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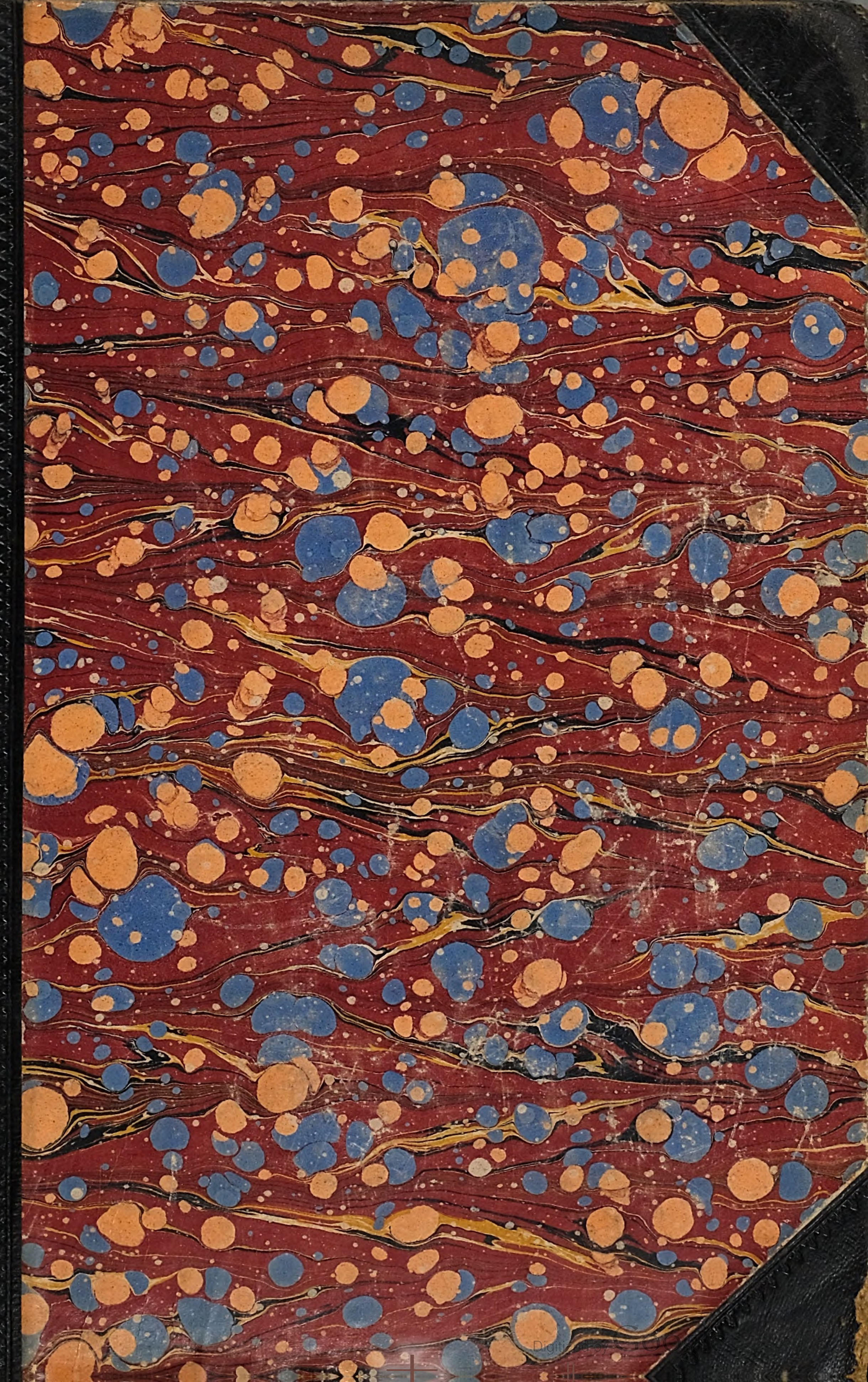

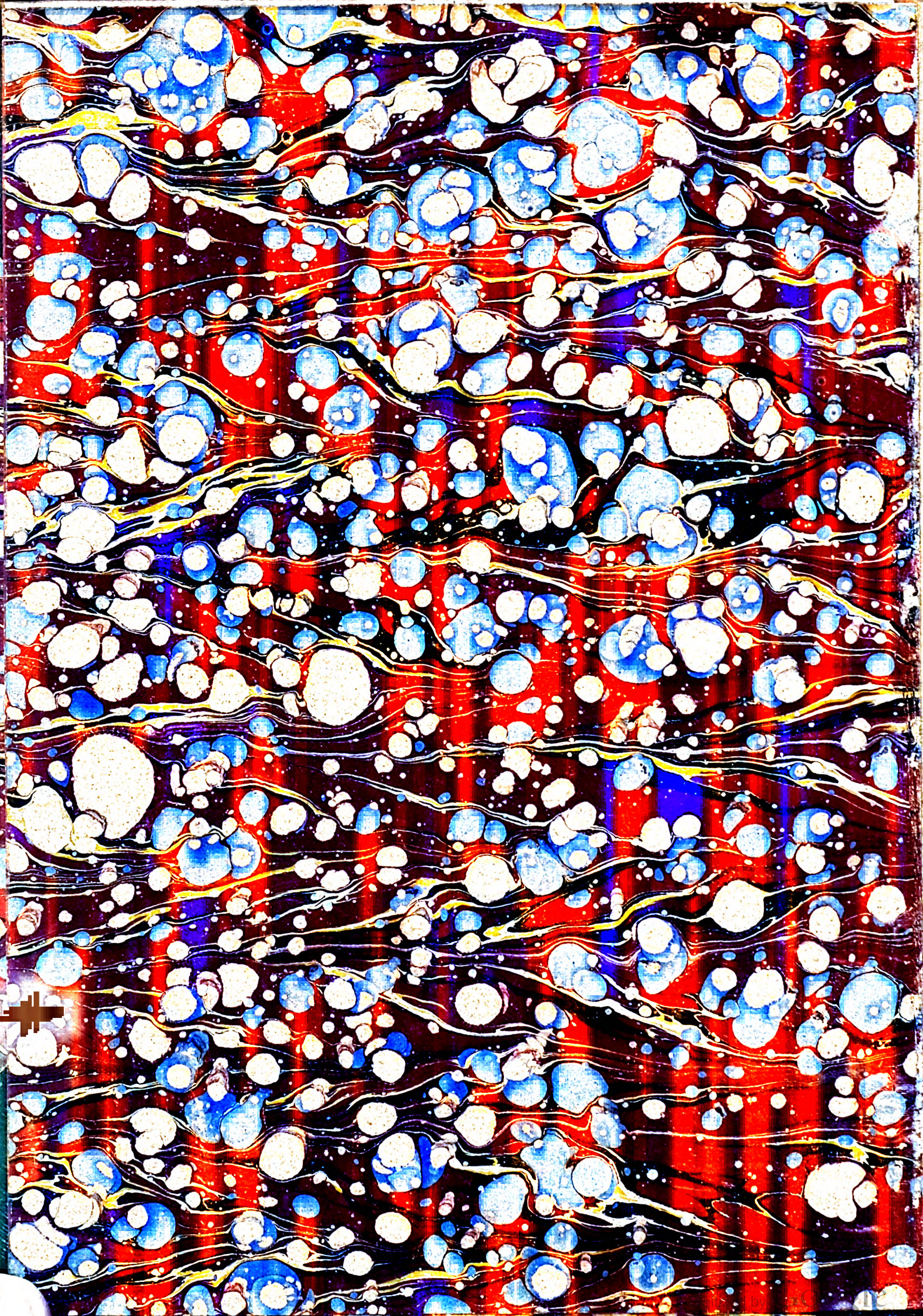

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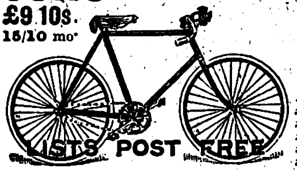

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SHORT STORIES.

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THE GOLDEN DWARF.

By
R.
Norman
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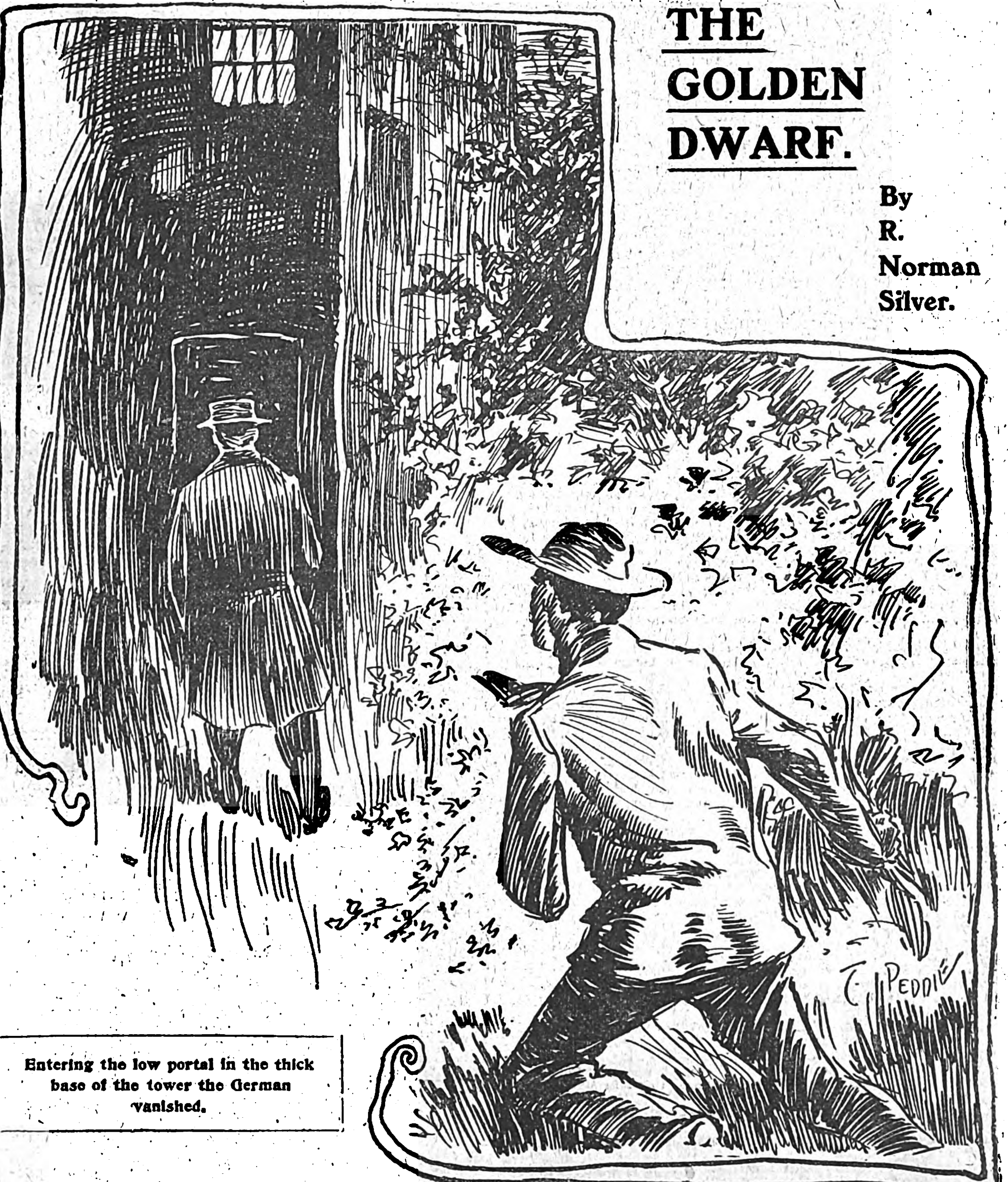

Entering the low portal in the thick base of the tower the German vanished.

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Pass "Short Stories" on to a friend.

The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer,"
"A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST INSTALMENT OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"It is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Otto Hare would like to suggest that he did—Esther's mercenary mother accepts his hints. She wants the Golden Dwarf for a son-in-law.

Felix is secretly loved by Judith Garland, a striking brunette, Lady Dering's companion. She has a wastrel brother, Neal, who is unaccountably in Wyresdale, and who is demanding money. This, by an affectation of sisterly solicitude, Judith obtains, as a cheque, from Felix Dering. The cheque is payable to bearer.

Otto Hare has an ally, a strange German physician, Joseph Kraft, who lives with him at Wyresdale Park, the Golden Dwarf's residence. He is an object of much curiosity to Archibald Geddes, a clever assistant at the Wyresdale Pharmacy, which is kept by a drunken old chemist, Caleb Forester.

Caleb has a charming daughter, Connie, whom Geddes is making bashful love to. She is Esther's friend, and quarrels with Geddes for crediting the rumour that Felix killed his uncle.

A one-armed sailor has suddenly appeared in Wyresdale. At the chemist's shop he encounters Kraft, whom he follows, and on the strength of some past episode attempts to blackmail. Kraft repulses him, but is dexterously tracked by the sailor to a curious fort-like structure in Wyresdale Park.

While spying on this the sailor is attacked by a huge dog, which he stabs. He is seen by Kraft and the Golden Dwarf.

Esther tells Felix of her mother's plan to marry her to Otto Hare. They swear constancy in an old and picturesque oath. Felix returns to Dering House, to be asked by the child Brian if it is true Felix has taken his father away.

Judith Garland shows Felix several links of a chain he has been in the habit of wearing. They are bloodstained. She adds that they were found near the cross roads, where Sir Christopher's body was discovered, and that, moreover, Felix was seen near the place at ten o'clock on the night when he was supposed to be in Duchester. She assures him she will keep his secret.

Felix in vain protests his innocence. At this moment an inspector of the local police is announced.

Felix Dering staggers—is he dreaming, the prey of some hideous nightmare?

A caution sounds in his ears; Judith Garland is speaking to him. "Don't look like that," she whispers, "pull yourself together."

CHAPTER IV.

DR. KRAFT TAKES A WALK.

"CURSE it, why am I not like other men? The girl loathes me, Kraft; I can see it in her face."

The Golden Dwarf flung himself pettishly into a leather-covered lounge—spattered from end to end with the grey ash of consumed tobacco. He had just entered the private sitting-room of the singular German physician whom he had permanently installed at Wyresdale Park.

Joseph Kraft looked shrewdly at his diminutive patron. The elephantine figure of the German was extended in a creaking wicker-chair, a cigar in a corner of his big mouth. On his knee was an oblong cage, of wire and wood, empty. Its late tenants, a dozen small and gaily-coloured tropical birds, were fluttering about his massive head and clean-shaven visage.

"That is better," he retorted, in his deep bass, holding out a fat finger for a parroquet to perch on; "than if she should despise you. My birds feared me to begin with; now their affection begins to grow, as flowers in sunshine. Sugar-plums, flattery, and good-temper have made them mine. So you must tame the love-bird Esther."

He laid down his Havana and put a glossy rape-seed between his lips—the parroquet flew on to his chin and picked the dainty out of his mouth. The German smiled and started to hum a tune. Presently he broke into the words,

"It was upon a Monday,
Upon a Monday free,
That Mynheer Jacob van Artevelde
Unto his men said he:"

Otto Hare fidgeted impatiently. "Confound your new pets, Kraft," he interrupted; "they have begun to get on my nerves. If you would christen one of them Felix Dering and wring its neck, it might reconcile me to the rest."

Joseph Kraft smiled genially and clapped his great hands. With a babel of shrill chirpings, the flock of birds wheeled about him for a moment, and then settled in the cage. Their owner secured it, and placed the receptacle on a stand. The German was singing a fresh stanza of the curious Flemish ditty:

"And when he came to Bruges town,
The meisjes sprang from bed,
And found Mynheer van Artevelde
With a cross-bolt through his head."

Dr. Kraft spun round and commenced to rub his plump palms together.

"The Golden Dwarf" is simply enthralling.

"So you are still hungry for the blood of Mr. Felix Dering," he said. "My impulsive friend, have I not shown you a better way? Did you carry out my instructions touching your visit this afternoon to the worthy Mrs. Carew?"

The Golden Dwarf produced a flat gold case and lighted a cigarette.

"To the letter," he answered. "I represented Wyresdale as ringing with the suggestion that Dering was accountable for his uncle's death, Sir Christopher and he having quarrelled the day previous to the discovery of the body. I also permitted my interest in Esther to be seen, and felt Mrs. Carew's pulse as to Dering's connection with her daughter. You were right; the mother will work for me. She threw Dering over without hesitation."

Kraft started to gather up a batch of papers that littered a writing-table hard by. The apartment in which the two men were conversing was large and bright, yet phenomenally untidy, and spattered everywhere with cigar ash. Chemical flasks, jars, and test-tubes stood about, books mingled with manuscripts on shelves and carpet, and a fire-proof safe, open, showed its pale green interior between the windows. Outside were the velvet lawns and thick plantations of Wyresdale Park.

"Am I not always right?" observed the German, responding to the other's final sentence. "My dear Hare, you perceive in me your benevolent fairy godfather. Strongly as I disapprove of your sudden passion for this girl, from the instant I saw she was necessary to your happiness I determined, at all costs, to bring about your marriage with her. Who but I warned you that Dering was your rival, who but I pointed out the possibility of connecting him with his uncle's murder?"

The Golden Dwarf rose and contemplated his mentor cynically; Otto Hare's tiny frame and proud features lent a certain grace to his scornful attitude.

"Fairy godfather or familar demon," he said; "I care not which you are, Kraft, provided you win me Esther Carew for my wife."

"It shall be done," declared Joseph Kraft, shaking his papers into order; "you must have a little patience, that is all. But to business; you have not glanced at my notes for days."

He held out a bundle of sheets, covered closely by lines of cipher, resembling the hieroglyphics of a stenographer, or those of some Oriental script. Otto Hare waved the folios aside.

"I am in no humour for work," he replied; "I shall go and look at the dogs."

Kraft was locking away his papers in the safe.

"A love-sick man desires solitude," he commented briefly; "so be it."

The Golden Dwarf lit another cigarette.

"I wish," he muttered, "we could discover the blackguard who stabbed Cerberus. He had only a single arm, I thought."

Joseph Kraft laughed uneasily.

"A trick of perspective," he said; "I myself saw both his arms. Some poacher probably."

"What was a poacher doing near the——?" asked Otto Hare, significantly, and leaving the query unfinished.

Kraft turned and chirruped to his birds.

"You are not yourself, my dear Hare," he decided; "if I did not know you to be suffering from the tender passion, I should say you were getting—morbid."

The Golden Dwarf shrugged his shoulders and left the room without answering. Joseph Kraft paused reflectively in the middle of the apartment, the late sunshine gleaming on the lenses of his wide spectacles.

"Otto, my friend," he murmured; "you are becoming more difficult to drive on what you call a loose rein. Well, I have a strong wrist and I fancy the tackles will hold. But, you must have no doubt upon this point—the man who dispatched the unpleasant Cerberus had two arms—oh, yes, he had two arms, beyond question. If you believed otherwise, now that you have returned to the external world, Otto, and were to notice in Wyresdale a seafaring person with one arm, you would have a bad attack of that stupid English disease, the 'funk.' And then you might take the bit between your white teeth and all my two years of labour would go for nothing. Perhaps, Otto, it is fortunate you are in love—it will occupy your mind."

He donned his soft straw hat, twisted the key in the door of the chamber, pocketed the complicated steel trifle, and walked downstairs—his private room was on an upper floor of the Golden Dwarf's huge residence.

The house itself was a white stone building, with a classic portico, marble steps, and two tall and shallow wings. It was elevated on a terrace, reached by a sweeping double file of Scotch firs.

Dr. Joseph Kraft did not follow the course of the avenue, but struck off, at his rapid, noiseless gait, toward the southern limit of the park.

Soon he attained the blunt green hill on whose slope was erected the peculiar structure—resembling, but for its tower, a species of fort—that had excited the curiosity of Nicholas Foley, the one-armed sailor.

Entering the low portal in the thick base of the tower, the German vanished.

When he reappeared again, it was to walk with a slower stride and his hands behind his back, as if lost in meditation. Reaching the wicket in the ring-fence of Otto Hare's domains, he passed through it, and continued his saunter in the direction of the cross-roads.

As he strolled down the narrowest of the ways, he came in front of a dilapidated cottage with a thatched roof. It boasted a strip of garden, and in this, at a bed near the gate, a man was wielding a short fork. The digger had a cropped bullet-head, a bronzed skin, and a limp sleeve—the sign of a missing arm—pinned to his jacket. He was none other than the sailor, Nicholas Foley.

Straightening himself to breathe, he beheld the flapping frock-coat and straw hat of Dr. Kraft. A grin wrinkled his tanned countenance.

"Mornin', Dutchy," he cried; "how goes it?"

Kraft glanced at him and frowned; the sailor came to the gate and leaned over.

"I've settled down quite close to your swagger lodging, Dutchy," he said; "so's to keep an eye on you. Got these moorings on the cheap; I'm putting in a few sallids."

He motioned the German to draw closer.

"How did the little chap take my dishing his bow-wow yesterday?" queried Nicholas Foley, touching the buck-horn haft of a clasp-knife that projected from a wide, buttoned pocket on the front of his hip; "you twigged me, didn't you? I knew you'd not put the coppers on me yourself, but them little men are rumbustious when they're roused, so I sheered off."

Dr. Kraft gazed undecidedly at the sailor; his pale yellow orbs seemed to fix in a spasm of intense reverie. Nicholas Foley threw the gate ajar.

"Suppose you come in, Dutchy," he offered; "and we can have a talk over old times, the old times I'm so willing to keep quiet about—at a price."

Kraft weighed the proposal. Then, his hands still knitted at his back, he marched up the cramped path and into the cottage. The sailor followed him; on the threshold he halted and unbuttoned his pocket, so that the buck-horn haft of his clasp-knife was within easy reach of his brown fingers. This done, he entered. The latch snapped behind him.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH AN ARREST IS MADE.

"INSPECTOR BRASHER to see you, sir."

The message was brought to Felix Dering as he stood in the entrance hall of Dering House with Judith Garland by him. Her whispered counsel: "Pull yourself together!" still rang ominously upon his ear. Like a man half awake he stepped forward, Judith following him.

The inspector saluted with every appearance of respect. He was a young and semi-military type, smarter than the average county police-officer.

"Sorry to trouble you at such a moment, Mr. Dering," he said; "but the fact is, I've a warrant for the arrest of the man we suspect of the late Sir Christopher's murder. And thinking it would be preferable to nab him quietly, I asked for a short interview with you."

"Who—who is the person you wish to apprehend?" stammered Felix, trying in vain to control his voice—the shock so recently dealt him by Judith Garland's bewildering allegation had left him tremulous and unnerved.

Inspector Brasher dropped his own crisp accents to a confidential murmur.

"It's—it's a groom on the establishment here," he answered; "Edward Spencer, commonly known as Ted. The late Sir Christopher, we believe, gave him a month's notice only a week ago, Mr. Dering—Spencer is stated to have been lurking in the neighbourhood of the cross-roads the evening prior to the discovery of the body."

Felix Dering felt that a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He heaved a sigh of relief. Judith Garland, who had heard all, knitted her dark brows and showed her even teeth in a flash of annoyance. Then she smiled—a slow, terrible smile. Some sudden and reassuring thought might have passed through her mind, so satisfied became the expression on her handsome features.

"Now, if I may trouble you to send for Spencer," proceeded the inspector; "as though to make some arrangement or issue some order, I can secure him without a fuss in domestic quarters. Perhaps, however, the lady had better retire." And he glanced critically at Judith.

"I will advise it," said Felix, and he went to the side of the woman who, but a few moments earlier, had been showing him that strange piece of evidence which was to connect him with the murder of his uncle.

"The officer thinks that it will be as well," he observed coldly, for he guessed that she had been listening, "if you are not present when Spencer is arrested."

She looked at him, amused, and raising a firm small hand, opened it slightly. In her palm there lay the blood-stained links, whose terrible import she had been so brutally explaining to him upon the arrival of the inspector.

"For your sake," she said, under her breath, "I am glad the police have picked up this absurd scent. It makes you safe—safe from all but me. And I am your friend, am I not, on conditions."

She moved to the window-seat, from which position of vantage the child Brian was studying the stalwart frame and trim uniform of Inspector Brasher. Picking up the little baronet, she carried him off, a gliding, elastic figure in her black dinner-dress. Felix Dering rang for a servant (the inspector's tall form had stepped hastily into a recess below the stairs), and bade him light the great chandelier that hung from the roof. This preliminary over, he summoned the groom who was the object of Inspector Brasher's diplomacy.

While he waited for the appearance of the youth, once, in spite of the three months' notice mentioned by the inspector, Sir Christopher's favourite attendant Felix Dering was wrestling with a score of perplexing problems.

How had that broken portion of his watch-chain come into the possession of Judith Garland? He had caught his guard by chance upon the stile at the cross-roads, when vaulting the ragged bar, and had torn, at the same time, the flesh of his palm. Touching the severed chain with blood-besmeared fingers, he must have left on it a terribly suggestive stain, before several of the dangling links, strained at some unperceived point, had fallen to the earth.

Improbable though the explanation seemed, it was true. But why did Judith say he had been seen in the vicinity of the cross-roads that night—the night he was supposed to be in Duchester? A grey pallor fell on the countenance of Felix Dering, and he shuddered.

He was roused from his meditation by a brisk step, and a sharp "Yes, sir": he looked up. A bright young fellow stood before him, fair, and hazel-eyed, with a ruddy complexion, and clad in a neat, plain suit of tweeds. It was Ted Spencer, a cheerful Irishman, who had been on the best of terms with everyone at Dering House, including, as a rule, the irascible Sir Christopher.

Felix Dering shrank back, sickened by the part the inspector had caused him to play. The groom stood at ease, a trifle puzzled. A tap on his shoulder made him start, there was a double *click!* and the Irishman's wrists were in steel fetters.

"Edward Spencer," intimated Inspector Brasher, the author of this disconcerting achievement, "I arrest you on a warrant. You are charged with the murder of Sir Christopher Dering. It is my duty to warn you that anything you say may be taken down and used in evidence against you."

The groom flung out his gyved arms towards Felix.

"I am innocent, sir," he cried, "I swear it. I was at the spot that night—I am walking out with Barbara, Mrs. Carew's maid, the Rosery is close to the cross-roads. And I did see something I would have told, sir, if I hadn't been a bit of a coward after all the talk about the murder, and that was a man, the very spit of Sir Christopher, sitting on a horse as though he were ill, and another man leading it by the bridle. I might have followed, sir, but Barbara had promised to meet me, and I didn't like to risk missing her."

The words sounded sincere enough, and they filled Felix Dering with a paralysing amazement. What enigma lay behind the murder of his uncle? Could he, indeed, have been killed by this pleasant Irish lad, with the frank, hazel eyes, and the brown cheeks, and if not, by whose hand had he been done to death in the mysterious hours that lay between his departure from Wyresdale Park and the discovery of his lifeless body in the ditch near the gate of Mrs. Carew's villa? Was there in the groom's tale of a horse, a swaying rider, and an unknown guide at the bridle, more than the glib equivocation of an accused criminal?

"Don't look at me like that, Mr. Felix," pleaded Ted Spencer; "I can't bear it; I wouldn't have harmed a hair of the squire's head for worlds. I—I——"

He faltered and hid his face.

"It'll kill my Barbara when she hears I'm taken," he moaned.

Felix Dering flung off his absorption.

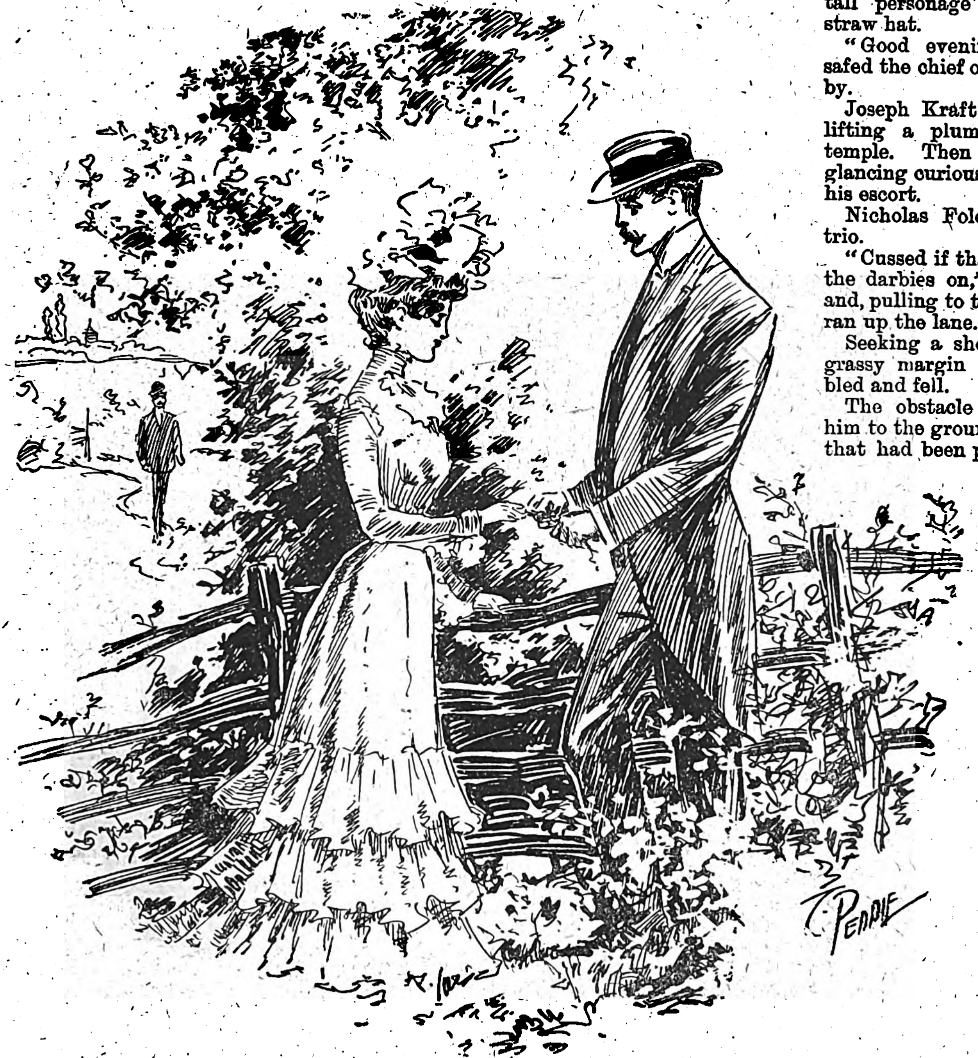
"I do not think you guilty, Spencer," he said, "and you shall have every chance to clear yourself, for Barbara's sake."

"Thank you, sir," muttered the Irishman; "thank you kindly; can't I be rid of these, sir?" he showed the polished fetters on his wrists; "I'll go peaceful with the officer."

Felix glanced at the inspector, but that authority made a curt sign in the negative.

"Hurry up, Spencer," he added; "I've a constable outside and we'll just walk you down to the station without any show—it's dusk already. Keep a good heart; you're not guilty till you've been tried and sentenced. And, for the credit of Wyresdale, I'm sure I hope you'll prove yourself innocent."

With this concession the severe Brasher and his *aide* led away their prisoner, after borrowing a cap for him from the rack in the hall. They left Felix Dering a prey to the most utter bewilderment.



"I, Felix Dering, promise."
"I, Esther Carew, promise."

Down the shadowy avenue the two police-officers and the groom proceeded at a melancholy pace. The evening was closing in, the western sky aflame with the hues of the rainbow, and the cool air of the gloaming perfumed by the thousand gentle odours of July.

Near the lodge-gates the Irishman halted and spoke.

"Put my handkerchief so it'll cover these irons," he said; "I can hold an end in my fingers, natural-like."

The inspector sniffed, but acted upon the petition, nevertheless. Ted Spencer murmured a grateful acknowledgement and resumed his despondent advance.

Reaching the lane beyond, the three stalked towards the cross-roads Their route lay beside the fence of Nicholas Foley's cottage.

The sailor, at his wicket, was just bidding farewell to a tall personage in a frock-coat and straw hat.

"Good evening, Doctor," vouchsafed the chief of the officers, striding by.

Joseph Kraft started, and bowed, lifting a plump forefinger to his temple. Then he, also, passed on, glancing curiously at the groom and his escort.

Nicholas Foley stared after the trio.

"Cussed if that son of a gun hadn't the darbies on," he said to himself, and, pulling to the door of his cottage, ran up the lane.

Seeking a short cut athwart the grassy margin of the lane, he stumbled and fell.

The obstacle which had brought him to the ground was a human leg that had been pushed through a gap in the fence. The rest of the body appeared, hastily crawling backwards from a neighbouring meadow on to the wayside.

Nicholas Foley had bounded to his feet in an instant. As he perceived the unwitting cause of his accident, he cried out bluntly:

"Hullo, messmate, do you steer starn foremost for choice?"

The fellow addressed sat up.

It was Neal Garland, and the sailor saw his evil countenance. Nicholas Foley gasped.

"Keelhaul me for a landlubber!" he exclaimed; "if it isn't the swab that struck the match at the stile. Here, my hearty, what was it you picked up yonder and gave to the taut little craft you had with you?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE STATION STRONG-ROOM.

"No, I'm not given to taking prejudices, Miss Connie, but I must say I can't endure that man Brasher. He's as opinionated as he's presumptuous and as presumptuous as he's opinionated."

Constance Forester laughed. She was strolling by the side of Archibald Geddes—the clever young Scotch chemist who was her father's assistant—through a field of ripening corn. The chime of the bells from the spire of the parish church and the height of the sun in a cloudless sky marked the advance of the peaceful Sabbath towards its noon.

"The dead set he's made at poor Spencer," went on Geddes, in his dry, resentful tone; "is simply ridiculous. If the lad's had one month's notice from Sir Christopher he's had a score. He used to come to the shop for Lady Dering's medicines and tell me jokingly, 'I'm on a month's notice again, Mr. Geddes,' or 'I'm stopping to show how I behave myself.' The squire had his peculiarities like the rest of us, and it's absurd to imagine that Spencer would lie in wait for Sir Christopher and knock him over the head on account of a dismissal he'd no call to take seriously. Don't you think so yourself, Miss Connie?"

Connie plucked a blade of corn and trifled with the yellowing seeds. "Inspector Brasher is supposed to be very clever," she answered mischievously.

"Ay," said the Scotchman, "and it's fools that do the supposing. What's his theory of the matter? That Spencer, out of revenge, surprised the squire riding home, hit him on the back of the skull with a club, dragged him to the ground, and finished him off by suffocating him with a handkerchief and rifling his pockets to make the thing look like highway robbery. As I've explained to you, Miss Connie, it's perfectly obvious that the squire was struck when he was lying down. The fracture proves it."

"Why don't you offer to give evidence, then?" queried Connie, regarding him with a certain admiration, and shaking out the filmy skirts of her best frock.

Archibald Geddes shrugged his shoulders. "And ruin our prescription business," he said. "Didn't old Doctor Vavasour perform the post-mortem, and doesn't he agree entirely with the Inspector. They wouldn't hear me if I asked to go into the box. I'm not a surgical expert, I'm a chemist. And then, Miss Connie, I've another reason for holding my tongue—and that's your father."

Constance Forester started—her brown eyes widened and her cheeks blanched.

"What *can* you mean, Mr. Geddes?" she faltered.

The Scotchman lowered his voice and bent towards the pretty person near him.

"I'm afraid Mr. Forester knows more about this affair of Sir Christopher's death than he chooses to allow," responded Archibald Geddes significantly. "Haven't you noticed how he avoids the subject, how he insisted—until Ted Spencer was dragged into the case—that the motive was robbery and nothing else. He must have come past the Cross that night, for he was drinking at the Wheatsheaf, and I have managed to find out quietly that he left at ten. He did not arrive home, as you know, till after twelve."

Connie shivered. "You—you don't suspect him, really, Mr. Geddes," she stammered.

"No," admitted the chemist, "but there is an offence termed being an accessory after the fact, and it may receive a rather severe punishment. I don't say that Mr. Forester has rendered himself liable to the law in any degree. The whole thing is a riddle. But in view of your father's singular embarrassment when Sir Christopher's death is referred to, and his inexplicable delay in arriving at the High Street when he set out from the Wheatsheaf an hour earlier than usual, I have not wished to draw attention to us at all in connection with the mystery. I only mention it to you lest you might speak casually of Mr. Forester's movements that evening."

Constance put a hand upon the Scotchman's arm. "Thank you, Mr. Geddes," she murmured, "you are very kind—very, very kind. I don't know what would become of me if you weren't here to protect father against himself and to take care of the shop."

"I've done nothing to deserve your thanks, Miss Connie," dissented Archibald Geddes, "it's pure selfishness, and the pleasure of having you smile at me occasionally as you go by the counter. I was afraid I'd angered you the other day by speaking of the rumour in Wyresdale about Mr. Dering and the squire's murder."

"Forgive me for being so impolite," whispered Connie penitently, "but I could not bear to hear you talk of that horrible slander. You see, Esther—I should say Miss Carew—and Mr. Dering are practically engaged. But the police evidently don't attach any importance to the horrid idea, and we'll pretend we never heard of it, won't we? I tried to believe Mr. Brasher was right over Ted Spencer because it cleared Mr. Dering."

Archibald Geddes coughed nervously.

"I've a confession to make, Miss Connie," he said, "I've been running down Brasher for a bumptious ass, and so I dare be sworn he is. But the conviction is not a disinterested one on my part. You'll remember he's been paying you a good many compliments lately—buying useless soaps and scents from us and hanging round to pass the time of day with you. I'm jealous of him, Miss Connie, and that's why I've been defaming his character and speaking evil of dignities."

Constance flushed charmingly and dropped, in her agitation, the stalk of corn she had been depriving of its burden.

"You are very foolish, Mr. Geddes," she murmured.

"Maybe," replied the chemist, "but such folly is an infallible sign of a certain ailment that I'm suffering from. Mr. Brasher is a taller man than I am, and a bigger man, and he has a fine black beard and a fist that would fell a heifer. And I'm given to understand that these are things the ladies admire."

"I don't admire them, Mr. Geddes," said Connie, "and I'm positive the inspector doesn't know half so much as you do."

"You're right," conceded the Scotchman gravely, "Brasher is nothing but a constable in a hurry. I may be slow, Miss Connie, but I am sure. For three months now, I wondered if I was in love; at last I've made up my mind. I am."

He drew a step closer to the listener, and, twitching his wrist free of his starched cuff sought deliberately to embrace her. Connie slipped from him; a brace of figures were approaching them. Archibald Geddes recognised the slight form of Esther Carew. By her was Felix Dering.

"Good morning, Geddes," observed the latter, raising his hat to Connie.

The chemist returned the greeting imperturbably, and added a bow for Felix's companion. This recognition completed, the two pairs of lovers took to different paths, with an unsuccessful attempt at a calm demeanour. A lightning glance had been exchanged by Connie and Esther, a look of bantering feminine sympathy. Then a hedge intervened and separated the couples.

"You and little Miss Forester are still as firm friends as ever?" queried Felix, stooping once more to the pink ear and fair curls of Esther Carew.

"Yes," said Esther; "Connie is a brave girl—Mrs. Forester is dead, and her father drinks, yet she never despairs. I fancy she is beginning to care for Mr. Geddes, though she will not own it."

"Lucky Geddes!" answered Felix. "Nothing stands between him and happiness, while it seems as if the fates themselves were plotting to keep us asunder. Here am I detained indefinitely at Wyresdale by the murder of my uncle, which has not only threatened to cast upon me the shadow of a crime Heaven knows I did not commit, but

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has led you to become acquainted with Otto Hare, and so has excited a pitiless ambition in your mother's breast. Would I had left Wyresdale three months ago!"

Esther clung to him as they wandered through the wide expanse of standing grain. A quarter rang musically from the distant church—a lark's shrill song descended to them out of the blue.

"There is a detail of my perplexity, Esther," pursued Felix Dering, "that I have not so far confided to you. It may save us both greater pain if I anticipate the disclosure from some other lips. Yesterday, at the opening of the inquest, I answered the formal questions that were put to me. I could not feel it wise to volunteer a dangerous admission. Esther, I was not in Duchester the whole of that fatal night. After dining I visited the theatre, it is true; but the play was the *Shaughraun*, and the sorrows of Eily sent my thoughts flying to you. As if I were a romantic boy, I left my stall, and struck athwart the fields from Duchester, to catch a glimpse of your window. I may have been in the neighbourhood when my uncle was attacked."

Esther Carew had grown very pale; a sudden chill swept over her as she realised that circumstances had woven yet another sombre strand about their destinies.

"I am glad you told me," she murmured, "but sorry it was for me you did what might cause people to suspect you." She choked down a sob. "I would give my life for you, dear," she faltered, "and I am the very one who contrives to do you most harm. You quarrelled with Sir Christopher over me, and if you had not come back that evening, you would be able to vindicate yourself against the spiteful stories which Mr. Hare repeated to mamma."

"Mr. Hare," exclaimed Felix, "yes; I had forgotten. He would be willing enough to employ the slander against his rival. Esther, has your mother no heart? She encouraged our affection from the beginning; she knows that we have ended by being all in all to one another, and yet she schemes to give you to this—this Golden Dwarf, because his riches balance, and more than balance, his affliction."

Esther drooped, in her muslin gown, like some frail plant.

"Mamma is very cruel," she sighed pathetically; "but I will be faithful to you, Felix. They shall not compel me to marry Mr. Hare."

A luxuriant thorn-bush screened the couple at the moment; Felix seized the opportunity to clasp his betrothed to his breast.

"We are told," he said, "that all evils are powerless to withstand love, if it *be* love. We must prove the proverb to the hilt; while we live we will be loyal.' See!"

He broke a twig from the thorn-bush and gave her an extremity to hold.

Grasping the nearer tip he snapped the thin branch in twain.

"It is an old charm," he commented; "these are the words of the vow: 'Till this severed wood unite and bear leaf and flower, we promise fidelity, each to each.' Let us take it. I, Felix Dering, promise."

"I, Esther Carew, promise," gasped Esther, and burst into a fit of scalding tears.

Felix had much ado to comfort her, nor could he easily be brought to comprehend the unnerving effect of the picturesque oath upon the sensitive girl whose innocent soul had long since given itself to him.

While they talked, in the fond simplicity of their grief, a voice summoned Felix Dering. The tones were those of Archibald Geddes.

"Excuse me, Mr. Dering," he said, appearing round the thorn-bush—he had abandoned Connie and pursued them along the winding footpath to their retreat—"but a curious event has happened, and Inspector Brasher, at the police-station in the High Street, is half crazy. If you don't mind stepping down, as a gentleman of position in the neighbourhood——"

He paused, keenly regarding the countenance of Felix Dering.

"Certainly," responded Felix; "forgive me, Miss Carew, if I leave you without ceremony."

Esther replied by a veiled and tender look, and the two men set off together.

"What is the nature of the accident?" inquired Felix, as they strode along.

"I didn't say it was an accident," declared Archibald Geddes, drily; "and I want just to let the situation burst on you, sir."

Felix Dering wondered, but allowed himself to be hastened forward.

At the entrance of the Wyresdale police-station there was an excited crowd.

Felix pushed through it, escorted by his guide, and gained the principal apartment.

The door of the lock-up was ajar, Geddes marched in, nodding to a stolid constable, who gravely saluted Felix Dering.

The chemist pointed to a window, devised at an unusual elevation in the wall of the strong-room. But a solitary shaft of iron remained to testify that the aperture had been barred; a dozen bricks had vanished from the lintel.

"Brasher fastened Ted Spencer in here on Saturday," said Archibald Geddes, studying the expression on Felix Dering's startled face; "this morning he was gone and the window as it is now. Someone got the bars loose from outside—who, is what the Inspector would like to know."

(*To be continued.*)

* * *

"YOU say he is a director in a newspaper publishing company?" "Yes, he directs the wrappers for the out-of-town subscribers."

NORA: "One week from to-night I will give you my answer." Eugene: "Goodness! What am I to do in the meantime?" Nora: "You might make yourself agreeable to my parents."

"YOUR husband is not looking well to-night, Mrs. Rhymer. Has he been overworking himself?" "It isn't that so much; it is his originality. Why, that man is struck by so many original ideas that his mind must be one mass of bruises."

"I HAVE a handsome home," he suggested. "With all the modern conveniences?" she asked. "No-o," he answered slowly; "not all. One is lacking." "What is it?" she inquired. "A wife," he replied. Then she managed to convey the assurance to him that one was to be had for the asking.

CUSTOMER: "Why haven't you called upon me for that little bill I owe you?" Grocer: "Oh, I make it a rule never to ask a gentleman for money." Customer: "Indeed! But suppose a man is indebted to you and doesn't pay?" Grocer: "Well, after a certain length of time I conclude that he is not a gentleman; then I ask him."

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE.

An important announcement will be made in this column next week.

FOUR LIVES IN ONE.

A Tale of Transanimation.

THERE was something about the wholesome sleepiness of Freiberg, in Saxony, that fitted well with the lazy nature of Ronald Wyde. So, having run down there to spend a day or two among the students and the mines, and taking a liking to the quaint, unmodernised town, he boldly changed his plans of autumn travel, gave up a cherished scheme of Russian vagabondage, had his baggage sent from Dresden, and made ready to settle down and drowse away three or four months in idleness and not over-arduous study. And this move of his led to the happening of a very strange and seemingly unreal event in his life.

Ronald Wyde was then about twenty-five or six years old, rather above the medium height, with thick blue-black hair that he had an artist-trick of allowing to ripple down to his neck, dark hazel eyes that were almost too deeply recessed in their bony orbits, and a troublesome growth of beard that, close-shaven as he always was, showed in strong blue outline through the thin and rather sallow skin.

His address was singularly pleasing, and his wide experience of life, taught him by years of varied travel, made him a good deal of a cosmopolitan in his views and ways, which caused him to be looked upon as a not over-safe companion for young men of his own age or under.

Having made up his mind to winter in Freiberg, his first step was to quit the little hotel, with its mouldy stone-vaulted entrance and its columned dining-room, under whose full-centred arches close, beery, and smoky fumes lingered persistently, and seek quieter student-lodgings in the heart of the town.

His choice was mainly influenced by a thin-railed balcony, twined through and through by the shoots of a vigorous Virginia creeper that flamed and flickered in the breezy October sunsets in strong relief against the curtains that drifted whitely out and in through the open window.

So, with the steady-going and hale old Frau Spritzkrapfen he took up his quarters, fully persuading himself that he did so for the sake of the stray home-breaths that seemed to stir the scarlet vine-leaves more gently for him, and ignoring pretty Lottchen's great, earnest Saxon eyes as best he could.

A sunny morning followed his removal to Frau Spritzkrapfen's tidy home.

There had been a slight rain in the early night, and the footways were yet bright and moist in patches, that the slanting morning rays were slowly coaxing away.

Ronald Wyde, having set his favourite books handily on the dimity-draped table, which comprised for him the process of getting to rights, and having given more than one glance of amused wonderment at the naïve blue-and-white scriptural tiles that cased his cumbrous four-storey, earthenware stove, and smiled lazily at poor Adam's obvious and sudden indigestion, even while the uneaten half-apple remained in his guilty hand, he stepped out on his balcony, leaned his elbows among the crimson leaves, and took in the healthful morning air in great draughts. It was a Sunday; the bells of the gray minster hard by were iterating their clanging calls to the simple townsfolk to come and be droned to in sleepy German gutturals from the carved pillar-hung pulpit inside. Looking down he saw thick-ankled women cluttering past in loose wooden-soled shoes, and dumpy girls with tow braids primly dangling to their hips, convoying sturdy Dutch-built luggers of younger brothers up the easy slope that led to the church and the bells. Presently Frau Spritzkrapfen and dainty Lottchen, rosy with soap and health, slipped through the doorway beneath him out into the little church-bound throng, and, as they disappeared, left the house and street somehow unaccountably alone. Feeling this, Ronald Wyde determined on a stroll.

Something in the Sabbath stillness around him led Ronald away from the swift clang and throbbing hum of the bells and in the direction of the old cemetery. Passing through the clumsy tower-gate that lifts its grimy bulk sullenly, like a huge head-stone over the grave of a dead time of feudalism, he reached the burial-ground and entered the quiet enclosure.

The usual touching reverence of the Germans for their dead was strikingly manifest around him. The humbler mounds, walled up with rough stones a foot or two above the pathway level, carried on their crests little gardens of gay and inexpensive plants; while on the tall wooden crosses at their head hung yellow wreaths, half hiding the hopeful legend, "Wiedersehen."

The more pretentious slabs bore vases filled with fresh flowers; while in the grate-barred vaults, that skirted the ground like the arches of a cloister, lay rusty heaps of long-since mouldered bloom, topped by newer wreaths tossed lovingly in to wilt and turn to dust in their turn, like those cast in before them in memory of that other dust asleep below.

Turning aside from the central walk that halved the cemetery, Ronald strolled along, his hands in his pockets, his eyes listlessly fixed on the orange-coloured fumes and rolling smoke that welled out of tall chimneys in the hollow beyond, an idle student tune humming on his lips, and his thoughts nowhere and everywhere at once. Happening to look away from the dun smoke-trail for an instant, he found something of greater interest close at hand. An old man stooped stiffly over a simple mound, busied among the flowers that hid it, and by his side crouched a young girl, perhaps fourteen years old, who peered up at Ronald with questioning velvet brown eyes. The old man heard the intruder's steps crunching in the damp gravel, and slowly looked up too.

"Good-morning, mein Herr," said Ronald, pleasantly.

The old man remained for an instant blinking nervously and shading his eyes from the full sunlight that fell on his face. A quiet face it was and very old, seamed and creased by mazy wrinkles that played at aimless cross purposes with each other, beginning and ending nowhere. His thick beard and thin, curved nose looked just a little Jewish, and seemed at variance with his pale blue eyes that were still bright in spite of age. And yet, bearded as he was, there was a lurking expression about his features that bordered upon effeminacy, and made the treble of his voice sound even more thin and womanish as he answered Wyde's greeting.

"Good-morning, too, mein Herr. A stranger to our town, I see."

"Yes; but soon not to be called one, I hope. I am here for the winter."

"A cold season—a cold season; our northern winters are very chilling to an old man's blood." And slouching together into a tired stoop, he resumed his simple task of knotting a few flowers into a clumsy nosegay. Ronald stood and watched him with a vague interest. Presently, the flowers being clumped to his liking, the old man pried himself upright by getting a good purchase with his left hand in the small of his back, and so deliberately that Ronald almost fancied he heard him creak. The girl rose too, and drew her thin shawl over her shoulders.

"You Germans love longer than we," said Ronald, glancing at the flowers that trembled in the old man's bony fingers, and then downward to the quiet grave; "a lifetime of easy-going love and a year or two of easier forgetting are enough for us."

"Should I forget my own flesh and blood?" asked the old man simply.

Ronald paused a moment, and, pointing downward, said:

"Your daughter, then, I fancy?"

"Yes."

"Long dead?"

"Very long; more than fifty years."

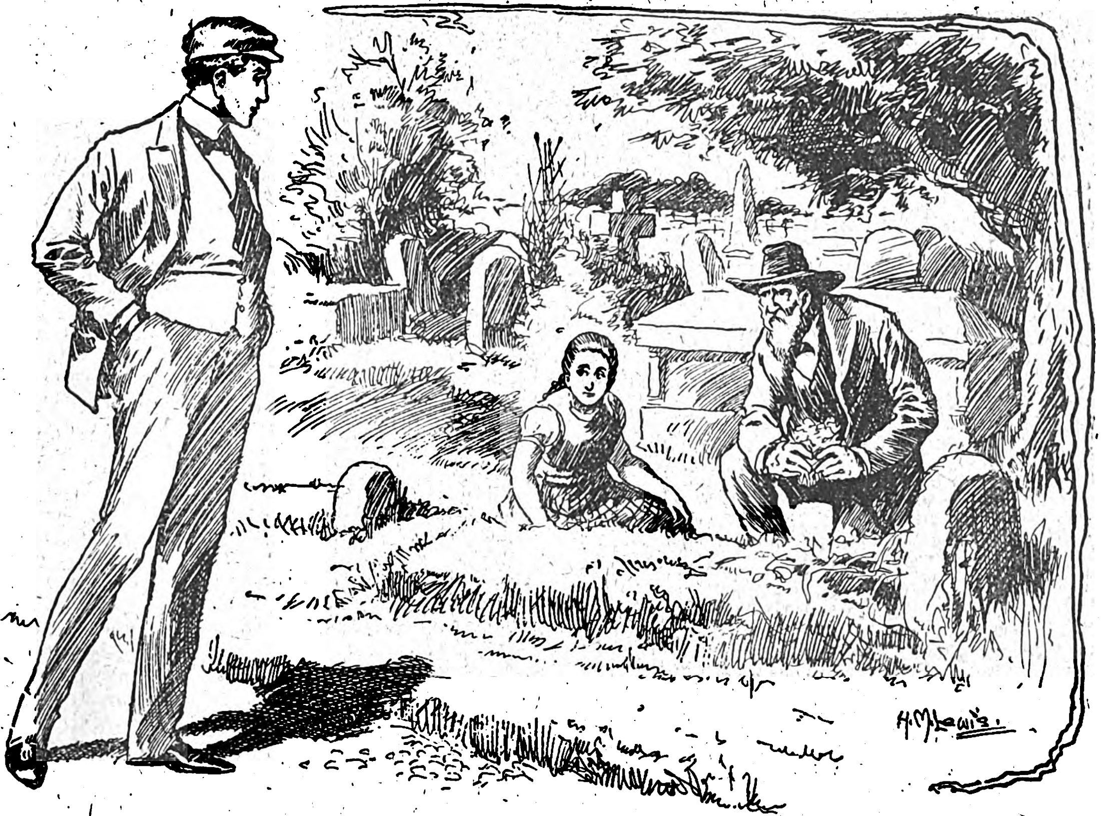
Ronald stared, but said nothing audibly. Inwardly he whispered something about being devilish glad to make the wandering Jew's acquaintance, rattled the loose gröschen in his pocket, and turned to follow the tottering old man and firm footed child down the walk.

After a dozen paces they halted before a more ambitious tombstone, on which Ronald could make out the well-remembered name of Plattner.

The child took the flowers and laid them reverently on the stone.

"It seems to me almost like arriving at the end of a pilgrimage," said Ronald, "when I stand by the grave of a man of science. Perhaps you knew him, mein Herr."

"He was my pupil."



The old man heard the intruder's steps crunching on the damp gravel, and slowly looked up too.

Take in "Short Stories" and it won't return the compliment.

"Whew!" thought Ronald; "that makes my friend here a centenarian at least."

"My pupil and my friend," the feeble voice went on; "and more than that, my daughter's first lover, and only one."

"Ach so!" said Ronald.

"And now on her death-day, I take these poor flowers from her to him, as I have done all these years."

Something in the pathetic earnestness of his companion touched Ronald Wyde, and he forthwith took his hands out of his pockets, and didn't try to whistle—which was a great deal for him to do.

"I know Plattner well by his works," he said; "I once studied mineralogy for nearly a month."

"You love science, then?"

"Yes; like everything else, for diversion."

"It was different with him," quavered the old man, pointing unsteadily to the head-stone. "Science grew to be his one passion, and many discoveries rewarded him for his devotion. He was groping on the track of a far greater achievement when he died."

"May I ask what it was?" said Ronald, now fairly interested.

"The creation and isolation of the principle of Life!"

This was too much for Ronald Wyde; down dived his restless hands into his trousers' pockets again, and the gröschen rattled as merrily as before.

"I have made quite a study of biology, and all that sort of thing," said he; "and, although a good deal of a sceptic, and inclined to follow Huxley, I can't bring myself to conceive of life without organism. Such theorizing is, to my mind, on a par with the illogical search for the philosopher's stone and a perpetual motor."

The old man's eyes sparkled as he turned full upon Roland.

"You dismiss the subject very airily, my young friend," he cried; "but let me tell you that I—I, whom you see here—have grappled with such problems through a weary century, and have conquered one of them."

"And that one is ——"

"The one that conquered Plattner!"

"Do I understand you to claim that you have discovered the life-principle?"

"Yes."

"Will you permit an utter stranger to inquire what is its nature?"

"Certainly. It is two-fold. The ultimate principle of life is carbon; the cause of its combination with water, or rather, with the two gaseous elements of water, and the development of organized existence therefrom, is electricity."

Ronald Wyde shrugged his broad shoulders a little, and absently replied:

"All I can say, mein Herr, is, that you've got the bulge on me."

"I beg your pardon——"

"Excuse me; I unconsciously translated an Americanism. I mean that I don't quite understand you."

"Which means that you do not believe me. It is but natural at your age, when one doubts as if by instinct. Would you be convinced?"

"Nothing would please me better."

With the same painful effort as before, the old man straightened himself, and made a piercing, clairvoyant examination into and through Ronald Wyde's eyes, as if reading the brain beyond them.

"I think I can trust you," he mumbled at last "Come with me."

Leaning on the young girl's arm, the old philosopher faltered through the cemetery and into the town, followed by Wyde, his hands again pocketed for safety. Groups of released church goers, sermon-fed, met them, and once in a while some stout burgher would nod patronisingly to Ronald's guides, and get in response a shaky, sidelong roll of the old man's head, as if it were mounted on a weak spiral spring. Farther on they intersected a knot of students, who eyed them askance and exchanged remarks in an undertone.

Keeping on deeper into the foul heart of the town, they passed through swarms of idle children playing sportlessly, as poverty is apt to play, in the dark shadows of the narrow street. They seemed incited to mirth and ribaldry by the sight of Ronald's new friend, and one even ventured to hurl a clod at him; but this striking Ronald instead, and he facing promptly to the hostile quarter whence it came, caused a sudden slinking of the crowd into unknown holes, like a horde of rats, and the street was for a time empty save for the little party that threaded it. Ronald began to think that the old man's sanity was gravely called in doubt by the townsfolk, and would really have backed out of his adventure but for the curiosity that had now got the upper hand of him.

Presently the old man sidled into a dingy doorway, like a tired beast run to earth, and Ronald followed him, not without a wish that the architect had provided for a more efficient lighting of the sombre passage-way in which he found himself. A sharp turn to the right, after a dozen groping paces, a narrow stairway, a bump or two against unexpected saliences of rough-mortared wall, two steps upward, and one very surprising step downward through a cavernous doorway that took away Ronald's breath for a moment, and sent it back again with a hot, creeping wave of sudden perspiration all over him, as is the way with missteps, and two more sharp turns, brought the three into a black, no-thoroughfare of a hall, whose farther end was closed by a locked door. The girl here rubbed a brimstone abomination of a match into a malodorous green glow, and by its help the old man got a tortuous key into the snakey opening in the great lock, creakily shot back its bolt, swung open the door, and motioned Ronald to enter.

He found himself in a long rather narrow room, with a high ceiling, duskily lighted by three wide windows that were thickly webbed and dusted, like ancestral bottles of fine crusty port. A veritable den it was, filled with what seemed to be the wrecks of philosophical apparatus dating back two or three generations—ill-fated ventures on the treacherous main of science. Here a fat-bellied alembic lolled lazily over in a gleamy sand bath, like a beach-lost galleon at ebb-tide; and there a heap of broken porcelain-tubing and shreds of crucibles lay, like bleaching ship ribs on a sullen shore. Beyond, by the middle window, stood a furnace, fireless, and clogged with grey ashes. Two or three solid, old-time tables, buil when joiners were more lavish of oaken timber than nowadays, stood hopelessly littered with retorts, filtering funnels, lamps, ring-stands, and squat beakers of delicate glass, caked with long-dried sediment, all alike dust-smirched. Ronald involuntarily sought for some huge Chaldaic tome, conveniently open at a favourite spell, or a handy crocodile or two dangling from the square beams overhead, but saw nothing more formidable than a stray volume of "Kant's Critique of Pure Reason." Taking this up, and glancing at its fly-leaf, he saw a name written in spidery German script, almost illegible from its shakiness—"Max Lebensfunke."

"Your name?" he asked.

"Yes, mein Herr," answered the old man, taking the volume and caressing it like a live thing in his fumbling hands. "This book was given to me by the great Kant himself," he added.

Reverently replacing it, he advanced a few steps toward the middle of the room. Ronald followed, and, turning from the windows, looked further around him. In striking contrast to the undisturbed disorder, so redolent of middle-age alchemy, was the big table that flanked the laboratory through its whole length. It began with a powerful galvanic battery, succeeded by a wiry labyrinth of coils and helices, with little keys in front of them like a telegraph-office retired from business; these gave place to many-necked jars wired together by twos and threes, like oath-bound patriots plotting treason; beyond them stood a great glass globe, connected with a sizable air-pump, and filled with a complexity of shiny wires and glassware; next loomed up a huge induction-magnet, carefully insulated on solid glass supports; and at the further extremity of the table lay a corpse.

Ronald Wyde, in spite of his many-sided experience of dissection-rooms, and morgues, and other ghastlinesses to which he had long since accustomed himself from principle, drew back at the sight—perhaps because he had come to this strange place to clutch the world-old mystery of the life-essence, and found himself, instead, confronted on its threshold by the equal mystery of death.

Herr Lebensfunke smiled feebly at this movement.

"A subject received this morning from Berlin," he said, in answer to Wyde's look of inquiry; "a sad piece of extravagance, mein Herr—a luxury to which I can rarely afford to treat myself."

Ronald Wyde bent over the body and looked into its face—a rough, red face, that had seemingly seen forty years of low-lived dissipation. The blotched skin and bleary eyes told of debauchery and drunkenness, and a slight alcoholic-fœtidness was perceptible, as from the breath of one who sleeps away the effects of a carouse.

"I hope you don't think of restoring this soaked specimen to life?" said Ronald.

"That is still beyond me," answered the old man, mournfully; "as yet I have not created life of a higher grade than of the lowest zoöphytes."

"Do you claim to have done as much as that?"

"It is not an idle claim," said Herr Lebensfunke, solemnly; "look at this, if you doubt."

"This" was the great crystal globe that rose from the middle of the long table, and dominated its lesser accessories, as some great dome swells above the clustered houses of a town. Tubes passing through its walls met in a smaller central globe half filled with a colourless liquid. Beneath this, and half encircling it, was an intricate maze of bright wire; and two other wires dipped into it, touching the surface of the liquid with their platinum tips. Within the liquid pulsed a shapeless mass of almost transparent spongy tissue.

"You see an aggregation of cells possessed of life—of a low order, it is true, but none the less life," said the philosopher proudly. "These were created from water chemically pure, with the exception of a trace of ammonia, and impregnated with liquid carbon, by the combined action of heat and induced electricity, in vacuo. Look!"

He pressed one of the keys before him. Presently the wire began to glow with a faint light which increased in intensity till the coal flamed into pure whiteness. Removing his finger the current ceased to flow, and the wire grew rapidly cool.

"I passed the whole strength of sixty cups through it to show you its action. Ordinarily, with one or two carbon shells, and refining the current by triple deduction, the temperature is barely blood-warm."

"Pardon an interruption," said Ronald. "You spoke of liquid carbon; does it exist?"

"Yes; here is some in this vial. See it—how pure, how transparent! How it loves and hoards the light!"

The old man held the vial up as he spoke, and turned it round and round.

"See how it flashes! No wonder, for it is the diamond, liquid and uncrystallized. Think how these fools of men have called diamonds precious above all gems through these many weary years, and showered them on their kings or tossed them to their mistresses' feet, never dreaming that the silly stone they lauded was inert, crystallized life!"

"Can't you crystallize diamonds yourself?" asked Wyde, "and make Freiberg a Golconda and yourself a Crœsus?"

"It could be done after the lapse of thousands of years," replied Herr Lebensfunke. "Place undiluted liquid carbon in that inner globe; keep the coil at a white heat, and if Adam had started the process, his heir-at-law would have a Koh-i-noor to-day, and a nice lawsuit for its possession."

Ronald Wyde bent toward the globe once more, and examined the throbbing mass closely, whistling softly meanwhile.

"If you can create this cellular life, why not develop it still higher into an organism?"

"Because I can only create life—not soul. Years ago I was a free-thinker; now my discoveries have made me a deist—for I found that my cells, living as they were, and possessing undoubted parietal circulation, were not germs; and though they might cluster into a bulk like this, as bubbles do to form froth, to evolve an animal or plant from them was far beyond me—that needs what we call soul. But, in searching blindly for this higher power, I grasped a greater discovery than any I had hoped for—the power to isolate life from its bodily organism."

"You have to keep the bottle carefully corked, I should imagine," laughed Ronald.

"Not quite," said Herr Lubensfunke, joining in the laugh; "life is not glue. My grand discovery is the life-magnet."

"Which has the post of honour on your table here, has it not?" inquired Ronald, drawing his hand from his pocket and pointing to the insulated coil.

The old man glanced keenly at his hand as he did so; at which Ronald seemed confused, and pocketed it again abruptly.

"Yes, that is the life-magnet. You see this bent glass tube surrounded by the helix? That tube contains liquid carbon. I pass through the helix a current of

"The Golden Dwarf" is simply enthralling.

induced electricity, generated by the action of these sixty Bunsen cups upon a succession of coils and carbon cores, and the magnet becomes charged with soulless life. I reverse the stream—what was positive now is negative, and the same magnet will absorb life from a living being to an extent only to be measured by thousands of millions."

"Then what effect is produced on the body you pump the life from?"

"Death."

"And what becomes of the soul?"

"I don't quite know. I fancy, however, that the magnet absorbs that too."

"Can it give it back?"

"Certainly; otherwise my life-magnet would belie its name, and be simply an ingenious and expensive instrument of death. By reversing the condition, I can restore both soul and life to the body from which I drew them, or to another body, even after the lapse of several days."

"Have you ever done so?"

"I have."

Ronald looked reflectively downward to his boot-toe, but seemed to find nothing there—except boot-toe.

"I say, my friend," he spoke at last, "haven't you got a pin you can stick in me? I'd like to know if I'm dreaming."

"I can convince you better than by pins," replied Herr Lebensfunke. "Let me see that hand you hide so carefully."

Ronald Wyde slowly drew it from his pocket, as reluctantly as though it were a grudged charity dole, and extended it to the old man. Its little finger was gone.

"A defect that I am foolishly sensitive about," said he. "A childish freak—playing with edged tools, you know. A boy-playmate chopped it off by accident; I cut his head open with his own hatchet, and made an idiot of him for life—that's all."

"I could do this," said Herr Lebensfunke, pausing on each word as if it were somewhat heavy, and had to be lifted out of his cramped chest by force; "I could draw your entity into that magnet, leaving you side by side with this corpse. I could dissect a finger from that same corpse, attach it to your own dead hand by a little of that palpitating life mass you have seen, pass an electric stream through it, and a junction would be effected in three or four days. I could then restore you to existence whole, and not maimed as now."

"I don't like the idea of dying, even for a day," answered Wyde. "Couldn't you contrive to lend me a body while you are mending my own?"

"You can take that one, if you like."

Ronald Wyde looked round once more at the sodden features of the corpse, and smiled lugubriously.

"A mighty shabby old customer," he said, "and I doubt if I could feel at home in his skin; but I'm willing to risk it for the sake of the novelty of the thing."

The old philosopher's thin face lit up with pleasure.

"You consent, then?" he chuckled in his womanish treble.

"Of course I do. Begin at once, and have done with it."

"Not now, mein Herr; some modifications must be made in the connections—mere matters of detail. Come again to-night."

"At what hour?"

"At ten. Mein Vögelein, show the Herr the way out."

The girl, who had been moving restlessly about the room all this time, with her wild brown eyes fixed now on Ronald, now on the old man, and oftener, in a shy, inquisitive stare, on the corpse, lit a dusty chemical lamp, and led the way down the awkward passage and stairs.

Ronald tried to start a conversation with her as he followed.

"You are too young, my birdling, to be accustomed to such sights as this up-stairs."

"Birdling is not too young, she's almost fourteen," said the girl, proudly. "And she likes it, too; it makes her think of mother. Mother went to sleep on that table, mein Herr."

"Poor thing! she's half-witted," thought Wyde, as he passed into the street. "By-by, birdie."

Home he walked, briskly, to be met under his flaming balcony by Lottchen's kindly afternoon greeting. How had mein Herr passed his sabbath? she asked.

"Quietly enough, Lottchen. I met a an old philosopher on the God's-Acre, and went home with him to his shop. Have you ever heard of Herr Doctor Lebensfunke?"

"Yes, mein Herr. Wrong here, they say," and she tapped her wide, round German forehead, and lifted her eyes expressively heavenward.

"Sold himself to the devil, eh?" asked Wyde.

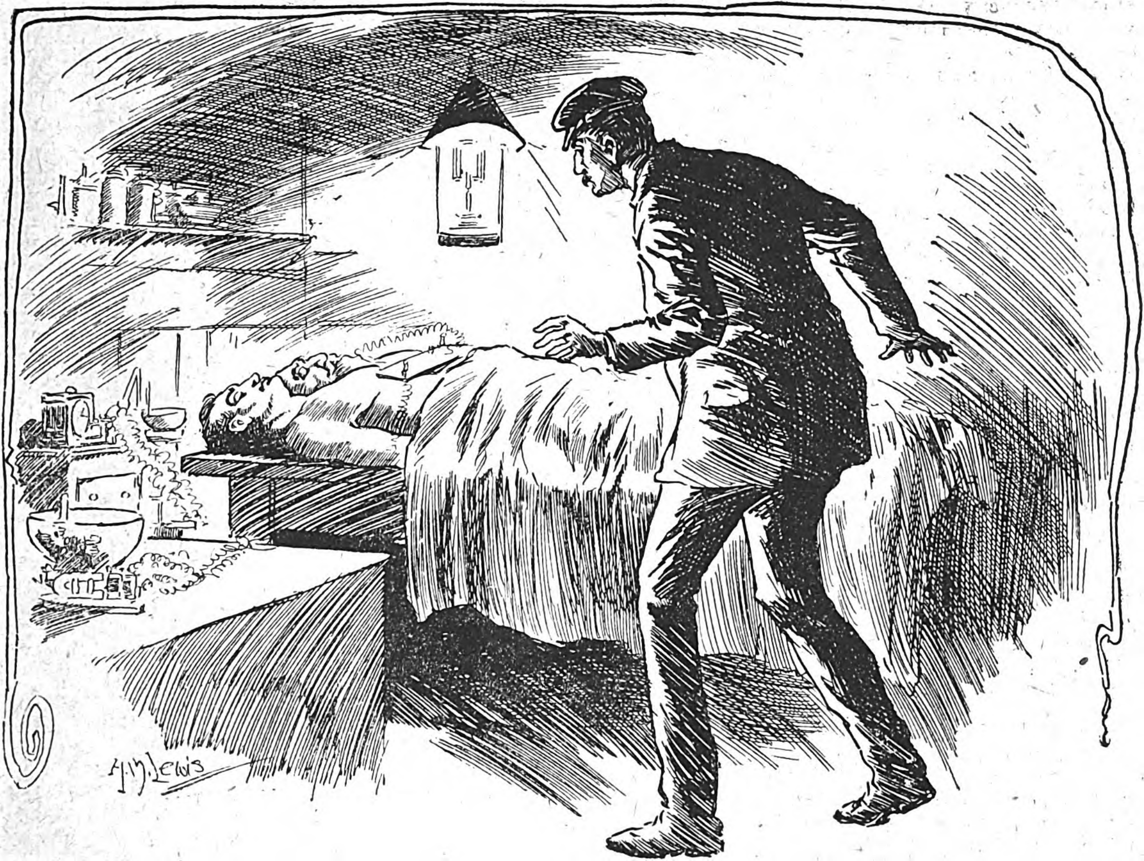
Lottchen was not quite sure on that point. Some said one thing and some another. There was undoubtedly a devil, else how could good Doctor Luther have thrown his inkstand at him? But he had never been seen in Doctor Lebensfunke's neighbourhood; and, on the whole, Lottchen was inclined to attribute the Herr Doctor's trouble to an indefinable something whose nature was broadly hinted at by more tapping of the forehead.

Ronald Wyde mounted the stairs, locked himself in his room, and wished himself out of the scrape he was getting into. But, being in for it now, he lit a cigar, and tried to fancy the processes he would have to go through, and how he, a natty and respectable young fellow, would look and feel in a drunkard's skin. His conjectures being too foggily outlined to please him, he put them aside, and waited impatiently enough for ten o'clock. A moonlight walk through the low streets, transfigured by the silver gleam into fairy vistas—all but the odour—brought him to Herr Lebensfunke's house. Simple birdling, on the lookout for him, piloted him through the unsafe channel and brought him to anchor in the dimly lit room.

"All is ready," said the philosopher, as he trembled forward and shook Ronald's hand. "See here." Zigzags of silk-bound wire squirmed hither and thither from the life magnet. Two of them ended in carbon points. "And here, too, my young friend, is your new finger."

It lay detached in the central globe, and on its severed end atoms of protoplasm were already clustered. "Literally a second-hand article," thought Ronald; but, not venturing to translate the idiom, he only bowed and said: "Ach so!" which means anything and everything in German.

It was not without a very natural sinking of the heart that Ronald Wyde divested himself of his clothing, and took his position, by the old man's direction, on the stout table, side by side with the dead. A flat brass



The old man and the corpse of his former self lay together under the light of a lamp.

plate pressed between his shoulders, and one of the carbon points, clamped in a little insulated stand, rested on his bosom and quivered with the quickened motion of the heart beneath it. The other point touched the dead man's breast.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

The old man pressed a key, and as he did so a sharp sting, hardly worse than a leech's bite, pricked Roland Wyde's breast. A sense of languor crept slowly upon him, his feet tingled, his breath came slowly, and waves of light and shade pulsed in indistinct alternation before his sight; but through them the old man's eyes peered into his, like a dream. Presently Ronald would have started if he could, for two old philosophers were craning over him instead of one. But as he looked more steadily, one face softly dimmed into nothing, and the other grew brighter and stronger in its lines, while the room flushed with an unaccountable light. The little key clicked once more; a vague sensation that the current had somehow ceased to flow, roused him, and he raised himself on his elbow and looked in blank bewilderment at his own dead self lying by his side in the daylight, while the sunrise tried to peer through the webbed panes.

"Is it over," he asked, with a puzzled glance around him; and added, "Which am I?"

"Either, or both," answered Herr Lebensfunke. "Your identity will be something of a problem to you for a day or two."

Aided by the old man, Ronald awkwardly got into the sleazey clothes that went with the exchange—growing less and less at home each minute. He felt weak and sore; his head ached, and the wound left by the fresh amputation of his little finger, throbbed angrily.

"I suppose I may as well go now," he said. "When can I get my old self there back again?"

"On Thursday night, if all works well," said the old man. "Till then, good-day."

Ronald Wyde's first impulse, as he shambled into the open air, was to go home; but he thought of the confusion his sadly mixed identity would cause in Frau Spritzkrapfen's quiet household, and came to a dead-stop to consider the matter. Then he decided to quit the town for the interminable four days—to go to Dresden, or anywhere. His next step was to slouch into the nearest beer-cellar and call for beer, pen, and paper.

While waiting for these, he surveyed his own reflection in the dingy glass that hung above the table he sat by—a glass that gave his face a wavy look, as if seen through heated air. He felt an amused pride in his altered appearance, much as a masquerader might be pleased with a clever disguise, and caught himself wondering whether he were likely to be recognised in it. Apparently satisfied of his safety from detection, he turned to the table and wrote a beer-scented note to Frau Spritzkrapfen, explaining his sudden absence by some discreet fiction. He got along well enough until he reached the end, when, instead of his own flowing sign-manual, he tipsily scrawled the unfamiliar name of Hans Kraut. Tearing the sheet angrily across, he wrote another, and signed his name with an effort. He was about to seek a messenger to carry his note, when it occurred to him to leave it himself, which he did; and had thereby the keen satisfaction of hearing pretty Lottchen confess, with a blush on her fair German cheek, that they would all miss Herr Wyde very much, because they all loved him. Turning away with a sigh that was very like a hiccough, he trudged to the railway station and took a ticket to Dresden, going third-class as best befitting his clothes and appearance.

He felt ashamed enough of himself as the train rumbled over the rolling land between Freiberg and the capital, and gave him time to think connectedly over what had happened, and what he now was. His fellow-passengers cast him sidelong looks, and gave him a wide berth. Even the quaint, flat-arched windows of one pane each, that winked out of the red-tiled roofs like sleepy eyes, seemed to leer drunkenly at him as they scudded by.

Ronald Wyde's account of those days in Dresden was vague and misty. He crept along the bustling streets of that sombre, grey city, that seemed to look more natural by cloud-light than in the full sunshine, feeling continually within him a struggle between two incompatible natures now so strangely blended. Each day he kept up the contest manfully, passing by the countless beer-cellars and drinking-booths with an assumption of firmness and resolution that oozed slowly away toward nightfall, when the animal body of the late Hans Kraut would contrive to get the better of the animating principle of Ronald Wyde; the refined nature would yield to the toper's brute-craving, with an awful sense of its deep degradation in so succumbing, and, before midnight, Hans was gloriously drunk, to Ronald's intense grief.

Time passed somehow. He had memories of sunny lounges on the Bruhl'sche Terrace, looking on the turbid flow of the eddied Elbe, and watching the little steamboats that buzzed up and down the city's flanks, settling now and then, like gad-flies, to drain it of a few drops of its human life. Well-known friends, whose hands he had grasped not a week before, passed him unheedingly; all save one, who eyed him for a moment, said "Poor devil!" in an undertone, and dropped a silber-gro' into his maimed hand.

He felt glad of even this lame sympathy in his lowness; but most of all he prized the moistened glance of pity that flashed upon him from the great dark eyes of a lovely girl who had passed him now and then as he slouched along. Once, a being as degraded and scurvy as his own outward self, turned to him, called him "Dutzbruder," asked him how he left them all in Berlin, stared at Ronald's blank look of non-recognition, and passed on with a muttered curse on his own stupidity in mistaking a stranger, in broad daylight, for his crony, Kraut.

Another memory was of the strange lassitude that seemed to almost paralyze him after even moderate exertion, and caused him to drop exhausted on a bench on the terrace when he had shuffled over less than half its length. More than once the suspicion crept upon him that only a portion of his vitality now remained to him, and that its greater part lay mysteriously coiled in Herr Lebensfunke's life-magnet. And this, in turn, broadened into a doubting distrust of the Herr himself—a dread lest the old man might in some way appropriate his stock of life to his own use, and so renew his fast-expiring lease for a score or two of years to come. At last this dread grew so painfully definite, that he hurried back to Freiberg a day before his appointed time, and once more found his two-fold self wandering through its devious streets.

It was long after dark, and a thin rain slanted on the slippery stones, as he again made his way through the deserted and sleepy paths of the town to the old philosopher's house. He was wet, chilled, weary, and sick enough at heart as he leaned against the old stone doorway and waited for an answer to his knock. The plash of the heavier rain-drops from the tiled leaves was the only sound he heard for many minutes, until, at last, pattering feet neared him on the inside, and a child's voice asked him who was there. To his friendly response the door was opened half wide, and Vögelein's blank, pretty face peeped in.

Was Herr Lebensfunke at home? No; he had said that he wasn't at home; but then, she thought he was in the long room where mamma went to sleep. Could he be seen? No, she thought not; he was very tired, and, in her own—Vögelein's—opinion, he was going to sleep, too, just as mamma did. And the wizened little face, with its eldritch eyes and tangled hair, was withdrawn, and the door began to close. Ronald forced himself inside, and grasped the child's arm.

"Vögelein, don't you know me?"

The girl, in nowise startled, gravely set her flickering candle on the doorstep, looked up at him wonderingly, as if he were an exhibition, and said she thought not, unless he had been asleep on the table.

"Good heavens!" cried Ronald, "can this child talk of nothing else but people asleep on a table?"

But, as he spoke, a thought whirred through his brain. He drew the poor half-witted thing close to him and asked:

"Can Vögelein tell me something about mamma, and how she went to sleep?"

The child rambled on, pleased to find a listener to her foolish prattle. All he could connect into a narrative was, that the girl's mother, some seven or eight years before, had been drained of her life by the awful magnet, and that, as the child said, "the Herr Doctor ever since had talked just like mamma."

His dread was well founded, then. The old man's one dream and end was to prolong his wretched life; could he doubt that he would not now make use of the means he had so unwisely thrown in his way? He turned about, half maddened.

"Girl!" he cried, "I must see the old man! Where is here?"

He couldn't see him, she whined. He was asleep up there on the table. At one o'clock he had said he would wake up.

He pushed past her, mounted to the long room, pressed open the unfastened door, and entered.

The old man and the corpse of his former self lay together under the light of a lamp that swung from the beam overhead.

An isolated carbon point was directed to each white, still breast. From the old man's hand a cord ran to a key beyond, arranged to make or break connection at a touch. By it stood a clock, with a simple mechanism attached that bore upon a second key like the first, evidently planned to press upon it when the hands should mark a given hour. The child had said that he would wake at one, and it was now past midnight.

Ronald Wyde comprehended it all now. The wily old man's feeble life had been withdrawn into the great magnet, and mixed therein with what remained of his own. In less than an hour the key would fall, and the double stream would flow into and animate his young body, which would then wake to renewed life; while the cast-off shell beside it, worn to utter uselessness by a toilsome century, would be left to molder as a mothed garment.

Surely no time was to be lost; his life depended upon instant action. And yet, comprehending this, he went to work slowly, and as a somnambulist might, acting almost by instinct, and well knowing that a blunder now meant irrevocable death.

Carefully disengaging the cord from the old man's yet warm grasp, and setting the carbon point aside, he lifted the shrivelled corpse and bore it away, to cast it on the white rubbish-heap in one corner. Returning to his work, he stripped himself, and lay down in the old man's place. As he did so the distant minster bells rang the three-quarters.

Was there yet time?

He braced his shoulders firmly against the brass plate under him, and moved the carbon point steadily back to its place, with its tip resting on his breast—the silk wrapped wire that dangled between it and the magnet quivering as he did so, as with conscious life. Drawing a long breath, he tightened the cord, and heard a faint click as the key snapped down.

The same sharp sting as before instantly pricked his breast, tingling thrills pulsed over him, beats of light and shadow swept before his eyes, and he lost all consciousness. For how long he knew not At last he felt, rather than saw, the lamp-rays flickering above him, and opened his eyes as though waking from a tired sleep. Sitting up, he gave a fearful look around him, as if dreading what he might see. The drunkard's body lay stretched and motionless beside him, and the clock marked three. He was saved!

Slipping down from his perilous bed, he resumed the old familiar garments that belonged to him as Ronald Wyde, shuddering with emotion as he did so. Only pausing to give one look at the heap in the shadowy corner, and at the other sleeper under the now dying lamp, he quitted the room, and locked its heavy door upon the two silent guardians of its life-secrets. When he reached the street, he found the rain had ceased to trop, and that the cold stars blinked over the slumberous down. Before noon he had taken leave of Frau Spritzkrapfen, turned buxom Lottchen scarlet all over by a hearty, sudden, farewell kiss, and was far on his way from Freiberg, with its re-vined balcony and its dark laboratory, never again to visit it or them. And as the busy engine toiled and shrieked, and with each beat of its mighty steam-heart carried him further away, his thoughts flew back and clustered around the witless, brown-eyed birdling. Poor child, he never learned her fate.

* * * * *

I heard this strange story from its hero one sunny summer morning, as we swept over the meadowy reaches of the Erie Zailway or hung along the cliff side by the wooded windings of the Susquehanna. When he had ended it, he smiled languidly, and, showing me his still mutilated hand, said that the old doctor's job had been a sad bungle, after all. In fact, the only physical proof that remained to verify his story was a curved blue spot where the ingoing current of the magnet had carried particles from the carbon point and lodged them beneath the skin. Psychologically, he was sadly mixed up, he said; for since that time he had felt that four lives were joined in him—his own, the remnant of Herr Lebensfunke's miserable hoard merged in that of poor birdling's mother, and, last of all Hans Kraut's.

He left the cars soon afterwards at Binghampton, watchfully followed by a stout, shabby man with a three days' beard stubbling his chin, who had occupied the seat in front of us, and had turned now and then to listen for a moment to Ronald's rapid narration.

A week later I heard that he was dead—having committed suicide in a fit of delirium soon after his admission to the Binghampton Inebriate Asylum. The attendant who made him ready for burial noticed a singular blue mark on his left breast that looked, he said a little like a horseshoe magnet.

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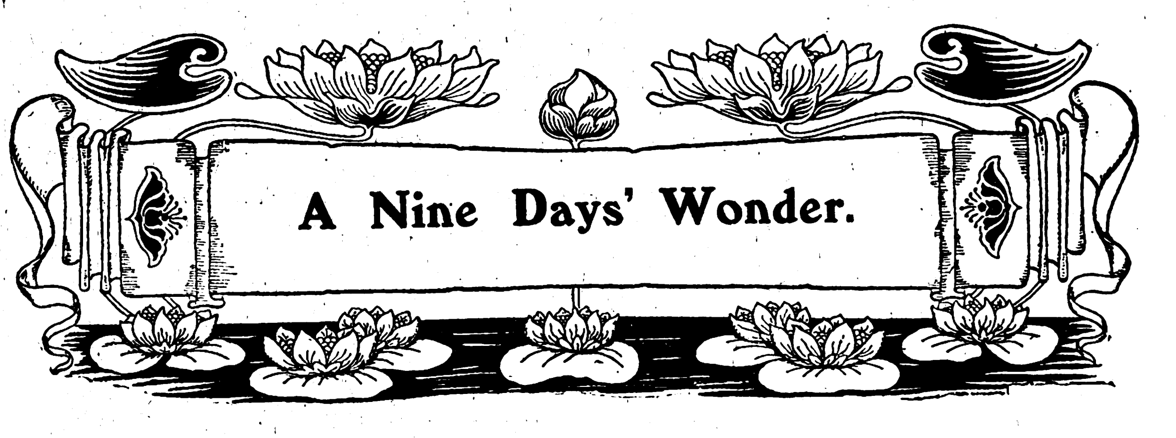

A Nine Days' Wonder.

THE whole street—the whole neighbourhood was in a ferment. For that matter, all London, from East to West, quivered with excitement and curious imaginings, for the Press had circulated far and wide the fact that Andrew Atterbury, of No. 2 Delaval Street, W., had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared.

Everyone was ready, of course, with the usual theory as to why and where the missing man had gone; but also, as usual, the suggestions were worse than valueless. As for the police, they were completely at fault and—awaiting information.

The strangest part, however, of the whole affair was that the only individual who might be said to have any, the greatest in fact, personal interest in Mr. Atterbury's movements manifested a singular and irritating mysterious unconcern.

At eleven o'clock on the morning of the day when the newspapers were devoting columns of "copy" to the "Sensational Case of Mr. Andrew Atterbury," the wife of that well-known financier and accredited agent in London for the South American Republic of "Buenos Vistas," emerged, groomed to perfection, from her front door and stood a moment calmly and deliberately buttoning her gloves, the while she talked to and teased her fat, wheezy, black pug.

The whisperings, the astonished hand-liftings, and the general surmisings, charitable and otherwise (principally otherwise) that followed the lady in her passage along the sunny side of the street testified undoubtedly to the extraordinary feeling of respectable surprise evoked by an attitude the ordinary mind could not grasp, much less understand.

Andrew Atterbury was an exceptionally clever man. City men swore by him, and followed his lead in things financial with the blind faith of sheep in the bell-wether. Not a movement in monetary matters, either in London or the world over, took place without his knowledge or intervention; not a "golden pie" was mixed without his finger, or hand even, being deep in it.

He was the "King of the Money Market," and although not a member of the Stock Exchange, knew more of its inner working, and controlled its more important interests to a greater extent than the most magnificent broker of them all.

The Republic he commercially—and rumour said politically—represented was certainly fortunate in its agent, for when its sister States failed, as they often did, to touch the pocket side of the well-to-do outside world, Buenos Vistas could always rely upon its loans being successfully taken up and placed without vexatious or unnecessary trouble or delay.

The financier's nationality was a mystery. Some said he was a Jew, and assuredly there was warrant for the opinion. He had all the Israelitish faculty for acquiring wealth, his personality also being markedly Hebraic. But where he was born no man knew.

Speaking English fluently and with a perfect accent, possessing a peculiarly English name, it was difficult to deny him a Briton's birthright. Yet German, High Dutch, Russian even, were as familiar to him as his presumably mother tongue.

A reticent man, more than ordinarily so, it was hopeless to seek to "draw" him on these and other private matters, and so men were content to worship Mammon in his company and under his priestship, and to let the mere detail of his genius quietly rest until that inevitable social millennium when revelation should satisfactorily account for every, as yet, unaccountable thing.

It was an open secret that the affairs of Buenos Vistas occupied the first place with Andrew Atterbury, and the largest share by far of his time and attention. The papers would every now and again publish a paragraph stating that "the agent for the Republic of Buenos Vistas left London last night by the late mail *en route* for San Madura. Mr. Atterbury's mission is, we understand, not altogether unconnected with a certain new loan, rendered necessary, it is believed, by the present critical state of public affairs in the Republic."

Statements such as these were common, everyday incidents, so much so that people thought but little of them; but when without a word of warning, without any journalistic notice or send-off, Andrew Atterbury, between the hours of six p.m. on the 10th and nine a.m. on the 11th of August, disappeared completely, no man knowing the manner of his going, tongues were set a-wagging and the floodgates of public wonderment flung wide to their fullest.

He had been last seen when descending from his brougham at his own door at six o'clock on the evening of the 10th, but from the moment that the house door closed behind him no more was known of him. A very

Tell us of a better paper than "Short Stories" and we'll take it in.

pretty mystery, deepened, as has been said, by his wife's apparently inexplicable indifference.

Bankruptcy, ruin, and the whole pack of commercial ban-dogs were trotted out, patted on the back, and otherwise made much of. It is such a satisfaction to hound the canine at the heels of a successful quarry. Much may be pardoned in our fellow man, but success—never.

Yet was this altogether a false scent, for Atterbury's solicitors—without, of course, revealing details—publicly announced in a letter to The Times that the financial position of their client was, if anything, still more impregnable and satisfactory than it had ever been, and that those who sought to insinuate ugly and scandalous suggestions did so without a shadow of foundation upon which to base their calumnious impertinencies.

Now there was in Atterbury's employ a person, one Barnaby Quicket, who probably could, if he would, have done much to satisfy public curiosity. But there existed a reason and a difficulty, the explaining away of the one and the surmounting of the other being alike almost out of the question.

Andrew Atterbury, big man financially though he was, had no office or other recognised place for the transaction of his business. He kept no books, in the ordinary sense of the word, nor had he in his service an army of clerks and underlings such as his brother magnates habitually indulged in.

One solitary henchman had he, the aforesaid Barnaby Quicket, and although there was a limit to his confidence in the man, yet the latter, being a trifle unscrupulous, did not hesitate to acquire information with regard to his master's more exclusive business arrangements by means undoubtedly underhanded, not to say criminal. The man had become an adept in the nefarious art of opening letters and deftly reclosing them, in keyhole spying, and in many other little ways and habits that come so easily to the crookedly-inclined.

Quicket's non-location in any one particular place rendered any questioning of him well nigh an impossibility. It had been always difficult to catch him; he was a sort of City "will-o'-the-wisp," evasive, disappointing; but now that his chief had melted into the shadow he was literally not to be found at all.

A certain stockbroker's clerk, to whom he was known by sight, declared distinctly that he had seen him, dressed for travelling, on the platform at Euston, evidently about to leave by the night mail. This in itself looked suspicious, but before the clue could be followed up and run to earth the opportunity had passed, and Barnaby Quicket, too, had dropped into the abyss of the unseen.

At last everybody decided to give up the riddle in despair, in the course of a fortnight the affair being practically forgotten save for an occasional reference to it in the daily papers.

To this day people talk of the ball given by Mrs. Atterbury in Delaval Street, just three months after the disappearance of her husband. There were no refusals. People were only too eager to attend in the hope of seeing or hearing something sensational. All such cravings were, however, unsatisfied.

The hostess was graciousness itself, beautifully dressed, but—absolutely silent upon the one all-important topic. There was no appearance of self-consciousness in Mrs. Atterbury's manner, no sign of any attempt to disguise real feelings. Perfectly natural, she moved among her guests with a dignity that to most of them seemed new and unaccustomed.

I have it on the authority of a well-known Society leader that Mrs. Atterbury trod her drawing-room floor that night with the step of a queen, that robes, crown, and all the other paraphernalia of royalty were alone needed to make a picture unequalled in the gallery of sovereigns. I learned also from my same informant a fact which, if it were true—and I have no reason for believing it to be otherwise—furnished the one link lacking to complete the chain of, as yet, circumstantial evidence.

Lady Hatfield averred that while resting in Mrs. Atterbury's boudoir, no one else being in the apartment, she heard voices, one of them that of her hostess, in conversation behind the closed door communicating with the adjoining sitting-room. She declares that she heard Mrs. Atterbury say:

"Well, Quicket, this is my last word to His Excellency, namely, that I will be with him upon the 6th of January. And, now, you must not delay longer or you will miss the mail."

Lady Hatfield says that after an interval of scarcely two minutes she saw a man, attired in a long ulster and wearing a travelling cap, pass the door of the boudoir and disappear quickly down the staircase.

The next day a large board announcing that No. 2 was to let appeared on the front of the house, other indications making it clear, a fact verified later in the day, that Mrs. Atterbury had departed for parts unknown.

* * * * *

"Revolution in Buenos Vistas. Complete Anarchy in San Madura, the Capital. Assassination of General Santhos, the President of the Republic, and Assumption by Señor Artuero of the Presidential Authority."

The above was the leaded headline announcement in all the evening papers of the 17th of January. Strange things began to be whispered at street corners in the City anent the matter. The name of the sometime financier, Atterbury, was banded about, and became somehow mixed up with those who had brought about the state of things existing in Buenos Vistas.

Then a letter appeared in The Times from an English resident in San Madura, making definite assertion that from his own personal knowledge of the missing Andrew Atterbury, he was able to declare that Señor Artuero, the revolutionary trader, the organiser of the *pronunciamento*, and the late London agent of the Republic were one and the same person.

This was in itself startling, but when a cable communicating the proclamation of that person as President was published in every newspaper throughout the three kingdoms the surprise was intensified a hundredfold.

* * * * *

His Excellency Señor Andrea Artuero, President of the Republic of Buenos Vistas, and his beautiful consort never returned to England; for when, less than six months after his accession, Señor Artuero, otherwise Atterbury, was shot during one of the perennial popular outbreaks in the capital, his wife, the sole inheritor of his vast wealth, departed for Paris, in which city she is likely to end her days in that fashion most pleasing to herself, and as Nature evidently intended her.

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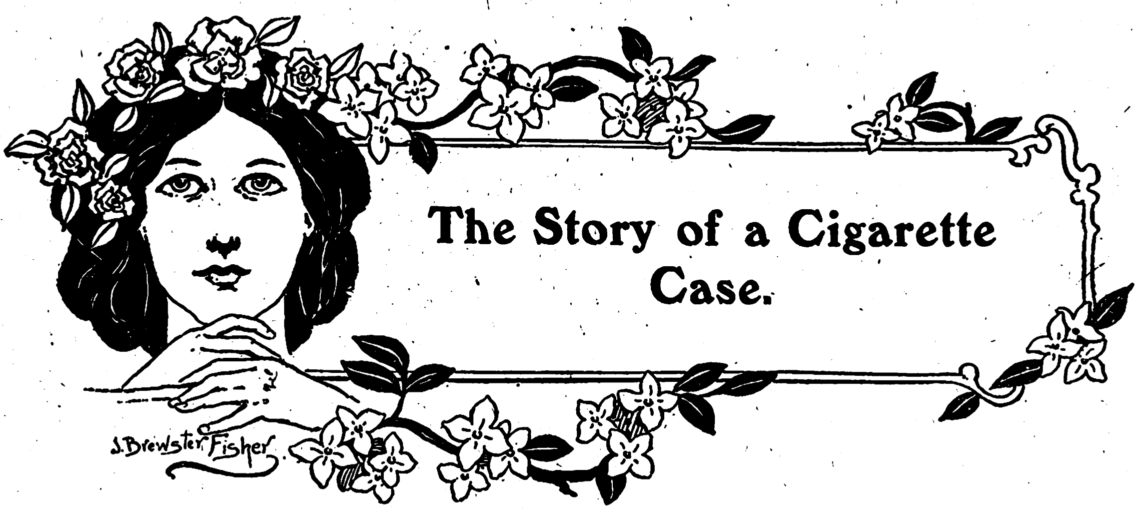


The Story of a Cigarette Case.

LIFE in what is called Society (remarked the ex-valet) is not all beer and skittles, nor even champagne and billiards, as I found out when I was "own man" to young Lord Ernest Delhoste, the second son of the Earl of Sinbars. He was a nice young chap, and very popular with his intimates. Life offers many temptations to young men when they are handsome, popular, and sufficiently well-off; and I am afraid my master rather went the pace till that happened which often happens—he met and fell in love with a sweet young girl of his own rank in life. There was her photograph in a big silver frame on Lord Ernest's mantelpiece, and I often used to have a good look at it, for a sweeter, purer, truer face I have never seen.

You know the kind of face which gives you at once the impression of a loyal and straightforward nature. Miss Mollie Trevarthen's was one of that kind. She belonged to a Cornish family, as the name will tell you—one of the very oldest in the kingdom, so I have heard, and so old and proud that three successive heads had refused titles at the hands of the sovereign of their day.

My master was not the same man after his engagement to his sweetheart got its due six lines in "London Day by Day" in the *Daily Telegraph*. The dubious companions who ate his lunches, drank his wine, smoked his cigars, "borrowed" his money, and swindled him at cards and billiards, were disgusted at the change. They would indignantly demand of me the reason of Lord Ernest's cutting himself off from his old haunts and habits in this sudden fashion; but, of course, being up in my business, I joined the "Know Nothing Club" directly. People in my position do not believe in the policy of the open mouth, and I do not blame them.

I am not saying that my master became an entire hermit after his acceptance by Miss Trevarthen. Among other things he still gave little card-parties in his rooms, though the company was a little more select than it had been, and only men in his own rank of life were admitted. One of the guests was invariably a Mr. Frank Hill. I believe he had been in the army, but had resigned on succeeding to some estates and a large fortune.

He was a bachelor, and currently reported to be sweet on Miss Trevarthen, though it did not appear to make any difference in his attitude towards my master, who on his part, never dreamed that any such attachment existed. Mr. Hill was a short, stocky man, very broad across the shoulders, with a very firm jaw, which his habit of shaving clean emphasised.

I should think he would have been a very useful man in a fight. Some people thought him good-looking, but in my opinion his eyes spoilt him, being hard and cruel in the extreme. However, his pleasant, but reserved, manner offended nobody, and "Old Frank Hill" was generally popular, though he did not draw to himself that admiring affection which seemed the birthright of Lord Ernest.

Never shall I forget a certain April night about six weeks after the engagement was announced. My master was having a little game of poker in his rooms. Though he hardly touched a card himself at that time, his guests were all devotees of the fascinating pastime, and they were soon hard at it in the midst of that absorbed silence which all good card-players love.

Suddenly one of the players, a callow youth named Deecie (who was subsequently slain at Spion Kop, poor lad!) picked up a massive silver cigarette-case which lay at Hill's elbow.

"F. H. from M. T.," he read out; and being a child utterly without discretion, he simpered: "Who may 'M. T.' be, if it isn't a rude question?"

"It is a rude question," snapped Hill, curtly.

Poor Deecie went scarlet, and dropped the cigarette case as if it were hot. But Hill wasn't looking at him; he stared straight at Lord Ernest with such mingled hate and triumph in his cold eyes, that as I caught it over my master's shoulder, I nearly let go the glass I was handing him.

For a moment Lord Ernest looked back at him, white to the lips, then in an ordinary tone, he said:

"I see your ten, and ten better."

So the game went on.

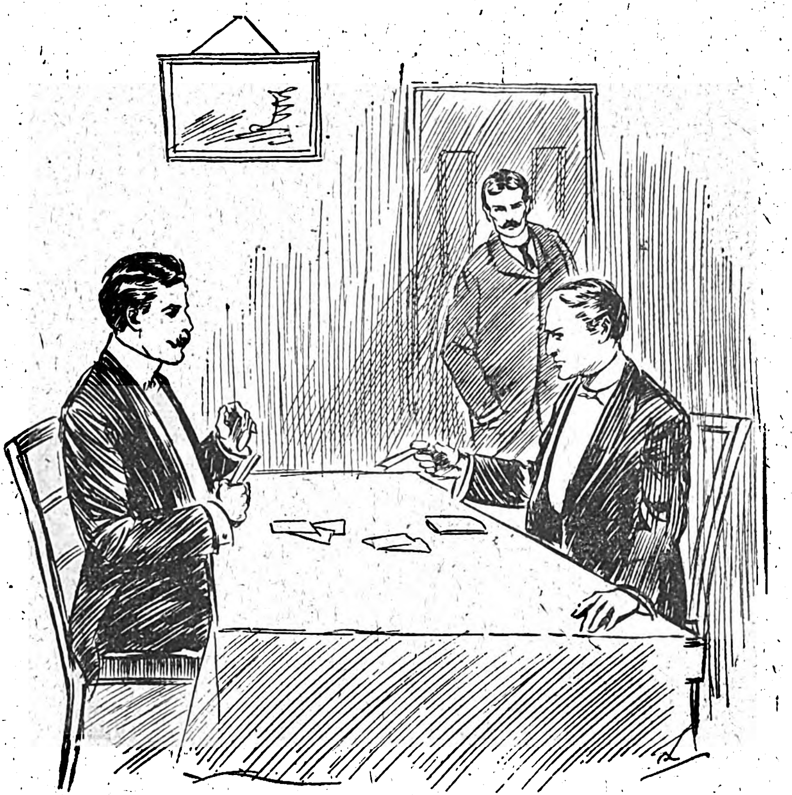
Mr. Hill was the last to leave the chambers when the party broke up. The wan dawn was breaking in through the window, and the sparrows were chattering. Most of the gentlemen looked heavy-eyed and haggard.

"I want a word with you, Hill," said Lord Ernest, when the two were alone.

"Yes?" said Mr. Hill in a non-committal manner.

"You made an insinuation at the table about—about the initials on your cigarette-case," said my master in a low, hoarse voice.

"I? An insinuation? I said nothing, my dear chap," cried Mr. Hill, raising his thick eyebrows in wonderment.



There were the two men quietly playing cards with as much composure as if the violent scene had never taken place.

"You looked an insinuation."

"Rot! I can't stand here at this hour in the morning arguing about looks. I want to get to bed."

He moved towards the door.

"One moment," said Lord Ernest in the same low tone, "I don't want to pry into your affairs."

"That's lucky," put in Mr. Hill with a black sneer.

"But I must know that it is not from Miss Trevarthen," said Lord Ernest, bringing out the last words with an expression of such utter misery that one's heart bled for him.

"Upon my word!" cried Mr. Hill scornfully. "Is that the kind of insinuation you make against the lady you are engaged to? You, to talk about insinuations!" He gave a low, contemptuous laugh.

My lord saw the trap into which his subtle enemy had lured him. He was livid with shame, anger, and disgust with himself. So engrossed were the two disputants in their conversation that neither of them had noticed me, as I busied myself with some totally unnecessary task at a side-table, but just then my lord happened to see me, and I was promptly ordered off to bed. I did not go to bed. I thought perhaps my lord might want me again before he retired, so I sat up in my own room. I could hear nothing from the room I had left but an agitated voice which I recognised as Lord Ernest's, and occasionally the cold, sneering tones of the other. All of a sudden, a loud cry in my master's voice was succeeded by a deadly stillness.

The silence continued for so long that I entered the room in case I might be wanted; but I nearly cried out with astonishment at what I saw. There were the two men quietly playing cards, with as much composure as if the violent scene of ten minutes before had never taken place. Soon, however, I noticed that with all my master's apparent composure, one large bead of moisture had appeared on his forehead, and his face was pallid and drawn. Hill was coolly smoking, and his case lay beside him on the table. He dealt another hand. My master began to bet confidently, after he had drawn a couple of cards, for the game was poker. I may say that both players drew two cards. The betting went on in silence for some time, till only a few chips remained to my master.

"Another ten," said Hill, quietly, putting up the stakes.

"I see you," said my lord in a harsh whisper, and he pushed over the last pile of ivory discs that remained beneath his hand.

He had to pass his tongue over his dry lips before he could manage to mutter: "What have you got?"

"Four tens," cried Mr. Hill, flinging down his cards faces upwards. "Is that good enough?"

My master nodded.

"Quite good enough," he said in the same harsh whisper, and he idly fingered the cards that had fallen from his hand.

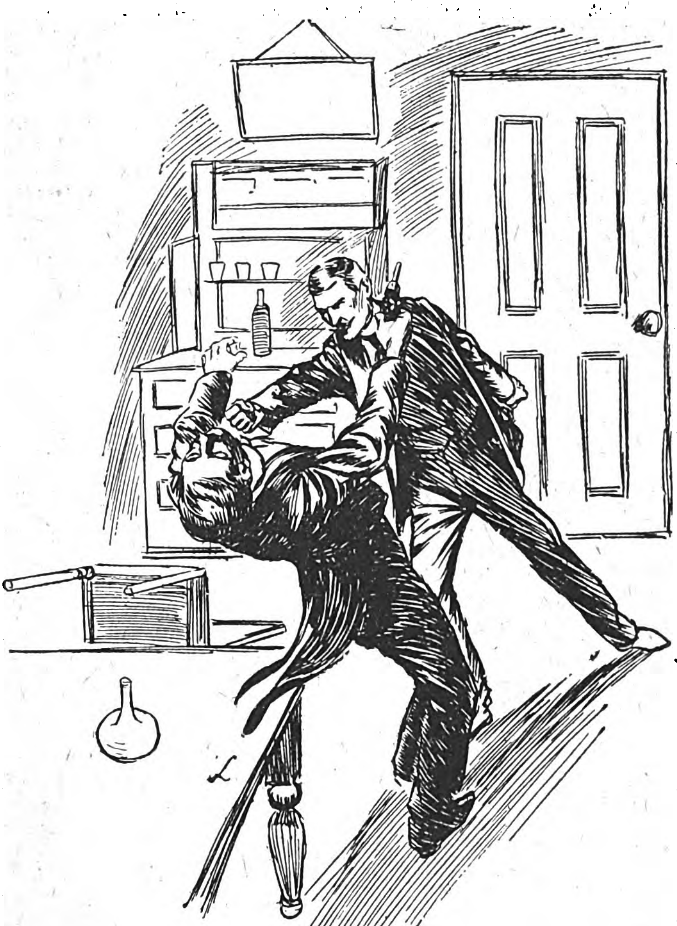
Mr. Hill rose.

I handed him his hat and coat.

"Good-night, Delhoste," he said, but my master was staring in front of him with such blank horror on his face as froze the blood in my veins.

* * * * *

I never want to pass such another month as the one following that night. I really thought my lord's mind had become affected. He was alternately wildly, recklessly merry, or in the depths of gloom. He spent money like water, and gambled furiously every night. Mr. Hill was never seen again at our place; nor, indeed, any of the people who had been present on the night of the quarrel. At the boisterous supper-parties which my lord gave, I shuddered to hear his wild laughter ringing high above the rest. It seemed to me as if the eternally-lost laughed.



I flung myself upon my lord, caught his wrist, and the pistol in his hand exploded.

Exactly a month from the date of his last game with Mr. Hill, my master handed me a note in the afternoon.

"There is a book—the title of it is inside—which I want you to get for me this afternoon," he said with the feverish, nervous manner that had become natural with him. "You must go to every bookseller's shop in London if necessary, but don't come back without it. It is most important that I have it to-day."

His room was in great disorder, and there was a heap of burnt paper in the grate. Two or three letters lay on his writing-table, and I noticed the top one was addressed to Miss Trevarthen.

"What are you waiting for?" cried Lord Ernest, irritably. "Why don't you go? A little fresh air will do you good, for I don't think you've been fifty yards from the door for the last month."

It was quite true that I had seldom been away from our place, for I felt that things were not going at all well, and I wished to be on hand in the case of an emergency.

Well, that afternoon I visited, as it seemed to me, dozens of booksellers' shops, but at each received the same reply. None of them had the book my master desired so particularly; and the assistant at the last place I visited bluntly said that he did not believe that there was such a book in existence.

Then, as it were, I saw clearly. Like a thunderbolt the revelation came upon me. My master had desired to get me out of the way for a time. But why? His extraordinary behaviour of late—the strange poker game I had witnessed—I began to piece things together rapidly. Then, chilling my blood, came the recollection of a wicked wager I had read about some years before, and had forgotten—that fearful institution known as the "American duel."

The duellists play cards, and the loser swears to kill himself at the end of a certain time. Could it be that my master was the victim of one of these fiendish contests? I leapt into a cab, and shouted to the man to hurry to Victoria Street on a matter of life and death.

As I expected, my master's door was locked when I reached home, but—thank Heaven!—I could hear his feverish tread still going to and fro. I put my shoulder against the door—I was young and strong then—it went in with a crash. I flung myself upon my lord, caught his wrist, the pistol in his hand exploded with a stunning report, but the bullet sped harmlessly upward. He fought as furiously for death as most for life — cursed and struck me, but I held on, and gradually he ceased to struggle, and only panted and glared wildly at me as I pinned him against the wall.

"My lord," I gasped at him, "listen, there is no need. I know everything. I tell you Mr. Hill cheated that night at poker."

"What do you mean?" he cried, wildly.

"I tell you he did," I said. "I saw him pass the cards over his cigarette-case as he dealt and he saw their reflection in the polished silver!"

* * * * *

This is how I saved my master from an ignominious end. He is now the adoring husband of the sweet girl whose photograph used to stand on his mantelpiece, for needless to say the initials on Mr. Hill's cigarette-case were not those of Mollie Trevarthen, but of a very different "M. T."

Tell us of a better paper than "Short Stories" and we'll take it in.

Eli Blake, Democrat.

"WELL, they're my sentiments, anyway; an' I'd stick to 'em, if I died for it."

"What! you'll make master an' man change places?"

"I didn't mean that; all I say is, as the 'man' 'as 'is rights as well as the 'master,' an' that one on 'em is the right to his own private opinion. Now, my opinion is, that, except in business hours, an' on business matters, master and man should each mind their own, an' leave one another's alone. I don't want to say any more about it, for it's just nine o'clock, an' there's Mr. Ned a-comin'."

The old timekeeper at Carberry and Mills, chain-cable and anchor makers, Isle of Dogs, stood waiting by the half-open gate, barely acknowledging the cheery morning greeting of Ned Carberry as he strode past toward his office.

Eli Blake was a character—a man of pronounced views—as his concluding remarks in the above fragment of conversation with the foreman of the yard clearly indicates.

He was, too, a prudent man, believing that absolute discretion should obtain, as between man and woman; above all, between master and servant.

He was a widower, with one child, a daughter, and Elsie Blake knew quite enough of her father's "mental twist" (as his cronies termed the somewhat forcible expression of his opinions, socialistic and political) to abstain from injudicious indulgence in too much self-assertion.

She was both a good girl and a pretty; about eighteen, and, for one in her station, well-informed and refined above the average.

Old Eli had been for many years in the employ of Carberry and Mills; for so many, in fact, that he was looked upon, alike by master and by men, as an institution, a fixture.

All knew his little peculiarities, but, in consideration of his many other and more important sterling qualities—virtues, indeed—liked and respected him none the less because of them.

Ned Carberry would as soon have thought of abdicating his own throne as of doing without Eli Blake. While certainly not entirely sympathising with the old man's more extreme democratic views, he did more than tolerate them, in that he held himself to be a man of the people, and believed in the right application of the great law of brotherhood, as between man and man.

This, of course, was going a little ahead of Eli, who, probably, from long habit, had come to recognize the class dividing-line as being not only a necessity, but, in a limited sense, an advantage.

One thing troubled—greatly troubled—him; Elsie would not, or could not, show any inclination for neighbourliness with those of her own class.

This struck at the very root of his principles, for he thought he saw in it the outcome of a spirit of dangerous social ambition, fatal to the due cultivation of that which he conceived to be the proper pride of her caste.

About five years before, in his wife's lifetime, Elsie, then a mere child, had on a certain occasion, narrowly escaped death.

It was in this way:

She was in the habit of daily carrying her father's dinner to him at the yard. One day the horse attached to an empty waggon, just being driven through the gates, shied, bolted, and fell with a crash, as the cart, colliding with one of the gate-posts, overturned, and was smashed to splinters.

Elsie was immediately in the path of the animal, and but for the presence of mind of young Ned Carberry—then a stalwart youngster of sixteen, who chanced to be making his way towards the entrance—would inevitably have been either crushed by the wreckage, or knocked down by the infuriated horse.

She was too frightened, poor child, to move out of the way, and it was only when Ned rushed forward, and, taking her up bodily, threw her with all his strength on to one side, that she fully realised her peril.

The act of her preserver had bruised and pained her, but the physical consequences of Ned's timely exertion of boyish muscle soon passed; from that time forward Ned Carberry was her girlish hero, the one being in the whole world whom she accorded a large place in her warm little heart.

Soon after this incident, Eli and his wife decided, on account of her poor health, to send Elsie to some farmer relatives in the Midlands.

The originally proposed visit of a month lengthened out, however, from various causes, into one of years, terminating only with Mrs. Blake's death.

His wife gone, his hearth lonely, Eli craved for his child's companionship, and so it was that a week or two before the beginning of this little chronicle, Elsie returned to her old home in Nelson Street, Isle of Dogs.

It so happened that during the years of Elsie Blake's absence, Ned Carberry had gone abroad to see the world, returning on the death of his father to take his position as sole partner in Carberry and Mills.

There had been no Mills for many a long day; so many, and so long, that the dead and gone junior partner had come to be regarded as a mere myth or a musty tradition.

Her new duties as her father's housekeeper fully occupying her time and attention, Elsie now no longer brought him his midday meal, the ten-year-old son of the foreman of the yard, and a great favourite with old Eli, deputising for her.

Elsie, it may be said, had now developed into a perfectly lovely woman, with about her not one reminiscent mark of her sun-bonnet and pinafore days.

There was not much difference to be noted in Ned himself. True, he was bigger, stronger, and, if anything, kinder and more gentle even than he had been as a boy. But he was the same Ned—the same loveable nature to all who had ever known him.

It may be accepted as a fact that the incident of nearly five years before had long since died out of his recollection. Men are not like women; they see and hear so much, their interests and occupations are so varied, that unless it concerns them very closely they easily forget events, which a woman, naturally and by habit more introspective, and with greater opportunities for quiet musing, cherishes in the hiding-places of her memory, bringing them forth every now and again, for contemplation, and mental refreshment.

Ned Carberry knew that Eli Blake had a daughter, but as to what manner of girl she was, pretty or plain, good or bad, he had not the faintest idea.

With Elsie it was far different. She, it may safely be said, had never forgotten the big Eton-jacketted boy who, at the risk of his own life, had saved hers. From the day that she had erected the idol in her little "holy of holies," she had continued faithfully to worship at the shrine until now she was beginning to find, to her own shame and confusion of mind, that the image she had set up was the one thing on earth she most desired.

It was all very reprehensible, no doubt; and quite opposed to the principles set forth in the dominant clause of her father's creed.

She knew this, and dreaded sometimes lest he should discover her secret.

Perhaps he might never even have known of its existence, had it not been for two things, impossible of control—fate, so called, and the tongue of a mischievous woman.

I venture to qualify the word "fate," it being in my humble opinion, at the best, a doubtful quantity, and not by any means to be relied upon, for I, at least, hold it to be half-brother to "chance," a notoriously untrustworthy principle. This admitted, I prefer to assign the credit of that which followed to "the Providence that shapes our ends," regardless of anything we may humanly do to carve out our own destinies.

Providence, then, decreed that Ned Carberry should, on a certain sunny morning in August—for the sun shines sometimes in the Isle of Dogs—and while on his way to the works, see Elsie Blake at the parlour window tending her plants, and looking sweet enough to charm the heart out of the veriest churl, vowed to celibacy and sulky solitude.

At first he could not identify her; did not, indeed, know her from—Eve! Then, with a hesitating slowness born of indecision, he raised his hat, halting almost imperceptibly as he did so.

It was a tribute to a beautiful presence—nothing more—for it was not until he reached the end of the street that it flashed upon him who it really was.

"Elsie Blake, by all that's wonderful! Why, she would be rare among the rarest. I'm glad, even in ignorance, that I saluted her. It's a privilege to recognise beauty such as hers."

This was dangerous musing. That his thoughts, far from troubling him, afforded him the keenest satisfaction, was not wonderful, though it intensified the peril; and when he passed the timekeeper's lodge and smilingly gave a more than usually hearty "Good morning!" to old Eli, there could have been but one opinion as to the state and bent of his mind.

Elsie was certainly not so ignorant as to who he was, as he himself had been at sight of her. Woman seldom is; she reads where man spells—very often.

Yet was it all very unfortunate; for Elsie, socially barred, and conventionally shut out from all the ordinary sources of giving and receiving, could, after this gentle fillip to her imagination, but indulge in vague dreams, which might or might not remain with her, when she should, as assuredly she would, awake to life's sober realities.

The morning's *rencontre* in Nelson Street had not passed unnoticed, Eli Blake having been informed of it on his way home the same evening by a certain inquisitive busy-body.

"Well, what about it?" growled old Eli. "I've only got your word for it" (he hated this particular specimen of the tattling sisterhood). "For aught I know you may be mistaken. I can hardly believe Elsie would encourage any, even the slightest attention from Mr. Ned; she knows my sentiments too well."

"Oh! of course you can believe it or not, Mr. Blake, just as you like." This with a sniff and a toss of the not too tidy head. "It's no concern of mine, and——"

"Then don't bother your head about it," snapped Eli, interrupting her, at the same time pushing past the woman, and hurrying on his way.

"Old cat!" he said to himself, when free of his persecutor. "An' yet," for it rankled, spite of himself and his faith in his daughter, "it's possible—it's just possible. Well, if it should be true, I'll nip it in the bud, that's all. Mr. Ned wouldn't wrong me or mine, I'm sure of that, sure as death! but I want no fine gentleman son-in-law, not me! An' so I'd tell 'im 'imself if it came to the push."

That evening, over his tea, he expressed himself pretty plainly upon the matter, much to Elsie's confusion and distress.

"I wouldn't mess about at that parlor winder of a mornin', Elsie," he said, "if I was you; leastways, not till Mr. Ned's gone by. He may think he's pleasin' you by a kind word, or a nod, but it don't please me; an' so I tell you. There's nobody the world over like Mr. Ned, but—well, don't do it, my girl! don't do it!"

Elsie made no reply; the fact is that she was afraid to speak, lest her manner should betray her; so Eli concluded that she had understood him, and would respect his wishes.

Days went by, and though Ned Carberry saw Elsie no more at her window, he met her frequently in the neighbourhood, when, as he often now did, he strolled out from his duties for a "breath of fresh air," as he tried to deceive himself into believing.

The Isle of Dogs is far from being an ideal place for a ramble, even in fine weather, but Ned Carberry did not appear to find it at all depressing.

Oh! how delicious it all was—to Elsie, poor Elsie; as for Ned, he too thought it delightful, but experienced qualms of conscience with regard to the wisdom of it all.

Even then all might have been well; and two lives, though they might not each have the "moon," still might have secured something, in its way equally good, something, perhaps, in the end, more satisfying, and intrinsically of greater value.

This is as the world would think. I have my own opinion.

But the busy-body was not content with that which she had already achieved, viz., the implanting in old Eli's mind a disturbing element, that without doubt, would rankle and grow, to the ultimate upsetting of everybody concerned.

She must needs send round the marvellous tale, with embellishments and exaggerations; the gossips of the neighbourhood soon taking up the story, and making the most of it.

It was not surprising that that which the wives discussed, should soon became the common property of the husbands, and that a whisper, more or less emphatic, should in time reach the ears of old Eli.

The day that he heard it was one when Ned and Elsie had agreed to meet at noon.

There were some waste fields, and by some deserted chemical works. Huge boards, proclaiming that the land was to be let for building purposes, disfigured even the already uninviting prospect. It was of all dreary spots the most dreary. As a trysting-place for lovers I can imagine none less suitable.

But as everybody knows it is difficult to find rural or romantic spots in the Isle of Dogs; a place therefore, such as I have described would probably be, for that locality, rather above the average than otherwise.

It would be about half-past twelve, when Ned and Elsie, standing, absorbed in talk, in the shadow of the wall that girt the uninhabited factory, heard heavy footsteps aproaching on the cinder-path leaning to where they were.

Elsie saw him first and instinctively drew away from Ned's side.

"Oh, don't trouble yourself," said Eli, quietly but with a dangerous light in his honest old eyes. "Don't trouble yourself to move, I shan't disturb you for long. I've got something to say, and when I've said it I'll go my way, an'"—he looked keenly at her—"you can go yourn."

"Blake! you're under a misapprehension," cried Ned Carberry; "you're not treating your daughter fairly!"

"Ain't I? Then I'm sorry, mortal sorry. But I'm thinkin' that it's you as is mistaken, sir. However what I've got to say to you, Mr. Ned, I'll say when I've done with her."

Elsie moved nearer to Ned now, perhaps because she felt that soon he would be her only protector.

"Elsie Blake," continued the old man, each word coming sharp as a razor from his lips, "a week or so ago I told you plainly what I wished; and I had every reason to believe that you would obey me. I find now that I wer' over-trustin'. If you think that a marriage with my master will please me, or that you will reap good from it, I tell you that you will do neither. From this moment I've done with you! I never wish to see your face more! I'll provide for you away from my roof 'till you go to your husband, but in no other way. That's my last word to you."

"Mr. Blake!" broke out Ned Carberry, "you are unnatural."

"Am I? That's as it may be," answered Eli, still quietly. "I thought, sir, as you was a gentleman, an' as I've knowed you ever since you was a lad, as you was honest. It's not my fault as you're neither one or the other."

"Blake, you forget yourself!"

"No, Mr. Ned! it's you as 'as forgot yourself, an' take this from me: oil and water'll never mix. You know my meanin'. I leaves your service from to-night. Good-day to you, sir."

He turned and walked slowly back along the cinder-path, without so much as a head-turn, and went into his own house—alone.

* * * * *

Mr. and Mrs. Edward Carberry are to-day a fairly happy couple, but I fancy that the lady must often call to mind those last words of old Eli (she has never set eyes on him since that day), for at times her husband sees the tears in her eyes.

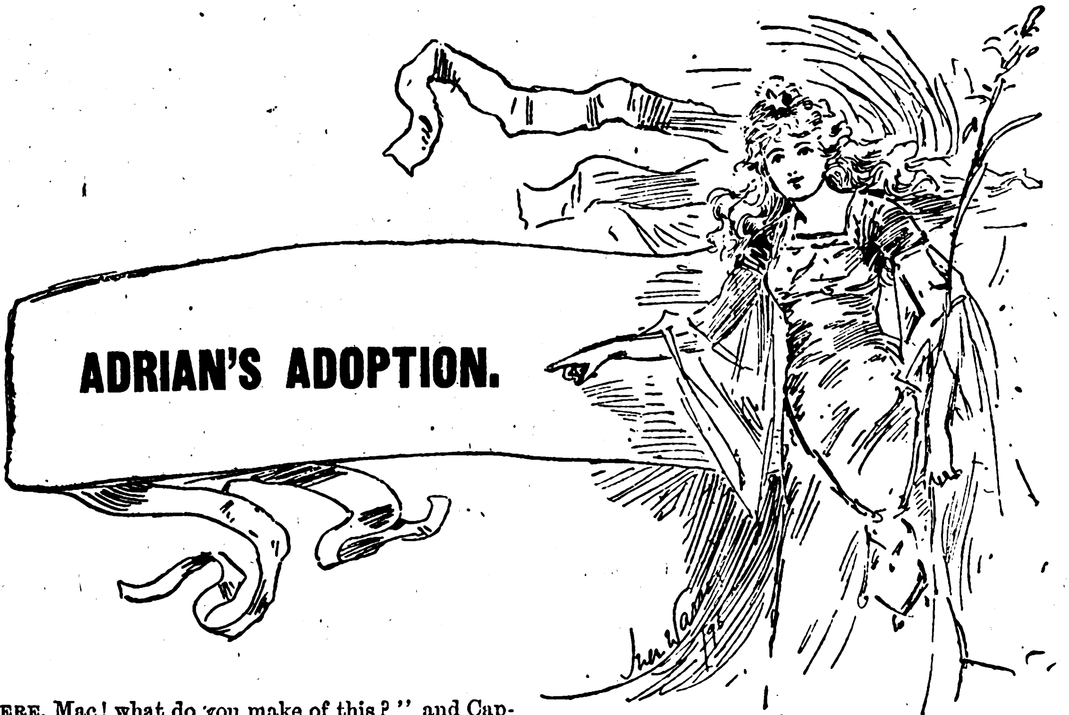
He never asks the reason, for he knows.

THE PALATE OF A WHELK.
A photograph of this
appears in an article
on the subject of the
Anatomy of the Atom
- - in the - -
JULY PEARSON'S.
NOW ON SALE 6d.

GALBRAITH OF St. ANSELM'S.
A story of Oxford and Undergraduates; of villainy and manhood; of shadows and sunshine. A story wherein is set forth the strange career of Galbraith of St. Anselm's—how shadowy mystery dogged his footsteps; how he suffered for the sins of another; how he was hounded out of college and university; how a faithful few stood by him; how, sometimes swept under, sorely battered and bruised, he never ceased to fight the fierce tide of adversity, and reached the shore at last! See next Thursday's issue of
THE BIG BUDGET. One PENNY.

"The Golden Dwarf" is simply enthralling.

ADRIAN'S ADOPTION.



"HERE, Mac! what do you make of this?" and Captain Philip Darling handed the morning's *Times* across the breakfast-table, with a laugh, to his companion.

"Make of what?" echoed the major; Major Patrick MacIlray, V.C., a grizzled old Indian veteran, and a frequent visitor in the early hours at the captain's quarters.

"Ah! I see," he continued, nicely adjusting his "pince-nez," and reading aloud the paragraph indicated by the other, which ran as follows:

> ADOPTION—Will any wealthy and benevolently-inclined bachelor or spinster adopt young couple, who have been many years engaged, but are unable to marry owing to lack of means. Address:—H. H., Box 1002, International Agency, Fleet Street. E. C.

"Well?" said the captain.

"H'm; can't say exactly, wants thinking over," said the major.

"Do you know what my opinion is about it?"

"No; what is it?"

"Rot!"

"Don't agree with you. May be genuine. Facts sometimes stranger than fic——"

"Not always. In such cases as this, for instance, it suspiciously inclines to the mendacious."

"I repeat, I don't agree with you, Phil, at any rate I intend investigating the thing."

"Nonsense! You're not serious! As sure as your name's Mac you'll be done if you have anything to do with it. You're too soft-hearted to undertake the *rôle* of investigator."

"Scoffer! avaunt! Frankly Phil, I've made up my mind to write to the male half of this advertising couple; and, according as I find, so will I act."

The major rose from the table with as much military precision and smartness as his years and the "gameness" of his right leg would admit of; then, asking his host for writing materials, he scribbled for a minute or two, and read aloud the following:

> IF "A. A." (the gentleman, not the lady) will call to-morrow afternoon, three o'clock, at subscribed address, he may hear of something to his advantage.
>
> MAJOR PATRICK,
> 64 Oxford Terrace,
> Oct. 5, 1900. Belgravia, SW.

"You mean business, then," said the other, scarcely able to restrain an amused smile.

"Of course! Why, sir, there's no knowing what prize I may get out of it; a—affection, and—and——"

"Disinterested affection; also, of course. Mac! Mac! you'll make a mess of it. Look here, old chap! I'm open to make a bet with you—a level 'tenner'—that within a fortnight—ten days—within a week from the sending of this letter you'll wish you hadn't."

"Done, you unbeliever, done! I'll leave you now; post this, and return on this day week to claim stakes. Ta-ta."

"Half a moment, Mac! Why Oxford Terrace, Belgravia, you don't live there?"

"No, but my man, that married last year, does. Benjamin and his wife are only too ready to oblige me; and it's very handy to have such a convenient field for operation."

"Yes, in the event of failure, and the necessity for backing out."

First posting his answer to the advertisement, the major made his way to Oxford Terrace, arranged matters then with Mrs. Benjamin, and strolled away to his club to await results.

He had desired that any letter for him, should be at once forwarded to the "Junior Military," by special messenger.

At eight p.m. a note was left at the club by Benjamin himself. It ran:

> DEAR SIR.
> In reply to yours of this morning I beg to say that I shall have much pleasure in keeping the appointment made by you:
> Yours Faithfully
> ADRIAN ADKINSON.

"He's lost no time, at any rate," said the Major to himself, "it now only remains to be seen what manner of man he is, and whether, as Phil seems to think he has any little game. The wish may be father to the thought but I don't believe he has."

When the next day at 3. p.m. punctually, the knocker was vigorously applied at Number 64, Major Mac, from an advantageous position behind the parlour window curtain had a good preliminary glimpse of his visitor.

He was young; he was well-dressed, and not by any means bad-looking. More than this the gallant "investigator" was unable to gather.

By the time the major had resumed his seat in an armchair by the fire, Mrs. Benjamin had announced Mr. Adrian Adkinson, and the owner of the name standing a moment in the doorway of the room, hat in hand, advanced towards the correspondent, who rose to meet him; bowed, and indicated a chair.

After an interchange of conventional courtesies, and a little diplomatic skirmishing on the Major's part to decide, if possible, motives and character indices, the following facts, or, waiting proof, what passed for such, were arrived at.

In the first place Ilma Dunthorpe, and Adrian Adkinson were not of the same "caste" socially—the latter admitted this in a way, but only as the result of a chance question of the major's. Evidently he would much rather have concealed the detail, being as he was, a young man of the vain, super-sensitive sort, much given to indulgence in wounded feelings, and the like.

It appeared that the lady, the daughter of parents moving in good society, was of artistic bent. A working student on certain days at South Kensington and elsewhere, she had met Adrian on various occasions. The son of people who had sacrificed much for his education and general advancement in life, young Adkinson had paid assiduous court to the girl, mainly as he was particularly anxious to impress upon his listener, because of her winsome personality. She, on her part was no less attracted by him, or, so, at least, he said.

With the usual drift of events in such cases, an engagement, secret for some time, followed. Then came trouble. A girl of fine principle, loyal-hearted, and straightforward to a degree, she confided in her mother, the issue being, a parental ultimatum, and a separation of interests.

Ilma possessed in her own right a small income of fifty pounds a year, and as she was of age, the disposal of it was in her own hands. A clever "black and white" artist, she calculated that her earnings in this connection, added to her own private resources, would enable her to circumvent the irrepressible wolf.

"But what first suggested to you the idea of advertising," asked the major.

"Oh! I don't quite know. I'm not very clever at money-getting, and didn't exactly relish the notion of living on my wife's means. Then I thought that there must be wealthy people in the world without kith or kin to absorb their good things, and so, I—we, I mean, decided to appeal to such in the forlorn hope that some one, man or woman, would see things in our light, and help us to help ourselves."

"Ah! now, suppose that I, willing and able to make your dream a substantial reality, adopt you; you, mind, open an account for you with a bank, and pave the way for your making a braver show on your side, would that suit your book, eh?"

"Well, Major Patrick, we—I thought that perhaps you would——"

"Do just as I have said. If, after certain inquiries made by me, I find everything satisfactory, you will be in the position of my adopted son, and able to meet your intended wife upon equal terms, or even more so. I don't understand women, and don't want to, which sufficiently explains my reason for dealing solely with you in the matter. It remains only for you to give me your address; the address of Miss Dunthorpe; and the name and whereabouts of someone to whom you have during your life been known."

Adrian Adkinson was only too ready to comply with these not unreasonable demands of the major, and left the house with the understanding that he was to call again at the same hour on the third day after.

He was more than satisfied with the result of the afternoon's work, but it was not until he was almost within hail of his own door, that there occurred to him something, which, had the major but even faintly suspected it, would have spoiled his success and prospects beyond redemption.

This was nothing less than repudiation of his obligations with regard to Ilma Dunthorpe. An idea, dim at first, began to take shape with him, that given a fair pecuniary status, a match, better and in every way more advantageous, was both possible and desirable. That such a course had in it the elements of mean, shifty trickery, and exposed him to an accusation of unmanliness and self-seeking, troubled him but little, not so much as crossed his mind even.

Poor Ilma was not a beauty, certainly; but there were compensations, that went a long way toward making that fact not worth mentioning.

If sweetness of disposition; expressive eyes; an

ARE YOU TRULY RURAL?
IF NOT, WHY NOT BECOME SO
WITH THE AID OF
SMALL GARDENS,
And How to Make the Most of Them.
By VIOLET BIDDLE.

It contains numberless hints and wrinkles of the utmost importance to would-be gardeners. Some of the chapters are:

TABLE DECORATION, including hints on Preserving and Resuscitating Flowers, and a Table of Flowers in Season, etc.
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WINDOW BOXES, How to Make Them, Suitable Soil, etc.
TERMS USED BY GARDENERS. GARDENING CALENDAR.

One Shilling at all Booksellers, or post free 1s. 2d. of the Publisher, 17 Henrietta Street, W.C.

intelligence above the average, enshrined in a form slight, indeed, but graceful, and instinct with a vigour healthy, because altogether wholesome, go to make a woman worthy the name, then Ilma Dunthorpe was a notable example of that which is "above rubies."

Adrian Adkinson had lied when he told the major that his *fiancé* was cognisant of the advertisement. As a matter of fact she was entirely ignorant of it, and would probably have remained so had not fate decreed otherwise, in a way absolutely unexpected.

Meanwhile, the inquiries concerning the young man (conducted through the medium of the ever convenient Benjamin) resulted so far satisfactorily, that the major considered himself justified in fulfilling his part of the contract.

Probably, it may almost be said certainly, the old veteran was influenced quite as much by a desire to crow over his friend Philip, as by mere philanthropic motives. Either way Adrian Adkinson profited. The adopted son and presumable heir of a wealthy old bachelor, his position was to be envied.

The germ of crooked inclination, however, manifested itself as a suspicious suggestion, almost before the ink was dry upon the dead copy, and substantial cheque, which changed hands upon the day of the completion of the business.

A casual question put by the major to his brand-new legal connection set the ball a-rolling.

"I suppose you will at once acquaint Miss—a—Dunthorpe as to how matters stand with you?" he said.

"Ilma? Oh! she can wait! I've so many things to do, more important, that trifling affairs of that nature must give way."

"Oh! I beg pardon! I merely thought that the main object of our little arrangement was the doing away with the necessity for this same waiting."

"So it is, sir," answered Adrian, not exactly in a confused way, but in something very much like it, "but I think you'll agree with me, that since owing to your goodness, the cause for anxiety is virtually removed, there need be no immediate hurry."

"Well, no; perhaps not; although Miss Dunthorpe must still be, to some extent, affected by the anxiety you refer to, inasmuch as she is utterly ignorant of the fact that indulgence in it is now unnecessary. But, as I said, I don't understand women, and their ways, and so I'll leave you to manage your own personal concerns in that direction in your own way."

Adrian Adkinson was not clever enough to detect the wrapped-up satire, but departed in the happy frame of mind of one able now to make his little "paradise of self" quite comfortable, and impervious to the attacks of vulgar worry and inconvenient disturbance.

Had he seen, however, the Major's expression of disgustful dissatisfaction as the latter watched him cross the road, and disappear up the street, he would, without doubt, have felt uneasy; not because he need fear the withdrawal of his patron's bounty (that after the legal formalities was impossible) but because of the contempt and worse, which highminded men always have for double-dealing, and which most men instinctively wince under and dread.

Late that evening Captain Philip Darling received a visit from his old friend.

The captain was inclined to make chaffing inquiry of the major as to the progress of the advertisement matter, but the latter was not to be drawn.

"Phil, I want you to do me a favour."

"You know it's granted before asking. What is it Mac? Not money, I know; you've plenty of that; and even if you hadn't, it would be no use to come to me, would it? The exquisite sensation of 'wealth' is an experience *in futuro* as far as I'm concerned. Now, what is it?"

"Only that you will make a call for me."

"Where, when? Say the word, and it's done."

"I want you, if you've no other engagement, to call in a casual way to-morrow afternoon at 197 Warwick Street, S.W., and discover for me if Mr. Adrian Adkinson is at home or out. I'm curious to know. For certain reasons I can't go myself; neither can I send Benjamin, as the inquirer must be a gentleman."

"Oh, of course I'll do it for you. In fact, I've a little private business of my own in that neighbourhood. But, 'Adrian Adkinson,' who on earth is he?"

"Oh, someone in whom I am interested."

"All right, old chap! beg pardon! wouldn't probe secrets for the world."

"Thanks, Phil. I may depend upon you then."

"Certainly."

"Good-night," said the major.

On the following afternoon about four o'clock, Captain Philip Darling, stepping out of a hansom, knocked at 197 Warwick Street, S.W.

Truth to say, he was somewhat at a loss how exactly to do his private inquiry business.

As so very often happens, however, the difficulty was solved for him, in unexpected fashion.

About to put a leading question to the woman (evidently the landlady) who answered his summons, he he was interrupted by the advent of a young lady, hatted and jacketed, who, hurriedly descending the stairs and advancing along the hall-way towards the street door, stopped shortly at the mention of Adrian Adkinson's name. She had a crushed note in her hand, and Captain Philip could plainly see that she was excited, angry even.

"Excuse me," she said to him, "are you seeking Mr. Adkinson?"

"I certainly did wish to see him, had he been at home," replied Philip, impressed by the girl's appearance and manner.

"Are you a friend of his?" she queried, still in the same agitated way.

"Well, no, not exactly," he said, "I am acting for a friend of my own."

"Have you any objection to telling me your friend's name? I have a reason—a very strong reason for asking. My own name is Dunthorpe, Ilma Dunthorpe, and I am, or *was* engaged to Mr. Adkinson."

"Oh, indeed!" said Philip, in a courteously interested way—(they had left the house, and were walking along one side of Eccleston Square, into which they had turned out of Warwick Street.)—"There is no reason," he added, "why I should not tell you my friend's name. It is Major Patrick——"

"Mac Ilray. I thought so."

"Then you know him?"

"No, I have never seen him, Mr.—a——"

"Philip Darling," said he, producing his card case.

"Captain Darling," she said, just glancing at the pasteboard. "If you are a friend of Major Mac Ilray's you will tell me where I can find him, or, better still, take me to him at once. He only can make quite clear to me that which I have but now learnt in a very unsatisfactory way."

"I shall be pleased to take you to the major," said Philip, glancing down sideways at his companion, and beginning to think what a nice girl she was, and what an ass a man must be to say or do anything which should risk the losing such a treasure.

The day was fine and Philip, availing himself of the fact to the full, strolled with Ilma to the major's chambers in the "Albany."

He certainly lost no time in improving the acquaintance, and before the Park was reached they were chatting in the spirit of right good-fellowship.

She explained her presence in Warwick Street by saying that not having heard for some time from Adkinson, she had called at his lodgings to gain information about him.

The landlady had handed her a note from Adrian, ultimately permitting her to write a few lines in his sitting-room.

It was while she was thus engaged that a certain paper lying open on the table opened her eyes to her lover's dissimulation. Hence her agitation.

The same paper also made her acquainted with Major MacIlray's name, and share in the business.

Then light broke for Captain Philip. Unknown to his old friend he had stumbled across the latter's studiously preserved secret. He laughed joyously to himself; promising himself a rare treat when he should reveal his knowledge.

There is not much more to say.

Ilma Dunthorpe, in her interview with the Major, got to the bottom of Adrian's treachery, as towards herself; first in concealing the fact of the advertisement from her, and making her unconscious partner in his scheme for raising the wind, and then, when success was achieved, casting her aside, as something undesirable in his prosperity.

Fortunately, Major MacIlray's fortune could stand the comparatively small strain upon it of the money he had so impulsively settled upon Adrian. A growl or two, and he passed it to the "loss" account with as good a grace as might be.

But still more fortunately, he saw that Phillip and Ilma made common cause.

No word of love, so far as he at least knew, had as yet passed between them, but these were sure indications that the word would be spoken, and soon.

With regard to that "tenner," there was a decided unanimity of opinion; both agreeing that in the broadest sense, there had been no failure, although upon the face of it the word was to a certain extent plainly written.

The bet, therefore, was by mutual consent cancelled, both parties to it being more than satisfied.

The Major found a good wife for his favourite; and Philip rejoiced in the possession of the love of as true and sweet a nature as ever gladdened man's heart and life.

* * * * *

Adrian Adkinson has recently been heard of. Upon the list of passengers on the *Teutonic*, for New York, he and his wife prominently figure.

It is supposed that he was actually married at the time Ilma discovered his deceit, deceit which has so happily resulted for herself.

A CHARMING NOVEL FOR SIXPENCE.

MY JAPANESE WIFE.

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"As slight as it is clever . . . . bright and original from cover to cover."—*Saturday Review.*

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Inclose six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope with each specimen of handwriting.

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PRICE 6d., or POST FREE 8d.

"The Golden Dwarf" is simply enthralling.

HOW "SPIKE" BEALE LOST HIS NERVE.

"SPOT the big cove in the corner—'im wi' the beard!"

It was Joe Egan, an old convict with whom I had become acquainted, who whispered these words in my ear as I sat alongside him in the parlour of the "Brown Bear."

The tavern in question is grimy and exceedingly ancient, and is situated in one of Hoxton's worst streets—a street through which no respectable person willingly passes after nightfall.

A favourite resort of criminals who infest the neighbourhood is "The Bear," and oft-times has its secret loft afforded refuge to desperate cracksmen being hunted by the men of Scotland Yard. How old Ben Draffin, the landlord, secured his licence in the first instance, and how he manages to get that license regularly renewed, is not easy to understand, seeing that the police are well aware of the character of Ben's principal customers.

I had visited the place twice before under the guidance (and protection) of Joe Egan. On the night of this, my third visit, a kind of benefit was going to be held in aid of a pickpocket's young widow, and as the hour at which the proceedings were to commence was close at hand, the low-ceilinged parlour was unwontedly crowded.

It was curious company to be in—this gathering of evil-visaged criminals. Burglars, swell-mobsmen, pickpockets, representatives of almost every branch of crime, in fact, stood or sat about in little groups, drinking, and laughing together. Roughly dressed for the occasion though I was, each new arrival regarded me suspiciously, until a signal from my companion reassured them that I was "all right."

Absorbed in watching the faces of those around me I was suddenly aroused by the remark from Joe Egan which I have set forth above. Looking in the direction indicated, I at once espied the individual referred to—a man of herculean build and bloated face, the lower part of which was adorned with a bushy red beard.

"Ain't exac'ly o' the burglar cut, is he?" my acquaintance quietly observed. "That's 'is lay, though—or *was* 'is lay is, p'r'aps, nearer the mark. For 'e aint any good at anythin' but warehouse-breakin' jobs nowadays. He used to be a tip-topper, too, fer all 'is awk'ard make. Wouldn't touch nothin' but the best jobs, Spike Beale wouldn't—until he lost 'is nerve."

I took another look at the big, bearded man in the corner. Though bull-necked and of unpleasing-enough countenance, he was totally unlike the typical Bill Sikes. His huge, clumsy-looking figure, too, was not exactly adapted to a "profession" which, above all things, requires agility. I noticed another failing. His hand, as he raised a glass of spirits to his twitching mouth, trembled violently—a sure sign of "nerves."

"No, it 'aint the rum," muttered Egan, reading my thoughts. "Until the night o' that job t'other side of the Thames, Spike Beale could drink a pint neat, an' 'is nerves be as steady as steel arter it."

Then, speaking in low tones, and breaking off now and again to join in the choruses, or applaud the performers, my companion related how "Spike" Beale lost his nerve. He told the story in his own way. For the better understanding of my readers I here re-tell it in mine.

* * * * *

The neighbouring clocks had just struck one a.m. and the dense November fog which had been hanging over South London for nearly twelve hours obscured everything like a pall. Under the wall of a large detached house, standing some way back from a lonely suburban road, two men crouched. They seemed not to mind the weather at all. Indeed, to judge by their conversation, the state of the atmosphere appeared to afford them the liveliest satisfaction.

"Couldn't 'a bin better, Spike!" said one of the pair. "The cop. won't be by again fer another hour, an' you might light the 'ouse up an' then 'im not see a glimmer from the road 'ere."

"Yes, it's turned out well. But keep a sharp look, all the same. Now give me a lift."

The speaker, a bearded, immensely powerful-looking man, clutched the top of the surrounding wall, and, with the assistance of his comrade, pulled himself up. Then, with the parting injunction, "Keep yer eyes open," he dropped into the garden of the lonely house.

Cautiously picking his way along, he advanced for about twenty yards, then halted for a moment as the house itself loomed into view. All was dark within, the occupants being apparently fast asleep in their beds. From the pocket of his capacious coat "Spike" Beale—for that notorious burglar it was—now produced a small lantern, ready lighted. Then he tip-toed to the rear of the house, finally halting before a window.

Five minutes later, he was standing inside the kitchen, his keen eyes taking in every article exposed to view. Apparently coming to the conclusion that there was nothing there worth stealing, Beale crept softly along a passage until, reaching the dining-room door, he turned the handle and entered.

Here he found a small quantity of silver-plate, which he promptly wrapped up in a cloth and placed in the passage. Then he returned and commenced to force open sundry drawers and cabinets. Their contents evidently disappointed him, for, muttering an oath, he crept out of the room and entered another on the opposite side of the passage. This apartment contained nothing of a portable, and at the same time valuable, nature, save a marble clock and a few richly-chased ornaments. These he placed in the passage with the plate, and muttering, "Jewellery and money in the bedrooms, I expect," immediately ascended a broad flight of stairs.

Reaching the landing, he hesitated for a second, listening intently. Not a sound did he hear.

A door on his left stood ajar. Pushing it open he found himself in a small but well-furnished bedroom. It was unoccupied, and was evidently kept ready for the use of any visitor who might have occasion to stay at the house for a night. A rapid search satisfied Beale that it was no use wasting time in the room; so, with the swiftness of the experienced housebreaker, he now glided along a passage which ran at right angles from the landing.

Again he halted at a door, and this time placed his ear to the keyhole. There was no sound of any occupant.

"Rummy!" mused the burglar. "The servant's out fer the night, but the family' at home, Poulter said, and from his plan o' the 'ouse this ought to be the boss's room. Can't 'ear no breathin,' though!"

Once more he stooped and listened; then covering the glass of his lantern, tried the door. To his surprise it was not locked.

Beale pushed the door open an inch or two, and listened a third time. As before, all was silent as the grave; so deciding that Poulter—the confederate who had arranged the "job" and prepared a rough plan of the house—had either been misinformed as to the location of the principal bedroom, or that the family *were* away for the night, the buglar boldly entered.

Uncovering his lantern, the first things he espied were several articles of jewellery lying upon a dressing-table near the window. His eyes glistened greedily. Then the thought flashed on him that in a room where watches and rings lay about there must be occupants, and, shading his lantern with his hand, he turned to take a general survey of the room.

He glanced at the bed, and the sight which met his gaze almost caused him to shriek aloud with terror. His eyes bulged from their sockets, his tongue and lips grew suddenly parched, while his whole attitude was that of a man stricken with palsy.

For, side by side in the bed, lay a woman and a little child—dead—with their throats cut!

Beale stood horror-stricken for several minutes. Try as he might he could neither move nor take his eyes from the awful sight.

Then suddenly the spell was broken by the sound of a footstep behind him, and, turning, he saw standing in the doorway a man as tall and powerfully-built as himself, holding in his hand a razor, the blade of which was dyed a deep crimson.

But it was the man's eyes which struck terror to the burglar's heart. They were bloodshot, and in the dim light emitted by Beale's lantern glowed like live coals.

For a moment the two stood gazing at each other, then the man uttered a horrible laugh, and, with razor uplifted, sprang furiously at the burglar. Dodging just in time, Beale avoided a vicious slash, and, dropping his lantern, closed with his antagonist.

In the black darkness there then commenced a battle of giants.

Both men were, as has been said, of great proportions, and both were of about the same age. It was a silent struggle, save for the horrible panting of the two antagonists as each vainly tried to overpower the other. To and fro in that chamber of death they struggled, until at length Beale felt muscular fingers gripping his throat, and, half choking, he was borne backwards and pinned against the wall.

The burglar was now powerless to struggle, and feeling the clutch on his windpipe tighten, he had given himself up as doomed, when suddenly the other relinquished his hold, and, chuckling strangely, began to fumble about the floor for his dropped razor.

Like lightning, Beale slipped past him, and, half mad with terror, hurried downstairs and out of the house. The fog was still dense, and he did not hesitate to reach the road by way of the front gate. Near at hand he found his accomplice waiting in some alarm, and to him Beale briefly recounted what had happened.

On the following day the evening papers were filled with accounts of "A Horrible Tragedy in South London," in which were set out the fact that a well-to-do gentleman had, in a sudden fit of madness, murdered his young wife and child, and afterwards committed suicide.

They dwelt at length on one mysterious point, viz., that although the victims were found lying in positions which testified to their having been murdered in their sleep, the room showed unmistakable signs of a violent struggle having taken place. To account for the fact that the murderer's clothes were disarranged and torn, it could only be surmised that he had roamed about the house in a wild frenzy before cutting his own throat.

Another curious thing about the terrible affair was the discovery that burglars must have visited the house, seeing that the kitchen window was found to have been forced, while a bundle of plate lay in the passage as though it had been dropped there by housebreakers.

* * * * *

"Since that night," concluded Joe Egan, "Spike Beale's nerve 'aint bin worth a brass farden. Whether it was the sight o' the murdered wife an' babby, or the narrer escape 'e 'ad o' bein' choked by the madman that give 'im sich a fright as 'e can't git over, I dunno. But that it was one o' the two there 'aint a doubt. 'E trembles an' sweats whenever 'e sees a copper in the street, an' can't be got to jine anybody in a private 'ouse plant.

"Altogether 'e's got a bad look-out afore 'm. Ware'ouse breakin' don't show much profit—the fences git all that. Besides, I'm thinkin' that if 'e goes on swillin' the rum like 'e's bin doin' fer the last few months, even ware'ouse jobs'll soon be too much fer Spike."

Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, July 8th. Postcards only, please. The first prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Miss A. Clark, 35 Palace Grove, Bromley, Kent, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

"Anything fresh this morning?" asked the gossip. "Only that paint you are leaning against," replied the bored man, with a yawn.

"Don't you hate to hear unpleasant things people say about you?" "No, I feel in luck that I don't have to know the unpleasant things they think about me."

Brown: "Do you suppose I'll ever make a good golf-player?" Todd (pityingly): "Never, old man. You think too much of your family, and your business."

"They say a carrier pigeon will go farther than any other bird," said the boarder, between bites. "Well, I'll have to try one," said the landlady. "I notice a fowl doesn't go far!"

"What two things," exclaimed the orator, "are helping mankind to get up in the world?" "The alarum-clock and the step-ladder," answered somebody in the rear of the hall.

Tailor: "We came, your lordship, to ask you to pay your bill. We cannot wait any longer because we have not been able to pay our own bills for cloth for three months." His lordship: "Well, I declare—you fellows incur debts and then you come to me for money to pay them. What impudence!"

Returned Trooper: "Clara, you were engaged to me, and yet I hear that while I was at the front you went out often with that old admirer of yours." Clara: "Oh, George, he was so thoughtful, and I was so anxious that he took me every night to the—er—War office—to see—er—if you were killed!"

"Oh, we had the loveliest arrangement at our bazaar last week! Every woman contributed to the missionary cause one pound, which she earned herself by hard work." "How did you get yours?" "From my husband." "I shouldn't call that earning it yourself by hard work." "You don't know my husband."

*A negro boy was a great favourite with his master, but whenever he committed a fault, his master gave him a note to carry to the overseer, directing that he should be whipped. The boy soon noticed that whenever he took the piece of paper he got punished. He spoke to his master about it. His master said: "Oh, the paper tells the overseer that you are idle and neglect your work." "Why, massa," said the boy, "I never see you work." "Not with my hands, certainly," said his master, "but I work with my head, which is much more difficult." The next time he was sent with a note to the overseer he threw it away. His master asked what the overseer said. "Nothing at all," said the boy, "I did not go to him; I worked with my head this time."

Men of the Time—Watchmakers.

Many people settle their debts like clockwork—tick, tick, tick.

The ability of the gas company to make both ends meet depends on the meter.

"This is two bad!" exclaimed the tram conductor when he received his second bad shilling.

"I see your husband is trying to read without glasses." "Yes, he will persist in making a spectacle of himself."

"Our yacht was beaten by a despicable trick." "Why, how?" "Woman in balloon sleeves stood on the deck of the other boat."

Possibly what makes it more annoying and painful is, whatever he does for man, the mosquito presents his bill before beginning work.

Cyclist: "Is this a safe hill, my man? Do cyclists meet accidents here?" Rustic: "Oh, no, sur; it's quite safe—they all walk down it."

"'Ere, capting, won't yer give us a copper? I'm that 'ungry——" "Why don't you work?" "Well, cos that 'u'd only make me more 'ungry."

Dick Singleton: "Does your wife object to your going to the club of an evening?" Benny Dictus: "No, but she objects to my coming home from it in the morning."

Miss Anteek: "He is the most insulting man I ever met." The Brother: "Did he ask you how old you were?" Miss Anteek: "No; he asked me how old I said I was."

"What makes you look so worn and dreary,
As if you were quite tired of life?"
"Alas!" he sighed, in accents dreary,
"I've just been shopping with my wife."

Jones has come into Brown's and is looking about the walls. Suddenly he pauses before a sketch. "I say, Harry," he says, "where did you get that?" "Why, I got it out of my head." "Well, it's lucky for your head that you got it out."

Flossie is six years old. "Mamma," she called one day, "if I get married will I have to have a husband like papa?" "Yes," replied the mother with an amused smile. "And if I don't get married will I have to be an old maid like Aunt Kate?" "Yes." "Mamma"—after a pause—"its a tough world for us women, isn't it?"

A professor in a medical college called the attention of his class to a man who had applied for medical advice. "Now, gentlemen," said the professor, "will you be kind enough to look at this patient closely, and see if you can tell what is the matter with him? Look at his eyes, the shape of his head, the expression of his features. You detect nothing. I do not wonder at it, for, gentlemen, let me assure you that it requires many years of actual experience to detect at a glance the malady of the patient. I am no more acquainted with this man than you are, yet as soon as I looked at him, I saw that he was a deaf mute." The students indulged in exclamations of admiration. As soon as these had subsided, the supposed deaf mute opened his mouth and spoke: "I say, gov'nor, I hope you will excuse me, but it's my brother who is deaf and dumb. He is outside waiting to know if he shall come in. Shall I fetch him?"

CALL OR WRITE.

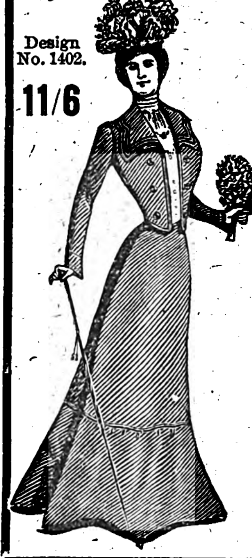
Allen Foster & Co

THE LONDON MANUFACTURERS

CALL OR WRITE.

Design No. 1402.

11/6



BUY DIRECT BY PARCEL POST FROM THE LEADING FIRM OF LONDON MANUFACTURERS.

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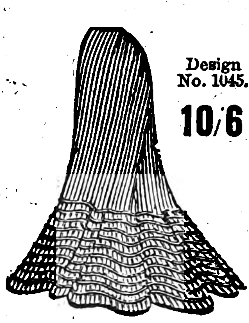
New Corded Flounce Skirt.—The Fashionable Costume Skirt of the Season. Lined throughout with linenette. The flounce is 16in. deep and trimmed round with rows of the new cording now so fashionable. Made in the **Specialite Serge** and also in the **Venetian Cloth.** Colours: Black, Navy, Grey, Purple, Green, Drab, Fawn, Brown, Royal, Cardinal, etc. Price **10/6.** Sent carriage paid, 5d. extra. This Skirt can be had in good **Alpaca** same price. Colours: Black, Grey, and Fawn.

DESIGN No. 1402.

☛ 11/6.

The New Eton Costume.—A smart and fashionable Costume for Summer and Seaside wear. Made in the **Specialite Serge** and **Venetian Cloth.** Colours: Black, Navy, Grey, Fawn, Brown, Royal, Cardinal, Green, etc. (patterns post free). The smartly-cut coat has a pretty shaped collar, which is trimmed with narrow braid. Costume complete **11/6.** Carriage, 6d. extra. The Skirt by itself, **6/6**; carriage, 5d. This Costume can be had in good **Alpaca** (lined throughout) for **21/-** Great Value.



Design No. 1045.

10/6

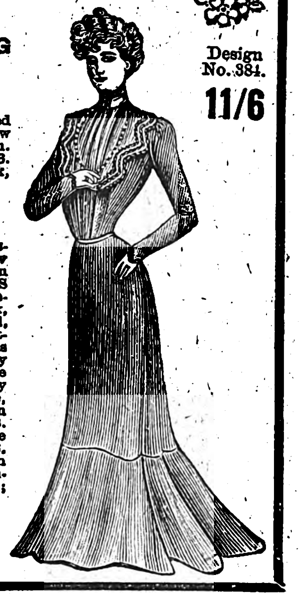
DESIGN No. 384.

11/6. ☛

A Fashionable Costume with the New Flounce Skirt. Made in ALLEN FOSTER & CO.'S **Specialite Serge** or **Venetian Cloth.** Colours: Black, Navy, Fawn, Grey, Royal, Brown, Red, and Green (patterns free). The bodice is tight-fitting, and tastefully trimmed with braid. The Skirt is well and carefully made, and has a 16-in. flounce, which is lined linenette. An excellent Costume for **11 6.** Carriage paid, 6d. extra. The skirt by itself will be **6/6.** Carriage, 5d. This Costume in bright **Alpaca** (lined throughout) will be **21/-** Colours; Black, Grey, Blue, or Fawn.

Design No. 384.

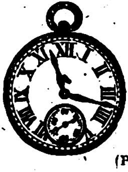
11/6



ALLEN FOSTER & CO., The London Manufacturers,

47 GOLDEN LANE, BARBICAN, LONDON, E.C.

2/9 CHALLENGE TO THE WORLD—OUR WARRANTED TIMEKEEPER, 2/9



With a guarantee to keep correct time for three years, will be sent to any address on receipt of P.O. or stamps value 2/9, and three stamps extra for postage. To every purchaser during this month we give with it ABSOLUTELY FREE a strong Mexican SILVER CHAIN. All we ask of you is to show them to your friends, as by doing so you advertise our business.

GENEVA WATCH IMPORTERS,
148 Old Street, London, E.C.

(Please mention paper.)

NOSE

A. LEES RAY, South Castle Street, Liverpool, is a Specialist on Ugly and Red Noses. Send stamp for particulars of his Patent Scientific Nose Improver. Medically-approved Red Nose Cure, 3/9. Pamphlet, "Cause and Prevention," 1/-. Machines for Prominent Ears. Blackhead Cure 1 9.

DRUNKENNESS

CURED. This can be done with or without patient's knowledge. Send me a stamp and I will tell you how. (Send no money.) Address, in confidence, Mrs. C. H. (Room 8), 195 Oxford Street, London, W.

The only Efficacious Substitute for Cod Liver Oil.

Devonshire Cream

(Really Genuine).

In patent air-tight tins. ½lb., 1/4; 1lb., 2/4; 2lb., 4/-: including tin & postage.

MRS. CONYERS,
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A LITTLE GIRL'S PRETTY FROCK

can be made by any lady who follows carefully the Paper Pattern and Instructions

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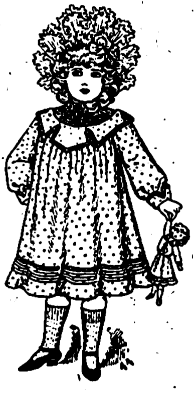

Mr. GEO. R. SIMS'

HAIR RENEWER

Called by him **"TATCHO"**

(Romany: "Genuine," "Good," "True.")

And why, pray, is the successful poet, playwright, and journalist an eminent authority on hair restorer? Eager for an explanation a *Daily Mail* representative sought out Mr. Sims. . . .

Now Mr. G. R. Sims, as many people know, is one of the busiest men in the kingdom, but hastily affixing his signature to a letter, he looked up and extended a characteristically cordial welcome. Then he said, "I will explain. I found that I was rapidly going bald. Not seriously, you understand, but the thinning out was sufficiently marked to set me thinking out a remedy. I went to two specialists, both of whom cheerfully assured me that I should be absolutely bald in two years.

Then I discovered the preparation which is now placed upon the market. I found that I had hit upon a remedy capable of working wonders. Look at my hair now, isn't that convincing evidence of the value of my preparation?

"Ladies confirm my good opinion of it as a dressing for daily use. Mrs. Brown-Potter, whose beautiful hair is the admiration of the entire lady world, writes that she uses nothing but 'Tatcho.' There is nothing to prevent every woman from making her hair silken in texture and bountiful in volume, for she can obtain a bottle of 'Tatcho' now in every town or even village."

In order that the public may be able to test the superlative value of Mr. George R. Sims discovery, the Company is issuing large 4/6 size test bottles post free for **1/10,** under plain cover, one of which may be had on application. Please cut off the corner of this advertisement where marked and send with name and address, legibly written to the—

GEO. R. SIMS CO.,
81c Great Queen Street,
LONDON, W.C.

Mr. Geo. R SIMS'
HAIR RENEWER
4/6 Large Bottle **1/10**
POST FREE.
COUPON S.S, July 6, 1901.

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

A CHORUS of hearty approval has followed the reading of the opening chapters of "The Golden Dwarf." From various parts of the kingdom complimentary letters have come, showing the most cordial appreciation of Mr. Norman Silver's great story.

Now, on this matter of appreciation, I want to have a little candid talk with you. As you can readily understand, the weekly supply of thirty-two pages of high-class fiction entails a heavy expense on the editorial exchequer. I am not going to grumble at that. My policy has ever been, *give the readers the best, cost what it may.*

In these fiercely competitive days quality must inevitably tell, and when you compare *Short Stories* with the trash that many papers contain you will readily agree that we have quality as well as quantity.

I want you to help us to recoup ourselves for the very heavy outlay which this production entails. Now, don't pull out your cheque books. I am not starting a subscription list —all you have to spare in that way you can send to the FRESH AIR FUND.

What I want you to do is to each get me a new reader. You can do this easily. All you need do is to hand to a friend the number containing the opening chapters of the new serial, with a hint to him to read it. The story itself will do the rest. If you don't care to *hand* anybody your copy, post it, or leave it in a train or omnibus. But do do something.

* * *

DON'T read the foregoing and then forget all about it. Just give a thought to your poor editor, whose whole life is spent in trying to please you, and really make an attempt to get him a new reader.

N.B.—In order not to place limitations on your energies, it may be wise to state that you may get *two, three*, or more new readers if you think fit.

* * *

"WEIGHTY."—A French doctor has pointed out that several fallacies are common with regard to the weight of the human body. The man who congratulates himself on his gain of several pounds in weight over a given period may have no cause for rejoicing, for he may be under a delusion. Very few people, says this French investigator, have any correct idea of their own weight. As a rule, the correctness of his scale may be taken into account, the time which has elapsed since eating, etc.

As a matter of fact, the weight of the body is continuously changing, owing to innumerable influences. On a warm day, after breakfast, a man will lose more than a third of a pound per hour. Seventy per cent. of the body consists of water, and thus its weight must vary with the transpiration of moisture.

Therefore, the inferences drawn from the loss or gain of a pound or two may be mistrusted. Fluctuations of a few ounces per day are a sign that the body is in a healthy state.

* * *

THE following is declared to be the work of a pupil in an English elementary school:

"Seamen are what we call sailors, and captains, and training-ship boys. The sailors you see in the streets are nice little fat men, with red and brown faces. They ware boys' coats and hats, and their trousers are too tite for them up above and too wide for them down below. It makes them feel very riled. Sailors don't ware colars, becose their necks are so thick; and they always have their boots blacked for fear the captain might see them round a corner. They don't carry their best close in boxes, but they ty them up in big red and blue handkerchiefs, just like Christmas puddens.

"Sailors are very fond of their mothers and sisters, and you neerly always see them taking them out to walk. The reason why sailors like to get drunk is becose it makes them roll about like as if they were on the ocheant."

* * *

"RING-MASTER."—It is said that the origin of the modern circus dates back to about 1770. At that time a discharged English soldier, named Philip Astley, improvised a ring at Lambeth, London, and gave them exhibitions of horsemanship. His success was very great, and soon afterwards he built a rude circus near Westminster Bridge. There was no roof over the original structure, except that part occupied by the spectators; the ring was in the open air. His wife took part in the performance, being the first woman to enter the arena. This venture was so successful that Astley was able, in 1780, to put up a large and handsome amphitheatre. It was burned down three times, each time being immediately rebuilt.

* * *

"MABEL" sends me a question which on arriving at this office was eagerly discussed by all the younger members of the staff.

"Why is kissing so pleasant?" she asks.

Well, my chief assistant editor, who is of a scientific turn of mind and a great osculatory expert says that it "is because the teeth and lips are full of nerves, and when the lips of persons meet an electric current is generated."

The Joke Editor confirms this view and remarks:

"Yes, and it is so cheap. You don't have to have a dynamo machine nor a battery in the house, nor a call box, nor a button to touch to ring up the central office, and there is no patent on it, and the poorest person in the world can enjoy the electric current as well as the millionaire, and it never gets out of order. If Edison had invented kissing it would cost £20 a year, like the telephone, and then extra kissing would be charged up extra, and if you didn't pay for it they would take out your kissaphone and disconnect you from the central office."

As for my own opinion, being a poor, lone bachelor, I can venture none.

SHORT STORIES
ADVERTISEMENT RATES.

Single column, per inch, per insertion	£0	10	0
Double " " "	1	0	0
Full page inside, facing page of matter, either white paper or 2nd or 3rd page of cover, or back page, per insertion	10	0	0
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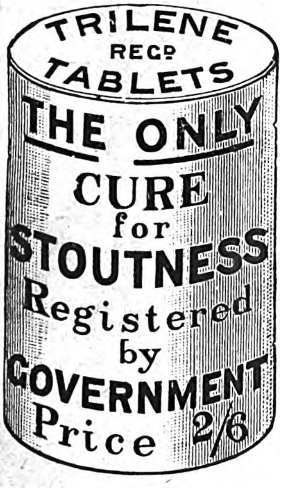
ALL FAT PEOPLE

Can be CURED by taking

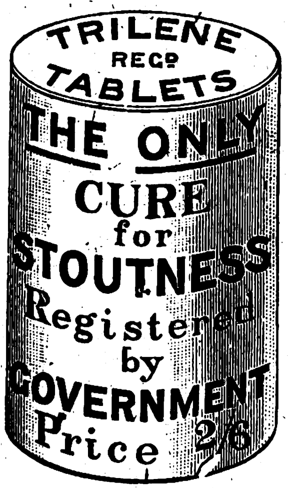
TRILENE TABLETS Regd.



For a few weeks. They will safely REDUCE WEIGHT and CURE CORPULENCY PERMANENTLY, whether Abdominal or General. They are small, agreeable, harmless, sent privately, and never fail to Improve both HEALTH and FIGURE without change of Diet.

An English Countess writes: "Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."

Send 2s. 6d. to THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 Finsbury Pavement, London, E.C.



SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

Mrs. DARNLEV SMITH, Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, writes: "Trilene Tablets have reduced my weight very much. I am so much lighter in every way, and better in health."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.

"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 21lb. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me.

"Yours sincerely, M. A. HEYWOOD."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mr. WALKER, 236 London Road, Hazelgrove, Stockport, says: "I have used one box and am 14lb. lighter. Send another soon as possible."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. E. ALEXANDER, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They have reduced me quite 2 stone, and I am now quite cured."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Mrs. TAYLOR-ROBINSON, of Tweed Green House, Whalley Range, Manchester, says: "I feel so much lighter and better since taking your Tablets, and am so much thinner that I hardly recognise myself."

Miss A. LONG, of 9 South Parade, Waterford, writes: "Your Tablets have reduced me 14lb."

Miss A. DAWSON, 62 Orchard Street, Weston-super-Mare, says: "Glad to say the Tablets have sufficiently reduced me. I shall always recommend them."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

Mrs. DREW, of 1 Bellevue Gardens, The Nursery, Devizes, writes: "I took Tablets some years ago; they soon reduced me and I have not got stout since. Send me a box for my mother."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

"AN OUNCE OF FACT IS WORTH A SHIPLOAD OF ARGUMENT,"

and it is an acknowledged,
well-proven fact that **BEECHAM'S PILLS**
are an absolutely
unrivalled remedy for

Bilious Attacks, Nervous Disorders, Liver Complaints, Indigestion, and many Kindred Ailments.

Therefore
Don't be misled by the "shiploads"
of specious "argument" advanced by
those interested in the sale of
untried preparations of
mushroom growth. Remember

BEECHAM'S PILLS

have been tried and trusted over
50 years. The annual sale exceeds
Six Million Boxes, and in spite of
all competition they become more
popular every day, and this is
not due to "Argument" and persuasion,
but to the fact that

THEY RECOMMEND THEMSELVES.

Where are YOU off to?

If you are in doubt, procure copies of **BEECHAM'S PHOTO-FOLIO,** and they will help you to decide both where to go and what to see when you get there. The series has been published in book form, arranged in local combination, each book containing **24** Photographic Reproductions of well-selected views of the most interesting objects and places of historical and architectural interest, and the choicest bits of scenery and beauty in each district. The series consists of nearly **3,000** views, which are beautifully reproduced on specially-prepared English-made art paper. One hundred and twenty volumes now on sale. **PRICE ONE PENNY** Each Book.

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The Proprietor of BEECHAM'S PILLS, St. Helens, Lancashire.

No. 654)　For Week Ending July 13th, 1901.　(One Penny.

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A WEEKLY MAGAZINE *for* HOME *and* TRAIN

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SAFE
SPEEDY

KAPUTINE

The Best & Safest Remedy for

HEADACHE.

NURSE HILL, of the London Association of Nurses, writes:

"I have seen Kaputine administered to many patients, and can truly say it is a remedy which should have a place in every household."

All Leading Chemists sell KAPUTINE, 1/-. Samples One Penny.

If your Chemist has not KAPUTINE send his name and address to

KAPUTINE, HUDDERSFIELD,

and we will send you a SHILLING PACKET FREE.

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GOOD! IT'S MASON'S EXTRACT OF HERBS!

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This is what you get with

MASON'S EXTRACT OF HERBS

Makes the most delicious and wholesome HERB BEER

There is no PURER
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and
There is no CHEAPER

Agents Wanted Everywhere.

Makes MORE BEER and BETTER BEER than any other Extract.

Sold everywhere. Bottles, Post Free, 9 Stamps.

NEWBALL & MASON, Nottingham.

"WORTH A GUINEA A BOX."

BEECHAM'S PILLS

FOR ALL

BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS,
Sick Headache, Constipation, Wind and Pains in Stomach, Impaired Digestion, Disordered Liver, and Female Ailments.

SALE OVER SIX MILLION BOXES YEARLY.

In Boxes, 1s. 1½d. and 2s. 9d. each, with full directions.

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THOMAS BEECHAM, St. Helens, Lancashire.

Sold by all Druggists and Patent Medicine Dealers everywhere.

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Anybody can learn to exert a magic influence over others. You can become proficient in curing diseases and bad habits of every nature. The acquirement of these powers brings happiness and health; develops will power; gratifies ambitions; gives one the key to personal and social success, and suggests many opportunities to make money.

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which are simple to handle, and Dye **BLACK or ANY COLOUR** Fast, Permanent, and Beautiful.

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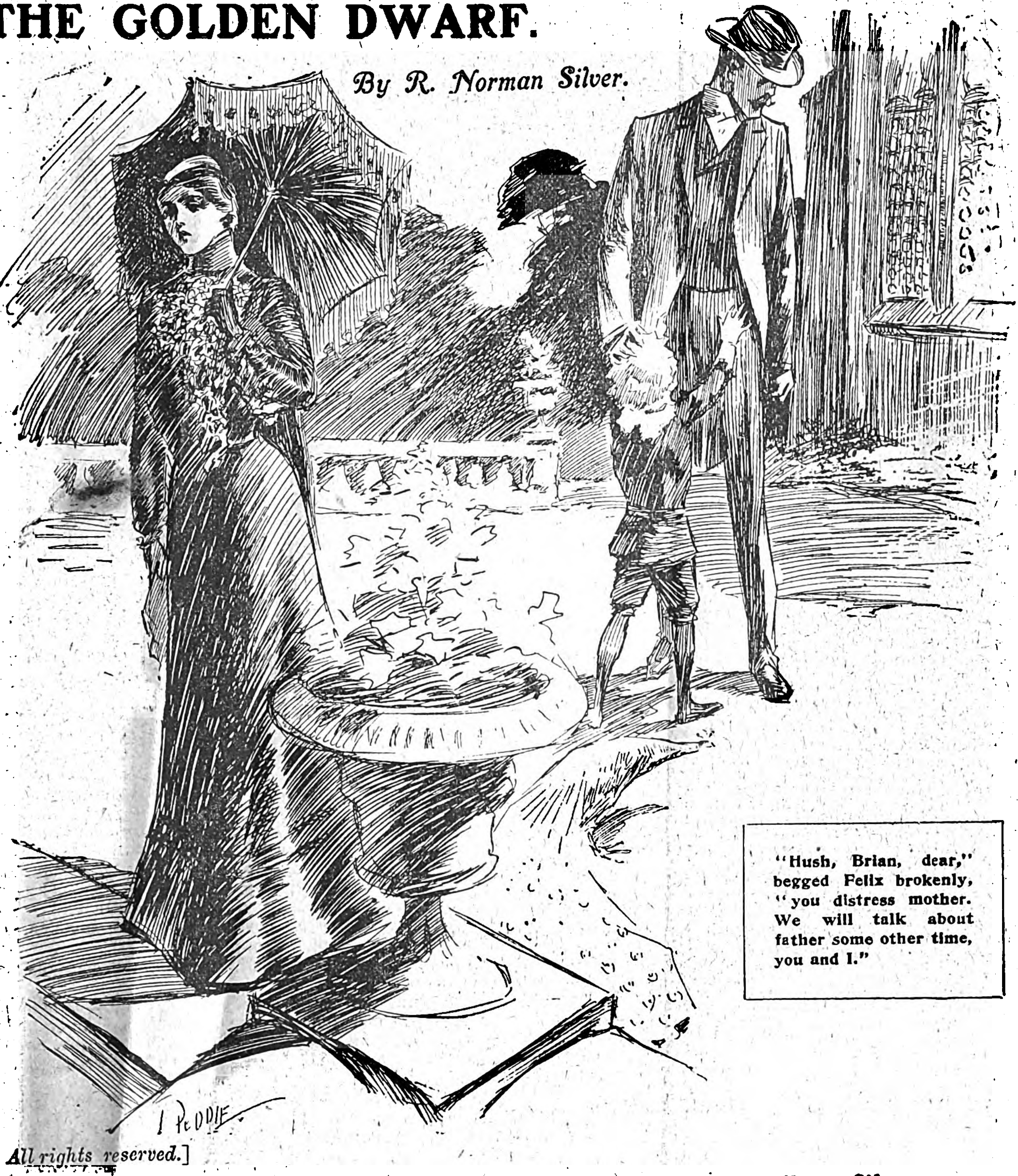
Send for Free Booklet, "THE PERFECTION OF HOME DYEING," to the Maypole Co., Ltd., 17 Cumming Street, London, N.

SHORT STORIES

No. 654.] For the Week Ending July 13th, 1901. [One Penny.

THE GOLDEN DWARF.

By R. Norman Silver.



"Hush, Brian, dear," begged Felix brokenly, "you distress mother. We will talk about father some other time, you and I."

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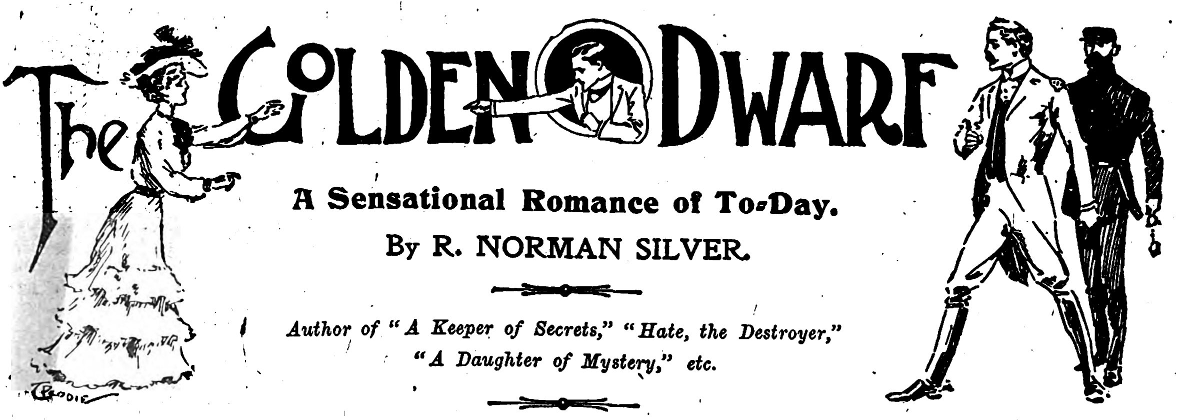
Persuade your best friend to read "The Golden Dwarf."



The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST INSTALMENT OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"It is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Otto Hare would like to suggest that he did—Esther's mercenary mother accepts his hints. She wants the Golden Dwarf for a son-in-law.

Felix is secretly loved by Judith Garland, a striking brunette, Lady Dering's companion. She has a wastrel brother, Neal, who is unaccountably in Wyresdale, and who is demanding money. This, by an affectation of sisterly solicitude, Judith obtains, as a cheque, from Felix Dering. The cheque is payable to bearer.

Otto Hare has an ally, a strange German physician, Joseph Kraft, who lives with him at Wyresdale Park, the Golden Dwarf's residence. He is an object of much curiosity to Archibald Geddes, a clever assistant at the Wyresdale Pharmacy, which is kept by a drunken old chemist, Caleb Forester.

Caleb has a charming daughter, Connie, whom Geddes is making bashful love to. She is Esther's friend, and quarrels with Geddes for crediting the rumour that Felix killed his uncle.

A one-armed sailor has suddenly appeared in Wyresdale. At the chemist's shop he encounters Kraft, whom he follows, and on the strength of some past episode attempts to blackmail. Kraft repulses him, but is dexterously tracked by the sailor to a curious fort-like structure in Wyresdale Park.

While spying on this the sailor is attacked by a huge dog, which he stabs. He is seen by Kraft and the Golden Dwarf.

Esther tells Felix of her mother's plan to marry her to Otto Hare. They swear constancy in an old and picturesque oath. Felix returns to Dering House, to be asked by the child Brian if it is true Felix has taken his father away.

Judith Garland shows Felix several links of a chain he has been in the habit of wearing. They are bloodstained. She adds that they were found near the cross roads, where Sir Christopher's body was discovered, and that, moreover, Felix was seen near the place at ten o'clock on the night when he was supposed to be in Duchester. She assures him she will keep his secret.

Felix in vain protests his innocence. At this moment an inspector of the local police is announced.

Felix Dering staggers—is he dreaming, the prey of some hideous nightmare?

A caution sounds in his ears; Judith Garland is speaking to him. "Don't look like that," she whispers, "pull yourself together."

Notwithstanding their alarm, the police-officer—one Inspector Brasher—has merely called to arrest, on suspicion of being concerned in Sir Christopher's death, a certain Edward Spencer, a young Irish groom whom the baronet, shortly before his death, had given notice to leave. Protesting his innocence, Spencer is taken away. While on the route to the little country police-station, he was seen by Foley, with whom Dr. Kraft has been holding a mysterious consultation. Almost immediately afterwards, Foley, by chance, makes the acquaintance of Neal Garland. "Here, my hearty," asks the sailor in his maritime lingo, "what was it you picked up yonder and gave to the taut little craft you had with you?" He is referring to the meeting of Judith and Neal at the stile.

The scene changes. During a walk in the meadows on a pleasant Sabbath morning, Felix tells Esther that he was indeed in Wyresdale that fatal evening, and explains his return. A new sensation interrupts their conversation, Felix is called to the small local police-station. It has a single cell, and in this Ted Spencer had been confined over an adjourned inquest. This cell is now empty, Spencer has vanished. The barred window has been broken through—from the outside!

CHAPTER VII.

"You'll Have to Go Shares."

"I DON'T know you from Adam, my man, and as I'm in a hurry I'll thank you to stand aside and let me pass."

Nicholas Foley placed his one athletic palm on the chest of the fellow who, after crawling backwards through the gnarled stems of the hawthorn hedge, had just risen to an upright position.

"Easy, messmate," he retorted; "you mightn't have the pleasure of my acquaintance and yet be no stranger to me. Let me prove it to you. You never saw me before in your life, but when you showed a glim at the stile last night, I was within hail; ay, and closer."

Neal Garland's dark features assumed a menacing expression and the stiff black hairs upon his upper lip bristled, as if they had been the feelers of some angry beast. He brushed the withered grass-blades from his garments and tried to sneer. The sailor went on, still remaining between his prisoner and the road.

"Consekently," he said, "I see you overhaul a bit of paper, give you by a smart little piece you called Judith, and which you allowed was a pay-note, signed by Felix Dering, and worth twenty quid to bearer."

The listener clenched a couple of soiled fists.

"Out of my path, you meddling fool," he stormed, and made a dive to escape his tormentor.

Nicholas Foley headed off the manœuvre and resumed his statement.

"Chucking down the match you'd struck," proceeded the sailor; "you was going to weigh anchor, but Judy hadn't finished with you. Says she, 'Neal Garland, spin me the yarn of Sir Christopher Dering's death,' or words to sich an effect."

Neal gathered himself together at this startling intimation, and without warning, sprang on Nicholas Foley. His lean fingers shot out towards the loose pocket, on the front

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of the sailor's hip, where was deposited a certain buckhorn hafted clasp-knife. The dagger-like handle had been noted by Neal Garland's comprehensive glance.

Nicholas bent and ducked through his antagonist's legs; their owner was hurled to the ground minus his projected booty. Snatching out the weapon thus retained, the sailor opened it, and mounted guard over his captive.

"Afore you could tip her an answer," pursued Foley, "the grass, which is more hay than grass in these hedgerows, blazed up—fired by your smouldering match—and you had to stamp it out. Your foot grinded on summat, you collared the thing and lighted another fusee to take stock of it. 'That's what he was searching for!' cried you, and Judy says 'Who?' and you told her 'A tall young chap, with a brown face and riding-boots and pretty moustaches.'"

Neal laid idly upon the parched turf, a sardonic smile stealing over his sallow countenance.

"Then the fusee popped out," continued Nicholas, "and I seen no more, and only heard a word off and on. Once it was, from you, 'Past the Cross—the same, I'll swear—the night of the murder,' and once, from her, 'Leave all to me; Felix Dering shall pay both of us our price.'"

The ferocious mirth betrayed by Neal Garland's twitching mouth increased; his amusement became unmistakable.

"Now," added the sailor, "I'm in want of a few yellowboys myself, and if so be as silence is golden, Nick Foley's is worth as much as anyone else's. Do I stand in, messmate, or do I go to the perlice?"

Neal sat up, motioning away the keen blade which still menaced him.

"You're a wonder, my friend," he said; "under the circumstances I have no alternative but to explain. The trifle I annexed at the stile was a section of a watch-chain, the links of which were smeared with blood. That section my sister Judith recognised as similar in pattern to a guard usually worn by Felix Dering. The importance of those blood-stained links consists in the fact that Sir Christopher Dering's dead body was found a few yards from the spot. I suppose you'll have to go shares in whatever hold we may obtain over Master Felix. But for the life of me I can't tell you what your share is worth. Felix Dering has no money to speak of, though my sister Judith has a plan which may remedy that drawback. You must wait for your investment to mature, Mr. Foley."

Nicholas closed his knife, and slid it into the pocket on the front of his hip.

"Maybe," answered the sailor, "and maybe not. I can't decide till I've took soundings on my own account. Do you keep these waters, my hearty, or have you put in to refit?"

"Oh, I'm off south in a day or two," said Neal, rising. "I merely came to Derbyshire to visit my sister."

The grim and enigmatic laughter had passed from his face, which showed traces of a vicious ill-temper at this new complication in his affairs.

Nicholas Foley stepped clear of the unkempt figure; he was aware that, with his single arm, it was necessary to be on his guard against a possible further assault.

"So Judy hangs out in Wyresdale," reflected Nicholas. "I guess I'll need to enjoy the pleasure of her acquaintance. What is she—a barmaid?"

Neal winced. His own shabby costume had warranted the inference that Judith Garland's station could not but be humble.

"She is companion to Lady Dering," he said sharply.

The sailor slapped his thigh.

"Shiver my timbers!" he ejaculated, "that is good! So Judy stays at Dering House, and makes her market out of Mr. Felix. The clever little hussy! Jehoshophat! I remember Mr. Felix when he was a lad and supposed to be the heir—before the first Lady D. died. She had no babbies, and Mr. Felix was the Squire's eldest nephew. And now he's reckoned to be his uncle's murderer! Dear! dear! It's a wicked world!"

Nicholas wrinkled his mahogany cheeks into something that purported to be a shocked expression, yet which only succeeded in being a malicious and hypocritical one.

"Where were you bound as I fell over you?" he demanded a characteristic shrewdness displacing his pretence of melancholy.

"I was retiring for the night," confessed Neal Garland, and pointed towards the end of the cramped thoroughfare; "my couch of ferns in Wyresdale Park is peaceful and salubrious, which excellences cannot be claimed for my Pimlico pallet. Mr. Foley, you have won this evening's rubber. Whether it will repay you for your trouble is a problem the future alone can solve; meantime, I am your obedient servant."

And casting at the sailor a glance in which vindictiveness and mockery were blended, he ran up the road and disappeared round a slight curve.

Nicholas Foley burst into a peal of odd merriment. As he retraced the route to his cottage he gazed thoughtfully into the roseate West, and the cool breezes of the early evening fanned his withered cheek.

"Same old sun," he muttered to himself, "same old earth, same old human nature! Nicholas, you're in for a bit of luck."

As he uttered the words he paused at the rustic gate of his small garden.

Upon the threshold of the dilapidated house beyond, was a stooping, undersized figure, with silvery locks beneath a square crowned black hat.

"By the great horn spoon," exclaimed Nicholas; "if it isn't Caleb Forester!"

He hurried up the rubble walk and clapped the chemist on the shoulder.

"What cheer, matey," he cried; "to think of you boarding me permiscuous like this! I asked them at the shop to report my call 'tother morning, but I reckoned on having to fire a shot across your bows myself. Come into the shanty and we'll have a glass of grog."

He turned the latch of the cottage door, kicked at it, and it swung wide.

Caleb Forester advanced, peering nervously about him. There were a few embers in the high grate, a table in the middle of the principal room bore a loaf of bread, a slab of cheese, a pitcher, a mug, and a whiskey-bottle, half full. On a delf platter was the bare spine of a herring.

The sailor placed a wooden chair for his guest, sought out an extra mug, tipped into the two a liberal quantity of the yellow spirit, qualified his own by a dash from the pitcher, and thrust the second vessel to Caleb. The chemist diluted its contents and gulped them greedily.

Nicholas watched him.

"Dry as ever, Caleb?" he said.

The visitor nodded and his host tapped the bottle.

"Plenty more!" he announced.

But the chemist drained his mug and turned it upside down.

"My brain's not as thick as yours," he snarled, depositing his hat on the table; "you've a skull of brass and a stomach of leather, and always had, be hanged to you!"

Nicholas replenished his drinking-vessel, he had emptied it at a draught.

"Why are you here?" he pursued, filling a briar pipe with a magnificent Virginian leaf tobacco which had palpably not been bought in Wyresdale; "you was never proud enough of our relationship to act on it uninvited."

Caleb coughed and cracked his pallid fingers—his frail, restless limbs afforded a peculiar contrast to the burly, indolent frame of the sailor.

"I was told about your visiting at the shop," he faltered; "but I was quite prepared for that—knowing that you were in the village. I—I saw you at the cross-roads, drunk, last Wednesday night"

Nicholas sprang to his feet, his brows knit, his skin purple, his discoloured teeth protruding.

"The night of the murder!" he hissed; "Caleb, you lubber, do you want me gaoled, your own brother-in-law?"

The chemist shrank from the fierce lineaments which glared at him.

"It—it didn't occur to me to suspect you!" he stammered, "but if I had done, I should have dismissed the idea on finding you had lost an arm—it was too dark to notice the fact on Wednesday. But Sir Christopher was not stunned and suffocated, my dear Nicholas, by a man with one arm—the fact is surely obvious."

At this consoling admission the sailor, with an effort, regained his equanimity.

"Least said, soonest mended," he growled, "where no offence was meant, none should be taken. But you haven't told me yet why you looked me up."

Caleb Forester leaned over the table.

"Did—did you see anything particular at the cross-roads that night?" he murmured.

Nicholas affected to ponder.

"N—no," said the sailor, "I was too drunk to see, Caleb, even you, so I cou'dn't swear to your being there, if I was put in the box, saving to you telling me yourself."

The chemist started and abandoned his seat.

"You're joking, Nicholas," he answered, "but I don't care for such fun, it's too ghastly. However, if you didn't see anyone, you didn't. I'll say good-evening to you now, Nicholas, I promised to be back at the shop in half-an-hour."

Nicholas Foley caught his brother-in-law by a button-hole

"What did you think I might have seen?" he inquired.

"Oh, something connected with the murder, of course," said Caleb nervously, "I've a notion to be a sort of amateur detective, Nicholas. I wondered if you could help me to a clue. You've disappointed me, really. Good evening."

He donned his square-crowned hat and evaded the sailor's attempts to detain him. Hastening through the low exit, he waved a rather hysterical farewell and departed.

The sailor compounded, with inexpressionable unction, a brimming mug of whisky-and-water and consumed it in silence. Then he smote his thigh, as if profoundly surprised and amused, and fixing his own slouched felt on his cropped head, marched off. He did not trouble to secure the latch, but left the door ajar.

The sunset sky was fading into a deep indigo as he went up the grassy lane towards the Cross. He passed the gravelled island in whose midst was reared that ancient land-mark, and strode on until he reached a drooping bough which over-hung the brick wall of Wyresdale Park, the house of the rich, if diminutive, person known, for miles about, as the Golden Dwarf.

Scanning the deserted prospect for possible spectators, Nicholas satisfied himself of his comparative privacy. This precaution finished, he grasped the branch with his knotted palm, and, exerting a tremendous strength, lifted himself elbow-high. The feat, though inelegant, enabled him to fling a leg over the rocking support. As agile as a monkey, he ran along the bough and dropped into the park.

Not far away, was the singular edifice on which he had been spying when the Golden Dwarf's favourite mastiff came by so unexpected a death at Nicholas Foley's hands. The shadows were veiling its stout walls and curious, round-topped tower. Screened by the uncertain light, the sailor darted to the base of the latter, and peered about its massive entrance.

Suddenly a voice arrested him, a sonorous, meditative voice, that carolled a rumbling song and drew nearer and nearer through the scented August night. Nicholas could distinguish the words—they were rolled out in a good English, a guttural German ring to them.

"It was upon a Monday,
Upon a Monday free,
That Mynheer Jacob van Artevelde,
Unto his men said he:"

"Dutchy!" muttered the sailor, and dodged into a sheltered corner some distance from the door. He was right; Dr. Joseph Kraft, in evening dress, a cigar in his fingers and the first rays of the moon glimmering on the lenses of his spectacles, stepped over the dewy turf and halted at the mysterious entrance. Unlocking it with a bright steel key, he vanished into the tower.

Nicholas shook his fist at the nail-studded portal. "Curse you!" he grumbled; "if only I could get inside I might learn some more of Dutchy's secrets. It's a soft job for a quiet man, taking money to hold your tongue. Wonder what this affair of Mr. Dering's 'll pan out like." A chuckle broke from his tanned throat. "Murder's a business that weighs heavy on the mind," he growled, "and the ill-convenience must be charged for."

An echoing bay interrupted him—it was replied to by another and another. The great dogs that evening let loose in Wyresdale Park had scented a stranger.

Nicholas Foley blasphemed. But he doubled back, nevertheless, from the ominous sounds, and was soon scaling the brick wall that shut in the Golden Dwarf's abode.

CHAPTER VIII.

"SHE DOES NOT SUSPECT ME—YET!"

"BUT why should he want to escape if he were not guilty?"

The question was propounded by Felix Dering. He stood within the strong-room at the Wyresdale police-station, and contemplated thoughtfully the small, high window through which—helped by some unknown friend—Ted Spencer, the young Irish groom accused of Sir Christopher's murder, had made his exit.

Archibald Geddes traced an invisible ring on the concrete floor with a neatly-polished shoe.

"Perhaps the one that helped him to get off could throw light on the point," retorted the Scotchman. "Spencer said at the commencement of the inquest yesterday that he saw a fellow leading a horse with a rider on it that looked very like as if he might be Sir Christopher, ill or wounded. Don't you think, Mr. Dering, if Spencer spoke the truth, it would be good policy for him to be spirited out of the way, lest he should identify, by any chance, the person he saw?"

Felix considered the suggestion. "It's a very reasonable view," he admitted, "and allows us to believe Spencer innocent—I cannot bring myself to look upon him as the criminal. Yet, in the event which you describe, it is unfortunate for him that he consented to fly when the road was freed. It will damage him at the adjourned inquest; the verdict will infallibly be murder, and against him."

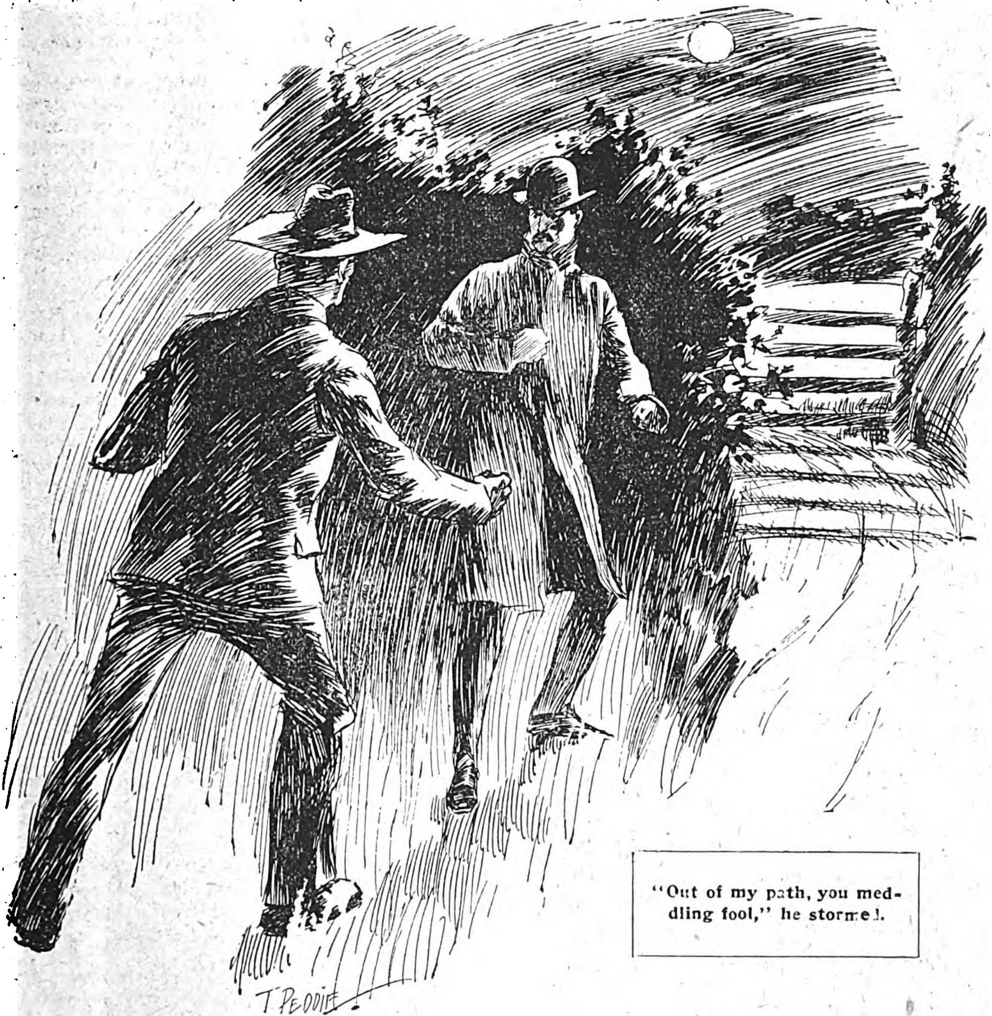
"What if that were foreseen, too," queried Geddes, "by the poor lad's pretended rescuer?"

Felix shook his head. "Now you are growing fanciful," he demurred; "let us have a glimpse at the outside of the window. The bars appear to have been removed in a most scientific fashion."

The chemist's assistant studied his companion as they passed into the general office of the little police dep't, and threaded its short entries to the rear. Unconscious of the close and singular analysis with which Archibald Geddes was favouring him, Felix penetrated a clump of bushes that backed upon the window of the strong-room.

Here, at the foot of the wall, were laid a heap of rusty iron bars. They had been displaced by some skilful operator from the casement above, their limed extremities showing where they had been set in the brickwork. A bend in each testified to the strength of the hand that had drawn them out of their sockets. The glass and its wooden frame had been levered away and deposited among the shrubs.

"This is no amateur performance, Geddes," exclaimed Felix Dering; "although these rods were only intended to confine an occasional drunkard or a petty thief, yet they are moderately stout. It is improbable that Spencer, unaided, could have wrenched them clear and dropped that frame down. But it might have fallen on the soil with a minimum of noise; what makes you so confident of his having had an ally?"



"Out of my path, you meddling fool," he stormed.

"The bars were on the outside of the window, Brasher says," replied the Scotchman, "and mark this, sir"—he indicated a couple of deep impressions in the earth under the ruined casement—"they're the traces of a ladder—the fellow was bold enough to bring or borrow it."

"Upon my word, Geddes," cried Felix, "you have a quick observation!"

"Brasher is the author of the discovery and the inference," answered Archibald Geddes; "he is fit to shoot himself now that the mischief is done. Spencer should have been sent to Duchester gaol over the week-end. But the Inspector kept him in Wyresdale for the sake of reflecting importance upon the local authorities. Brasher's weakness is vanity, otherwise he is quite a smart constable, as county police go—he even noticed that Spencer's rescuer must have had his boots muffled, to avoid leaving footprints in the recently levelled soil."

"Heavens!" cried Felix Dering; "it has been quite an organised affair, then."

"So much the worse for Brasher," said the chemist's assistant, with a patronising air; "he and I are on friendly terms enough, which accounts for my unofficial presence. But the more fuss there is made about the escape the hotter the Inspector will catch it. He will devote the rest of his career to tracking down the offender. I know Brasher."

The Scotchman spoke this prophecy in a manner that conveyed a species of warning. Felix Dering, however, was so engrossed by his own bewildered meditations that he failed to demand a reason for the other's significant intonation.

"I am sorry for the Inspector," he declared absently, "but as I am not a Justice of the Peace, I have no right to interfere. The law must avenge my uncle's death according to its lights; I cannot feel that a shadow of real proof has been adduced against Spencer. If he is guiltless, as I feel he is, I am glad he has escaped."

With which candid admission, Felix, not dreaming that he had lent grave support, in the Scotchman's mind, to a terrible theory—of Archibald Geddes's own evolving—bade him good-day. Re-entering the police-station, he acknowledged the salute of the constable at the desk, and walked out. The atmosphere of the miniature gaol was repellent to him.

As he went towards the gates of Dering House through the placid summer noon, his brain was occupied with the inexplicable details of the mystery that had fallen upon Wyresdale.

How, and by whom, had Sir Christopher been slain in those unrecorded hours which had elapsed between the moment when he loosed rein to canter home for his belated dinner, and that when his lifeless corpse was found in the ditch near the Rosery? Who had whisked Ted Spencer out

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of his prison, what malicious agency had brought into the possession of Judith Garland the bloodstained links that had convinced her of Felix Dering's guilt? Felix's brain reeled before a thousand improbable conjectures.

At the top of the avenue he gained a wide terrace that skirted the old and ivied mansion. Upon its gravelled expanse the child Brian was strolling gravely in his picturesque garments of velvet, black now instead of their wonted purple. By him, under a black lace sunshade, moved a despondent figure—the figure of Lady Dering.

Felix advanced and lifted his hat; she turned and glanced at him sadly.

Stella Dering was a pretty woman, with a weak mouth and large, pathetic violet pupils. Her faults were written upon her characterless features, but she was a good woman, and, in spite of her fretful disposition, had a kind heart.

Her young kinsman was a favourite of hers, his chivalric nature had made him invariably considerate of her overstrung nerves. Also, he loved Brian, her one child, and Brian worshipped his gallant cousin; he ran to clasp Felix's strong palm and be swung up to his shoulder.

"Cousin Felix," he cried, pushing back his sailor hat of white straw; "won't you tell me where father is? You said you hadn't taken him from me, you know, and he hasn't come back, all the same."

Felix averted his head; a lump had risen in his throat—Lady Dering covered her face with her handkerchief.

"Hush, Brian, dear," begged Felix, brokenly, "you distress mother—we will talk about father some other time you and I."

"Yes," conceded Brian, "but I do want a drive to-morrow and I must ask him quick, or he will go without me, as he always does. If you had taken him away, Cousin Felix, you would have had to take me, too."

Felix groaned; the child was wringing both their hearts.

"Oh, no," he answered, huskily; "you would have stayed with mother, wouldn't you?"

The little baronet dissented.

"Mother gets tired of me," was his shrewd objection; father only said, "Come and have a romp, you rascal!"

Lady Dering sat down upon a garden-chair and wept aloud.

Brian slipped out of his cousin's arm and climbed up by her.

"Don't cry, mother," he whispered "I'd rather be with you, often—I would, indeed."

His mother clasped him to her widowed bosom and sobbed. Suddenly she released him and bade him fetch some cake for the pea-fowl; his absence would give her an opportunity to regain her self-control. Felix leaned over the chair as Brian trotted off.

"You heard what the child told me," he murmured; "that I had said I had not taken his father from him. The slander had reached his innocent ears—the Wyresdale gossips would rejoice if they could learn the fact. My misunderstanding with Sir Christopher that afternoon will cost me a heavy price."

Stella Dering gazed at the man who—though about her own age—was nominally her nephew. "You don't mean," she stammered; "you are suspected of—oh, my poor boy, how absurd! Why, you were in Duchester when—it—it must have been done."

Felix shivered. "Would you credit the slander if I had not been?" he queried, hoarsely.

The dead man's wife looked into the generous countenance of her questioner. Her child had dispoiled him of a home and a fortune, yet she felt that he had never regretted his loss, that he loved Brian as if the boy were his own.

"What a foolish idea!" she said; "of course not! Here is Brian with the cake; do not let us speak of Kit's death before him—I cannot bear it."

She took the dainty from the childish fingers and broke it into crumbs for the splendid birds.

Felix slipped away. In the portico of Dering House he glanced back at the figure of the bereaved woman, playing sorrowfully with her young son.

"Thank heaven *she* does not suspect me—yet!" he muttered.

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW TWIST IN THE SKEIN.

"You must not think, Miss Carew, because I am as I am, that I differ seriously from other men."

It was Otto Hare who spoke; he was lounging among the cushions of a big and padded "chesterfield" in the window-bay which over-looked the Rosery gaden. His dark eyes were fixed on the slender figure of the girl who sat opposite him plying her embroidery needle with a nervous deliberation; he had relinquished his tea-cup, it rested on the low Moorish stool between them. The urn and cake-baskets were deserted—Mrs. Carew had contrived to be called away, leaving the Golden Dwarf and her daughter together.

"For instance," he pursued, a trifle disdainfully; "I can ride, shoot, swim, fence, and talk in four languages; there you have the equipment of the well-bred Briton. I am proud, revengeful, constant, passionate—which is as much as to say, I have red blood in my veins. Yet for fifteen years, Miss Carew, I had not gazed upon the face of a young and lovely woman. Then I beheld yours."

Esther's fair curls were bent over her work; she did not interrupt the Golden Dwarf's monologue. Once, however, she touched a little locket which hung at her throat—it held a portrait of Felix Dering.

"In that moment," said Otto Hare; "I realised how powerless was ambition—and I have had ambitions, Miss Carew—beside the unconscious charm wielded by your gentle sex. You are the flowers in earth's garden, do not blame us for desiring to pluck you."

He studied her attentively; Esther Carew's blue eyes, rippling blonde locks, and the milk and roses of her cheeks were, indeed, a text for poetical similes. The Golden Dwarf slipped his hand into his vest-pocket, produced a shallow case and pressed a spring. The lid of the receptacle shot up, to reveal a circlet of priceless old filagree, crusted with gems—rubies, emeralds and diamonds. As an ornament it was costly, as an article of it *vertu* was inestimable.

"Beautiful things should have beautiful owners," murmured Otto Hare, lifting the bracelet from its bed of silk. "Miss Carew, will you gratify me by accepting this? It is Oriental and of a somewhat rare finish."

Esther drew her breath, the proffered gift was beautiful, and she thought rather of its beauty than of its worth. But the expression on the Golden Dwarf's saturnine features recalled her to herself.

"It is indeed marvellous," she faltered, her gaze reverting to the barbaric splendour of yellow and red and green and translucent crystal, "but I could not take it; thank you very much, Mr. Hare, but really I could not."

The Golden Dwarf put the bracelet under his foot and crushed the jewel to a shapeless mass.

"Since you will not wear it," he said, slipping the ruined ornament calmly into his pocket with the case, "no woman ever shall."

Esther was terrified by the fierce determination evinced in this remarkable act. Before she could utter the words of regret that had lingered on her lips, the door opened and Mrs. Carew entered smilingly.

"So sorry to have been detained," she began: "Esther, dear, did you ask Mr. Hare to have some more tea?"

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Astute by nature and training, the widow could not fail to perceive that her daughter and the Golden Dwarf were upon strained terms. She was too diplomatic to take notice of it, but a vague anxiety filled her scheming heart. Surely Otto Hare had not been fool enough to propose upon so short an acquaintance, ere his wealth and position had had time to dazzle Esther's blue orbs, before her mother had been able to soften and bend her youthful will!

The Golden Dwarf rose.

"I have been too agreeably entertained by Miss Carew's conversation," he said sardonically, "to spare a thought for mundane realities. It is a pleasure I hope to renew."

He turned towards Esther with a certain dry significance.

"Ah," he said; "I was going to tear myself away before discharging my mission. Mrs. Carew, I am inclined to signalise my return to the world by throwing my gates open to my neighbours. I have no lady to receive my guests, may I venture to solicit your good offices?"

Mrs. Carew gasped delightedly. To play the part of hostess to the bachelor owner of Wyresdale Park—to penetrate its mysteries, and, for a few hours, to control its enormous social resources, it would confer upon her a position in Wyresdale second hardly to that of Lady Dering.

"I shall be charmed, Mr. Hare," she told him; "now that terrible inquest is over and the police have allowed the supposed criminal to escape, we will all be glad to forget the dismal affair for a while. And, in any case, it is most charitable of you to waken Wyresdale from its native dulness. Everybody will be delighted at the mere prospect of penetrating some of your reputed secrets."

Otto Hare made a contemptuous gesture. "Secrets which exist only in the imagination of Wyresdale!" he answered. "A thousand thanks, Mrs. Carew, for your promise to further my project; Miss Carew, permit me to confess that I shall estimate the success of my little fête by the amount of pleasure you derive from it."

He shook hands with her—his powerful though diminutive fingers causing her a curious thrill of revulsion—bade farewell to Mrs. Carew, and took his departure. On the threshold he passed a graceful, sombrely-dressed woman, whose dark, intelligent countenance moved him to a second scrutiny.

It had in it a force and selfishness akin to that betrayed by his own. As he walked out to his phaeton, he heard her name given to the maid—it was "Miss Garland."

Mrs. Carew greeted the newcomer with a degree of patronage—for was not Judith a paid companion, and had not she herself (though once but little better than a social outsider in Wyresdale) become now the chosen friend of the millionaire Golden Dwarf? Much had happened in Wyresdale since last Miss Garland had condescended to call at the Rosery.

"And how is Lady Dering?" asked Mrs. Carew, as she filled a cup of tea for her guest; "still quite prostrate, I suppose. But little Sir Brian will be a comfort to her, no doubt—she will bear up for his sake."

Judith Garland's lip curled.

"The child means a great deal to her, Mrs. Carew," she said, cynically; "if it were not for Brian, Lady Dering would soon be a mere dowager, and Mr. Dering would step into a very decent property."

Mrs. Carew glanced at Esther—Judith saw it and barbed an arrow for the girl's bosom.

"I believe," she said, and trifled with her spoon, "Mr Dering was about to leave for America when Sir Christopher's death detained him. If he had only sailed a fortnight ago he might never have learned how few true friends he had in Wyresdale. Of course, we did not credit the slanderous insinuation that he could have told the real story of the squire's murder. But some people did, and practically cut him."

A hot tear trickled down Esther Carew's cheek and splashed upon her embroidery. Judith gloated over her suffering.

"I imagine it was Mr. Hare who drove off just as I called," she called; "you are fortunate in striking up an acquaintance with him—he is enormously rich and quite nice, they say, in spite of his being a dwarf and a recluse."

Mrs. Carew fathomed the depths of Judith's malice, though she did not entirely comprehend its cause.

"Mr. Hare will be a recluse no longer," she said; "he is planning a garden-party in Wyresdale Park; being a bachelor, he wishes me to receive for him."

Judith started—the object of her visit was gained and another item of Wyresdale gossip vindicated.

"I congratulate you," she replied, putting down her cup; "it is an ill wind—you remember the proverb? Sir Christopher's death, I fancy, was the means of introducing Mr. Hare to you. We are all speculating on the cause of his sudden resolution not to shut himself up any more. Rumour has it that a pretty face—but there, I mustn't be indiscreet. Good-day, dear Mrs. Carew; bye-bye, Esther, get me an invitation to Mr. Hare's party, won't you?"

Esther could not have answered to save her life; every syllable of Judith Garland's had stabbed her deeply. She realised that her mother's heartless attitude towards Felix was as clear to Judith Garland as were Mrs. Carew's mercenary schemes respecting the Golden Dwarf. As her skilful tormentor departed she burst into a passion of grief, whose abandonment and intensity disconcerted her mother.

As for Judith, she communed with herself on the road to Dering House.

"I was right," she muttered; "they have thrown him over and are angling for that strange creature, Otto Hare. If I do not act quickly Felix will fling himself out of England in despair. I cannot lose him so. Guilty or not guilty of his uncle's death, he is the only man I ever cared for, and I will win him. There is but one way to keep him in Wyresdale—that way shall be taken."

This resolution, whatever its purport, made the rest of the afternoon and evening seem to Judith Garland like a week of ordinary days. Nor, when she went to her bedroom, did she prepare for sleep. Donning a thick cloak, she wrapped a shawl about her head and waited till all was silent in the old mansion.

Then, noiselessly, she stole from corridor to corridor of Dering House, reaching at length the nursery of its child-master, the little Sir Brian. Lifting the slumbering boy out of his cot, she folded him in her cloak and carried him down the wide stairs and through the dusky hall. At the side-door she drew a couple of bolts and bore him forth into the night air. The moon was up, but veiled by flying clouds.

(*To be continued.*)

NEXT WEEK . . .

we shall give full particulars of the new serial story,

FETTERED LIVES,

. . commencing in the Bank Holiday Number of . .

PEARSON'S WEEKLY.

FETTERED LIVES,

A Romance of the Prison and the Stage.

The wife will enjoy "Short Stories." Take it home.

BY ☘ LIP ☘ MOVEMENT.

IN the dimness and silence of the great West-End square the strip of red carpet that cut across the pavement and trailed up the broad stone steps to the portico of the house caught my eye in passing. Having nothing particular on hand at the moment I paused to see what was going on.

It was early yet for Society dinner-parties and crushes, the season being quite in its infancy. These people, whoever they were, were evidently determined to take time by the forelock and set the ball rolling at the first possible moment.

The guests were evidently slow in arriving, for though I waited several minutes I was rewarded by seeing nothing more imposing than a telegraph boy, who handed in his message and clattered off down the steps again.

Just as I was about to pass on, however, the lights of a hansom swung round the corner, and the vehicle came jingling leisurely towards the house. I looked for a man in evening dress, but to my surprise it was a young and exceedingly pretty girl, a white-furred opera cloak thrown loosely around her delicate shoulders and carrying a guitar-case in her hand, who alighted on the pavement within a yard or two of me.

As she crossed towards the steps her purse, which she had taken out to pay the cabman, fell with a soft flop on to the strip of carpet. I shot forward at once, picked it up, and restored it to her with a bow.

She took it from me with a most winsome smile and a soft murmur of thanks, while her limpid brown eyes, which shone in that dim light like two lovely stars, rested upon me for one fleeting second. Then she passed on up the steps, and the door closed upon this beautiful vision.

Though I had not been greatly interested in the proceedings so far, somehow it was very different now. In truth, that smile and the look which accompanied it had made more than a passing impression upon me. I wanted to see this charming creature again, felt as if I must see her, even though I had to loiter about until the small hours of the morning. As I looked up at the closed door I was conscious of a very envious feeling towards those who had the undisputed right of entry, and strongly inclined to rail against my own hard luck at being left out in the cold,

While I lingered on, unwilling to tear myself away, the door yawned open again. I glanced up to find a tall man in evening dress standing on the steps, his imposing figure silhouetted against the flood of light that came from the hall behind him.

He was, in many respects, a man worth looking at. Strikingly handsome, with a commanding presence and dark, flashing eyes, he caught and rivetted your attention on the instant.

At the present moment, however, he appeared strangely perturbed and upset. As he stood there, folding and unfolding a slip of pink paper—a telegram evidently—in a nervously abstracted manner, I could see that he was planted fairly and squarely on the horns of a dilemma, and was feverishly casting about in his mind for some way of escape.

His gaze swept round until it encountered my figure in the background. Instantly his dark eyes fastened upon me—clutched at me, as it were, with a kind of eager avidity. He was a man in a strait—a grievous strait, perhaps—and like all such was ready to grab at any straw within reach.

He tried to drag his gaze away, but it came back again instantly in my direction, and his keen eye played over me like the point of a rapier.

I made no move of any sort. I just stood still and watched that silent struggle, knowing full well that something would come of it. And something did come of it very soon.

My friend on the steps looked at me again, paused, hesitated a moment, and then came pit-patting down to the spot where I was standing.

"Excuse me," he said, speaking very hurriedly, and yet in the courteous tones of one about to ask a favour, "but do you happen to have any pressing engagement this evening?"

"Neither pressing nor otherwise," I answered airily.

"Ah!" he said with a pleased sparkle in his eyes, for the spirit in which I took his advances evidently went far to relieve him of his embarrassment. "Then you have it in your power to render me a service which will lay me under the deepest obligation, and which, I venture to think, will prove an agreeable method of passing a spare hour or two as far as you yourself are concerned."

"Indeed! Might I inquire the nature of this service you speak of?"

"Simply this: I am giving a little entertainment to some friends of mine"—here he waved his white hand towards the house—"*tableaux vivants*, and things of that kind, you know; just an informal and quite impromptu affair. Unfortunately, one of my guests, who was to have taken a leading part, wires me to say that he has been prevented from coming at the last moment through sudden indisposition. By an extraordinary coincidence, you bear a somewhat close resemblance to him, and——"

"You wish me to take his place?" I said, seeing that he paused; and I rather fancy there was a certain telltale eagerness in my tones, for the thought of seeing that beautiful girl again caused quite a little flutter within me.

"If you would be so kind," he murmured insinuatingly.

If I would be so kind! Why, I was ready to jump at the proposal. Here was the very chance for which I had longed thrown right in my way, the closed door opened to me. I could think of nothing else at the moment.

I was on the point of closing with his suggestion, for I was eager enough to avail of this unexpected opportunity, when a sudden thought occurred to me, and I glanced down doubtfully at my plain suit of tweed.

He read the looks at once.

"There are several costumes inside which are at your disposal," he said. "The little representations I propose to give will be principally tropical scenes, illustrative of life in Mexico and thereabouts. My guests are mostly from that part of the world, you see. By the way," he added, breaking off suddenly and looking straight at me, "you do not understand Spanish, do you?"

"Not a word," I assured him with perfect truthfulness.

"Ah!"

It was difficult to put a precise meaning upon that "Ah!" for the tone in which it was uttered was a singular one. Nor did my companion give me much time to puzzle over the point. Wheeling round he led the way up the steps, and conducted me through the brilliantly-lighted hall to a snug little retreat at the back, half study, half dressing-room.

He certainly had provided a varied assortment of costumes to choose from, though the picturesque tunic, flaring red sash, and broad sombrero of the Mexican was the one most in evidence.

Passing over these, however, he singled out for me a rich Spanish uniform, a marvel of gold lace, which might have done duty for an ambassador at the very least. I fancy my eyes sparkled a little at sight of it, for there was one among the company upon whom I was anxious to make an impression, and was not a little pleased at the thought of appearing before her in such fine feathers.

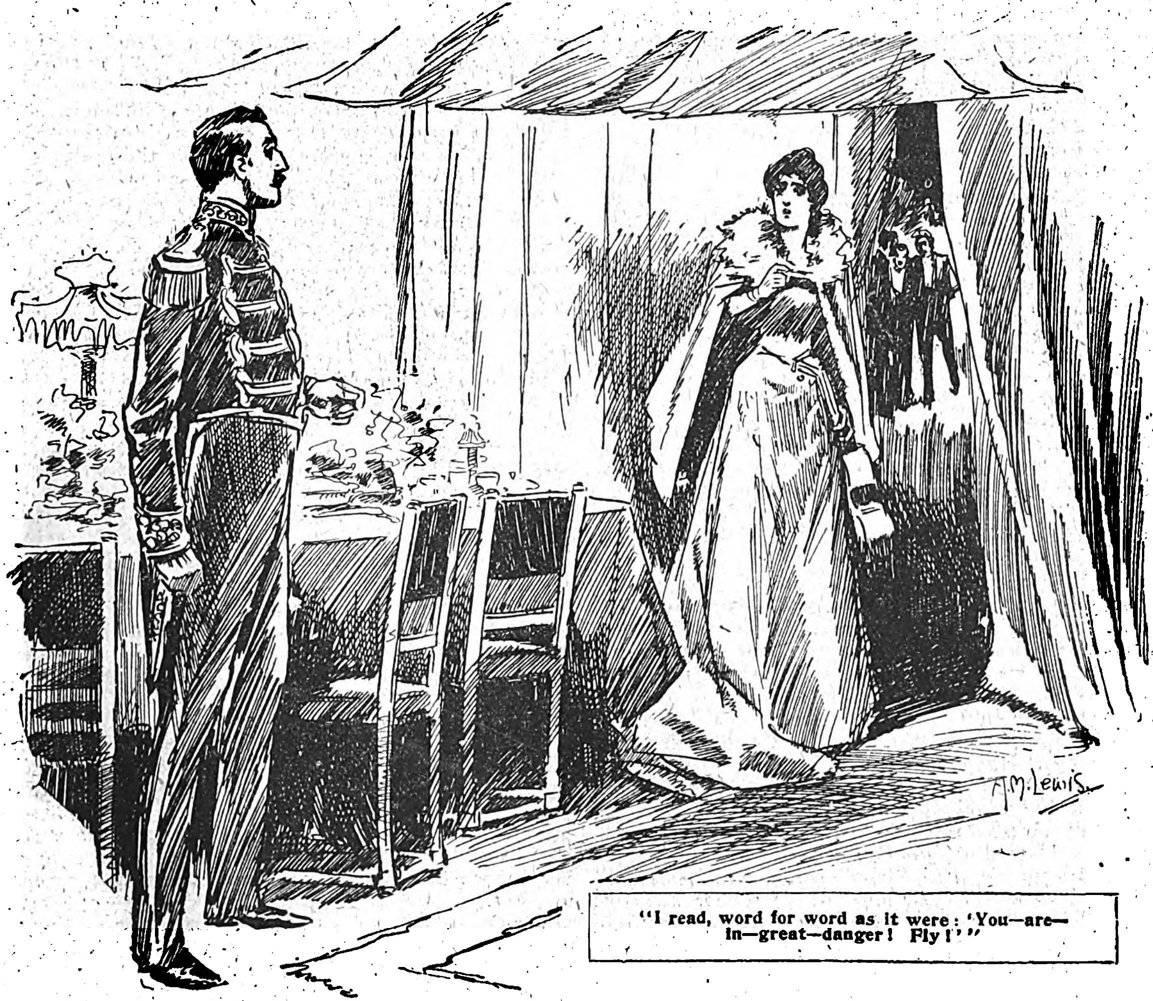
The host left me while I effected my change of raiment, and when I emerged from the room, in all the splendour of my borrowed plumes, I found him waiting for me outside.

Already there was a marvellous change in him. He was like a different man. The worried look had completely vanished, and he was evidently in the best of spirits again.

Nor, now that he had secured his man, if I may so express it, did he appear in any particular hurry to return to his guests. Taking me by the arm in quite a friendly way he drew me into the dining-room, which was unoccupied at the moment, and took a decanter from the sideboard.

While we chatted over a glass of wine, he informed me that his name was Orlebar, and that he had seen a good deal of the rough side of life abroad, especially in Mexico.

All this time I kept wondering where were the guests, for I could hear no sounds of festivity in any of the adjoining rooms. Unless, in the absence of their host,



"I read, word for word as it were: 'You—are—in—great—danger! Fly!'"

Persuade your best friend to read "The Golden Dwarf."

they were simply twirling their thumbs for want of something better to do, I couldn't make it out.

At last my companion led me from the room with the air of a man who had a little surprise in store, which he wished to spring upon me suddenly. Instead of moving towards the reception-rooms, however, he drew me along a handsome corridor which gave access to a spacious conservatory at the back. Looking on ahead I could see that the place was a blaze of electric lights.

Passing through the rows of magnificent palms and rare exotic plants we reached a door opening on to the garden. Just as my foot was upon the threshold I stopped short with a regular gasp of surprise, for a most wonderful, a truly fairy-like scene, burst upon my astonished vision.

The garden was evidently a large one, the space nearest the house being occupied by a velvety green sward. Beyond, wherever the eye turned, grottoes, pagodas, marvels of every kind were to be seen. You heard the splashing of tiny cascades; the soft hissing of concealed fountains. The skill of the landscape gardener, in fact had converted this ordinary London pleasure ground into some dream of the tropics.

Everywhere there were fairy lamps and Chinese lanterns, their soft, coloured glow, the flickering lights and shades of the whole place, producing a most wonderful effect upon the imagination.

To add to the impression, from some secluded nook to the right came the silvery tinkle of a guitar; and even as I stood there, lost in stricken wonder, a soft, musical voice—a woman's voice—poured forth a flood of melody from that concealment.

Upon the sward in front a number of men in evening dress were grouped; some few pacing slowly to and fro in couples. They were men of swarthy complexions and flashing eyes, all of them; chattering noisily in some foreign tongue, and inhaling cigarettes the whole time.

I was aroused from my wondering abstraction by the sound of the host's voice in my ear.

"Our entertainment is quite an *al fresco* one, you see," he said with a little gratified laugh, as if my visible astonishment was by no means displeasing to him. "My friends being from the tropics, I thought they would enjoy themselves more out of doors, especially as the evening is so delightfully mild. But come; let us get supper out of the way before we ring up the curtain, as it were."

I felt strongly impelled to make a bee-line for that concealed nook where the singer was posted, but Mr. Orlebar led me straight across the velvety sward, at the further end of which a large marquee had been erected.

As I moved along by his side in my brilliant uniform, the chatter ceased as if by magic. The guests drew apart, and every eye in the place was fixed upon me in a strangely intent and observant manner. I cannot describe the peculiar sensation it gave rise to, the concentrated fire of those gleaming eyes, but it was not exactly a comfortable one.

As we entered the tent and passed round to the other side of the long, well-laden table, the others all trooped in after us. With a wave of his hand in my direction, Orlebar said something in Spanish—by way of introduction, I suppose—and I was treated to a series of stiff, icy bows, which I did my best to return without appearing to notice the singularly frigid reception accorded me. Needless to say, I was quite at a loss to understand the meaning of it.

During the whole course of the meal, which was an elaborate one, I was practically left out in the cold as far as the conversation went. Orlebar's whole attention was taken up in answering the fire of questions poured in upon him from every side. The extraordinary part of it was, that, judging by the repeated glances shot in my direction, these questions seemed somehow to have reference to my presence amongst them.

As the supper drew to a close, a servant entered and whispered something to the host. Orlebar rose from the table at once, murmured a few words of excuse in my ear, reeled off a string of Spanish to the others, and left the tent hurriedly.

The instant his back was turned, a wiry, wrinkled, little fellow, seated on my left, turned to me and scraped out a sentence in broken English.

"Vat's becoom-a boullion, hey?" he said, fixing me with his glittering eye.

Boullion? Boullion? What on earth did he mean? I ran my eye over everything on the table. Finally, I looked back at him, and shook my head.

With a quick, angry gesture he turned to the others, and instantly they fell to jabbering amongst themselves in the most vehement and excited manner. The next minute they rose from the table in a body and left the tent as if to hold a consultation outside. I remained seated there in solitary state, and not a little bewildered by the strange turn events were taking.

So far I had seen nothing of the girl; but now, as I happened to look up, I suddenly caught sight of her outside. She was passing slowly before the opening of the tent, her guitar in her hand. I kept my eyes fixed upon her, for there was something peculiar in her manner, that I could not very well understand.

Presently she paused, edged a little closer to the opening, and threw a quick glance around as if to see that no one was standing near. Then, with a rapid movement, she turned full in my direction, and gave me a look which seemed to strike a chill to my heart. The next second her lips began to move.

Fortunately for me, I had some little knowledge of lip language; that is to say, the formation of words by the movement of the lips, without any sound being emitted. And now, as I watched the girl with eager, breathless intentness, I read word for word as it were:

"You—are—in—danger—great danger. Fly!"

She was gone like a flash, and seemed to pass round towards the back of the tent.

Danger! My heart seemed to stand still as I rose to my feet. Then it suddenly started to beat again like the piston of a steam-engine, for I caught the soft pit-pat of footsteps on the grass outside, and knew that the foreigners were about to return. Three or four of them made their appearance the next moment, and posted themselves near the entrance of the tent as if to frustrate any attempt at escape on my part.

My senses were keenly, almost painfully, on the alert, and just at that moment I caught a stealthy ripping sort of sound behind me. There was a pause, and then the sound was repeated. I knew what it meant. Ah! that brave girl. She had slit the canvas of the tent from top to bottom, so as to make an opening by which I could effect my escape at the proper moment.

Very cautiously I edged my way back; and, without daring to turn round, thrust out my hand behind me, groped for the rent, and found it.

Once or twice I thought of making a dive through the opening, but every time I glanced towards the entrance I caught the gleam of those watchful eyes in the semi-gloom outside, and knew that my slightest movement would only precipitate matters.

At last the rest of the foreigners came back, and the whole crowd trooped into the tent in a body. A striking and ominous change had taken place in their demeanour; their noisy chatter had given way to a sullen silence. I confess that I did not like the look of things at all.

They appeared to take no particular notice of me at first; but I observed with inward misgiving, that they were edging quietly round the table on either side, as if to hem me in.

I waited a moment or two longer, my heart beating as if it would stifle me. And then, as they came nearer, and I noticed that each man's hand was stealing slyly towards his breast, I flashed round in an instant and dived head foremost through the slit behind me.

At my very first movement the whole crowd set up a most appalling yell and rushed towards the spot, each with a glittering stilleto in his hand! But, thank Heaven! I was through the opening before they reached me, though I heard the whizz of those deadly weapons as they descended within a few feet of me!

Bolting around the tent I raced for the open door of the conservatory as I had never raced before. I reached it well ahead of those blood-thirsty wretches, who had scrambled out of the tent anyhow, slammed it in their faces, and turned the key in the lock. And then, as I started forward again, I ran right into the arms of Orlebar himself, who instantly closed with me!

For the first half-second or so I was too taken aback to try and shake him off; but, to my utter astonishment, he hissed sharply in my ear:

"Hit out, man! Struggle—fight! They'd have my life if they thought I allowed you to escape. I had no idea they would turn so confoundedly rusty!"

I did hit out; or rather I planted my knuckles on his chest and sent him crashing back amongst the flower pots. Then, while the others were clamouring at the door like a pack of wolves, I dashed on into the hall, and the next minute was tearing down the square in my magnificent, gold-laced uniform.

At the corner I saw a hansom waiting and instantly made towards it. To my surprise I found that it was already occupied, and by the beautiful girl to whom I owed my life!

"Thank Heaven, you have escaped!" she said, as she recognised me. "I could not go away until I knew you were safely out of their hands."

Hurriedly begging me not to stop, she handed me a card with her address, asked me to call the following afternoon, when she would endeavour to explain matters, and drove off.

* * * * *

Next day, my nerves being still a trifle shaky, I set out to call upon Miss Hendon—that was the young lady's name—and found her occupying a pretty flat in West Kensington, where she lived with her invalid mother.

"Mr. Orlebar," she explained, when we had settled down for a talk, "is a distant connection of ours. We have never seen very much of him, however, for most of his life has been spent in one of the smaller republics of Central America. I happened to meet him a few days ago, when he told me he was giving a little entertainment to some foreign friends, and said he would be most grateful if I would bring my guitar and help to amuse them for an hour or two.

"As it so happens, I have a brother who has lived for many years in Central America, though this fact was unknown to Mr. Orlebar. When he was last at home, being confined to the house a good deal by an accident, he amused himself by teaching me Spanish. On finding myself in the company of Mr. Orlebar's guests, therefore, I was able to follow the drift of their conversation easily enough.

"From what they said, and also from facts related to me by my brother, I learned that they were at one time at the head of affairs in their own country. The government was a very corrupt one, however; so much so, indeed, that it provoked a fierce and bloody revolution.

"The President was a man named De Castro, a close friend of Mr. Orlebar's. This De Castro had married an Englishwoman, but before these troubles broke out he had sent his wife over here to be out of harm's way. She was accompanied by their only son, who was a mere child at the time.

"Seeing that the insurgents were likely to get the upper-hand, De Castro, aided, it is said, by Mr. Orlebar, laid violent hands upon the Treasury, which was supposed to contain a vast sum in bullion, and escaped with it on board a trading steamer."

"Ah!" I exclaimed, for I now knew what my little wrinkled friend had been driving at when he spoke of "boullion."

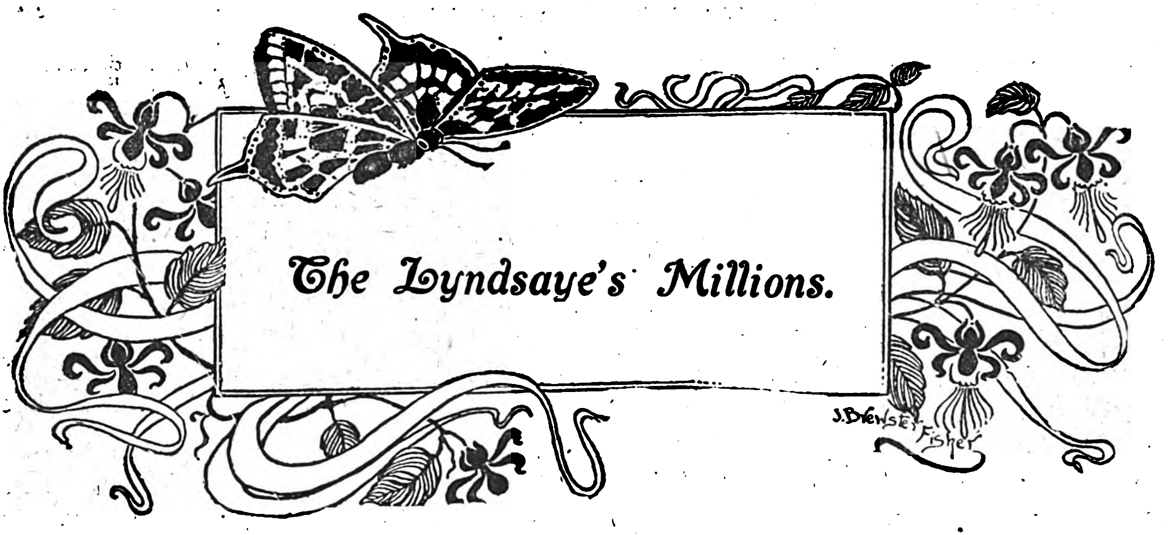
"The other members of the government were not so fortunate. Those who escaped the fury of the mob were thrown into a fortress, where they languished year after year, probably almost forgotten by the victors.

"When they regained their liberty at last they lost no time in making their way to England, with the intention of compelling De Castro to make a division of the plunder amongst them. But de Castro, they found, was long since dead; his son, who was now grown up, having inherited his ill-gotten wealth.

"In their difficulty they sought out Mr. Orlebar, who was supposed to have had a share in the spoil, and no doubt compelled him by threats to invite the son of the ex-President to his house. From what they said, I gathered that they meditated evil of some kind if the young fellow refused to comply with their demands.

"My amazement was unbounded when I saw you enter in his place. I guessed that, for some reason of his own, Mr. Orlebar wished to palm you off upon his guests as the son of their old colleague. At the close of the supper I sent in a servant to inform him that I wished to return home at once. When he joined me outside, however, I begged him to lend me a certain book, which I knew it would take him some little time to find. Then, when the others had left the tent, I attempted to warn you in the only way open to me."

And, to my mind, Orlebar's motive was not far to seek. It was plain that he wished to keep in with both parties—to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. No doubt, under the pressure brought to bear upon him, he had invited de Castro to his house; but that young gentleman was not to be caught so easily. He must have got wind of the pleasant little reception which awaited him, and wriggled out of it by pleading "sudden indisposition."



The Lyndsaye's Millions.

Travellers' tales, for many and obvious reasons, are not always to be relied upon.

Either they are related to gratify the personal vanity of the traveller himself, becoming then closely allied to the "fearful and wonderful," or they are the handed-down traditionary experiences of men and women of old, the intervening years having added whatever proportion and colour they may originally have lacked.

"Niggers" (that is to say, natives of Africa, the West Indian Islands, and so on) are adepts at this peculiar manipulation of the story-telling art; and as the island of Jamaica, or rather its surrounding waters, is the scene of the incident I am about to relate, one would naturally have to be upon one's guard when lending an ear to the ebon-hued spinner of yarns.

It must too, be borne in mind that the following account is satisfactorily authenticated, not only by the fact of the principal actors having been my own "forbears," but also in that the descriptive statement of the occurrence, bearing date 1760 (the year of King George the Thirds' accession to the throne of these realms,) is in the handwriting of my own great grandmother; and bears upon the face of it the unmistakeable mark of "truth dependable," which I have always understood to have been a notable characteristic of the old lady's.

It was quite by accident that I discovered the document referred to.

One day during the Winter of last year, I was for some reason or other, seized with a fit of "ferreting."

This meant of course, the turning out of long-hoarded, long-forgotten possessions, of every conceivable sort and description.

The largest part of this miscellaneous collection consisted, as in such cases it nearly always does, of old letters and papers.

I fear that Time had sadly discounted the original value of most of them; the fire, therefore, was in frequent requisition.

After an hour or two's hard "rummaging," I at length delved out a letter, dated from St. Anne's, near Port Royal, Jamaica, nearly a hundred and fifty years ago, and written in that fine, spiky, neat hand, so popular with the fair sex at that period.

Further than that I placed the yellow old packet on one side for future and more leisured inspection. I took no more present notice of it, beyond remarking in a casual way that the name "Romeo" occurred more than once in the somewhat lengthy account.

A few days afterwards I happened to be in Southampton on business—no matter of what nature—bent. Taking a quiet stroll one evening "Above Bar," in the direction of the "Forest," I encountered an old, grey-headed negro crooning out, in the roadway, one of the plaintive melodies so dear to the average black man's soul.

I stopped—I don't know why—but I stopped, gave him alms, and made to pass on.

"Ole Romeo t'ank you, sah!—t'ank you berry much, sah!"

"Romeo!" I should have thought but little about it, had it not been for this faded old letter of my great grandmother's, Dame Mahetabel Lyndsaye.

The coincidence was so strange.

"Is Romeo really your given name?" I asked the poor old creature.

"Yes, sah! an' my fader's—he called Romeo, too—an' his fader—but I got no chile—I'se the berry last Romeo—Yes, sah!"

He had got up alongside the kerb, towards which I had beckoned him, and stood shivering in the cold wind, which was blowing in gusts down the road from the Forest.

"Where were you born?"

"I'se Jamaiky nigger, sah!—San Annes—Po't Ro'al. Warm—warm dere! here po' Romeo die, he so cold, sah!" and he shivered until it seemed that he must fall to pieces, so wretchedly attenuated was he.

That decided me. As I said before, I cannot, even now, explain why I did all this. I only know that I could not help doing it.

I took the poor old darkie to where he could be cleansed, clothed, warmed and fed, and brought him back to London with me, another item to be considered; another link in a soon-to-be-found wonderful chain. The day after my return I was dining with a friend at Blackheath. Dinner over, with a consequent adjournment to the host's study for a smoke and a chat, my attention was drawn to a large engraving, evidently very old, over the chimney piece, and which I certainly had never before seen there, or, indeed, anywhere.

A large, open boat, with half-a-dozen people in it, filled nearly the whole of the picture space. In the water, on the side of the boat nearest to the spectator, appeared the enormous head, and more than half the body of an immense alligator. Its jaws were only kept from being completely snapped down upon the left leg of a man, by a vigorous thrusting of the latter's left arm down the creature's throat. The man's right hand clung to the boat's gunwale, and frantic efforts were being made by a big nigger, naked to the waist, to aid the alligator's victim.

Underneath the print was a brief descriptive note in French and English. This set forth that the sufferer was one Henry Lyndsaye, and that it was to his personal slave, Romeo (the nigger of the picture), that he owed his rescue, and subsequent restoration to life and health.

Thus I had, within the period of but a few days, become acquainted, co-incidentally almost, with three distinct things, all pointing to, and proving one particular circumstance.

The circumstance was in itself, perhaps, nothing more than a mere traditionary story of adventure, although the tale was, to my mind at least, removed far out of the ordinary run of such yarns, by reason of my own descendantal connection with Henry Lyndsaye, and his mother, the writer of the letter.

Perhaps, too, I ought at this point to mention a matter, which, in the light of after events, has no slight bearing upon general issues.

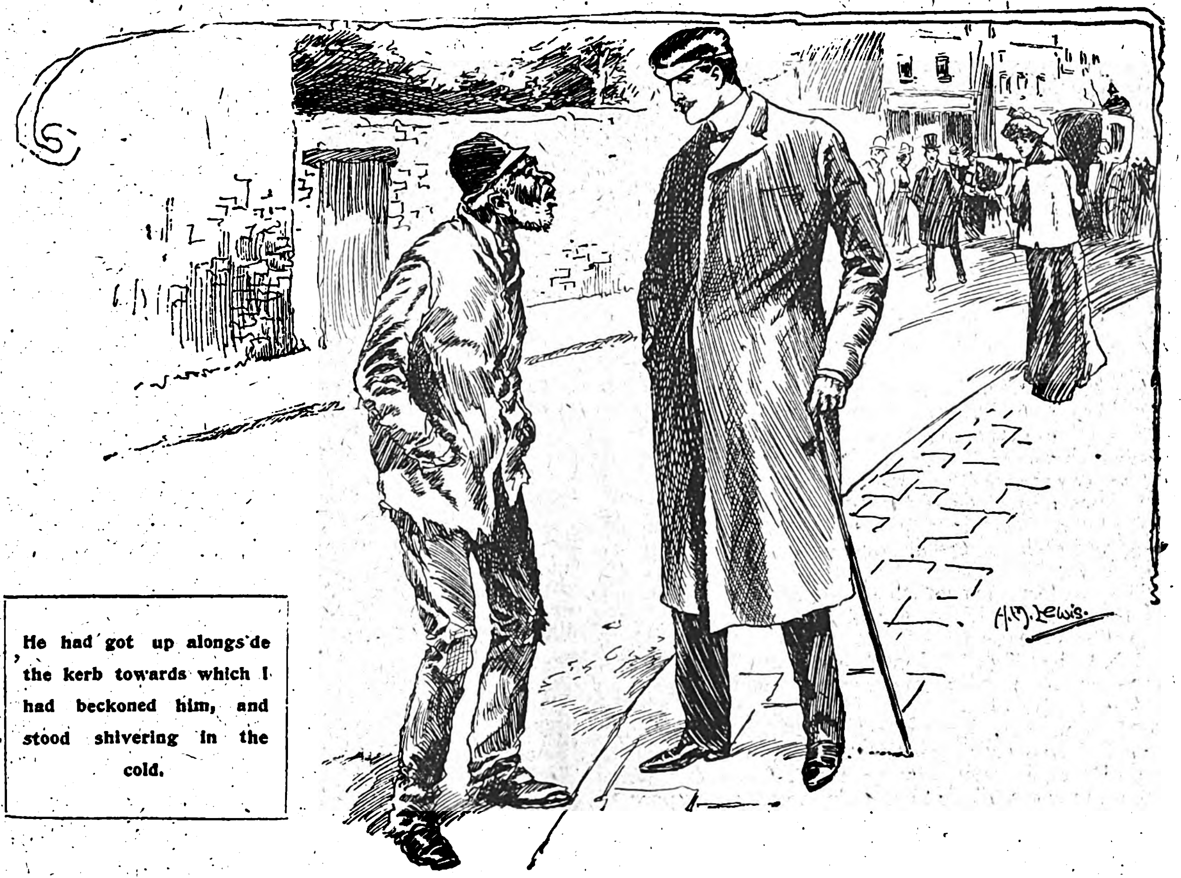
My great-grandfather, General Calthorpe Lyndsaye, was, in the year of 1760, Governor of Jamaica.

A rich man by inheritance, he had added to his wealth by judicious sugar-planting, and by sundry other ways and means, better, I take it, left untalked-about here.

It seems that when the General died, which he did in or about 1768 (his wife having pre-deceased him by nearly two years) leaving two sons (the elder of whom, though being suspected of being alive, had mysteriously disappeared six years previously) his large fortune running, it is said, well into six figures, became hopelessly locked up, the will definitely leaving everything without any reservation whatever, to Henry Lyndsaye the eldest son.

It came about, therefore, that the second son, Jasper, failed, right up to his death, to establish his claim to all, or any portion of his father's estate; Chancery, eventually opening wide its mighty man to absorb the tempting morsel.

Attempts were made at different times, and by divers persons to get the impounded money, but without success; and at the present period when I first became cognisant of its somewhat visionary legal existence, the representatives of the family had long ceased to express



He had got up alongside the kerb towards which I had beckoned him, and stood shivering in the cold.

Persuade your best friend to read "The Golden Dwarf."

belief, or to take any interest in the "hid treasure." I may add that I am, to-day, the acknowledged head of the Lyndsayes, and am, therefore, entitled to take first action, should action be at any time necessary.

Up to now I had seen no reason for formulating and presenting any claim to the High Court for the resumption by me of the accumulated millions that it was supposed must now be lying in the name of Calthorpe Lyndsaye, late Major General, and Governor of Jamaica.

Probably, nay certainly, I should still have been of the same opinion, and have gone down to my grave holding it, but for this triple discovery, this letting in of light upon a subject that I had agreed upon with myself to bury out of sight.

My friend Zartway at Blackheath, had, at my especial request, lent me for a few days the engraving that had so much interested me on the day that I had last dined with him. I had it taken to my study, and then, on the 15th day of January, 1899, I began my investigations.

It was the letter of old Dame Mahetabel that first claimed my attention.

It had been written evidently to a female friend in London—someone with whom the writer was well acquainted, and who had intimate knowledge of the family and its affairs.

After a few preliminary conventional courtesies, Mrs. Lyndsaye proceeds to tell how in the early morning of a certain day, Henry Lyndsaye, as was his wont, had gone down to the landing-stage, and leaving his clothes thereon, had swam out to a distance of a hundred yards or so from the shore.

Suddenly he was attacked by a huge alligator (twenty feet in length, according to the old lady, but the measurement is open to question) who succeeded in obtaining a partial grip of his left thigh. This, the monster would doubtless have been able to dissever, but for an heroic effort on the part of young Lyndsaye, who contrived to thrust his left arm down the brute's throat, and keep it there, so preventing complete dismemberment.

Despite his agony and terror, the young fellow managed to raise his voice in a piteous cry for help. This was heard by his own personal slave and henchman, Romeo, a gigantic negro, devotedly attached to his young master, and who had come down to the landing stage to look for him.

Romeo at once gave the alarm, and in a few minutes a boat, manned by the faithful "black" and half a dozen whites, friends and sympathisers, put off, and moved out to the spot where, in the semi-darkness, the deadly struggle still continued.

Romeo masterfully assumed the direction of affairs, no man forbidding him.

There is some mysterious, inexplicable force in the look which a negro, a full-blooded negro, casts upon you at times. In the region where Obi prevails this is even the more especially so.

So now. Romeo bent down from his great height, and peered intently and silently into the alligator's small red eyes, upturned as in devilish triumph to his own; the cruel, half-closed snout forming as ugly a picture as could well be of Nature in her most repulsive mood.

Just whispering in the ear of the now almost exhausted man: "Courage! Mass' Harry! Romeo'll do 'um!" the black reached down his long, muscular and naked arm underneath the creatures hinder-part, and with a rapid and powerful swing upwards, literally turned the alligator over on to its back, making it describe a veritable summersault.

Surprise and rage caused a momentary relaxing of the hideous jaws; and before the brute could resume its hold, willing hands had lifted the now inert body of Henry Lyndsaye into the boat.

The document goes on to describe, in quaint phraseology, which I have ventured to transcribe into modern vernacular, how that three physicians took the case in hand, at an expense in fees alone, so says the record, of over £700.

Merely saying that the patient in due course recovered, the writer winds up her statement with a fervent expression of thanks to "the Giver of all Good, for His great mercy in thus protecting an Estimable Young Man, the joy of his Parents and Friends, from the Powers of Evil, and from a Cruel Death."

So much for the letter of Dame Mehetabel Lyndsaye.

Were there no more to be found in it, it would simply be an ordinary or extraordinary story of perilous adventure, describable in a few brief sentences, and needing but little comment.

But as will presently be seen, the alligator story was a detail merely, a first brick in the building up of a "palace of fortune," which but for it, would probably never have been realised as being even possible.

Romeo, the Romeo of the third generation, was the next, and human document for examination.

The old man was in himself remarkable, inasmuch as he was just upon a hundred years old, and remembered things, in their way every whit as extraordinary as were the reminiscent revelations relating to the Lyndsayes, of his father, the second Romeo, when the century was young.

His first statement was—to me at any rate—startling. I already knew that Henry Lyndsaye had disappeared, but that he had done so immediately after his restoration to health I was altogether ignorant of.

The suggestion of my Romeo's father, that the young heir had been spirited away at the instance, and with the active connivance of Jasper, the second son, placed the latter's conduct in anything but a favourable light. That he hoped thereby to supplant his brother, and so grasp the greater portion of the wealth designed for the eldest born is certain, while it was as certain that he was quite unaware of the existence of the will, which completely disinherited him, and which gave as a reason the evil course of his life from boyhood upward.

Anyway Henry vanished, and from the day that he did so, never was seen again.

Every now and then rumour would assert him to be alive and well—somewhere, but where, rumour said not, with its usual brave vagueness, not condescending to detail. It was idle, general gossip, as worthless as it was unauthorised.

Then the General died, and there being no living representative of Henry Lyndsaye to be found, the property, as has been stated, was thrown into Chancery, there to accumulate if no claim was established to it, for the sole use and benefit of the Government in time of stress or emergency.

Could legal proof of Henry's death have been obtainable, then the next heir would naturally have succeeded; but such was not forthcoming (as I believe, providentially in order that villainy might not reap its unjust reward,

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and that after many days, right might reign) and so, the law being unsatisfied without it, and there being no prospect of its production in the near future, all interested had to be content as far as in them lay.

My own father, a moody, reserved man, and who never at any time educated me in the family history, kept religiously out of sight (that is, out of my sight) anything and everything that would have fostered in me the spirit of curiosity. It was only, indeed, when old Romeo, by certain things he told me, made me to see my position in almost its right light, that I at last suspected myself to be the real descendant of the Henry Lyndsaye aforesaid.

Romeo, who, when I met him in Southampton, had but just been discharged from the Hants County Hospital as an incurable pulmonary case, said that he recollected once how that his father had told him of a suspicion he had that Master Henry would be found in a certain little town in Holland, where, for some reason best known to himself, he lived secluded and alone, and where he, without doubt, ultimately died. Why he did this, why even he went there at all, is a mystery, of which no man knows the solution, or ever will know in this dispensation. How Romeo number two got the idea of Henry Lyndsaye's Dutch residence into his head it is hard to say. My own theory is that he had had a secret communication from his old master himself, and so had not a suspicion merely, but an absolute knowledge on the point.

Wasting no time I started that night for Amsterdam, and by noon the next day after my arrival was prosecuting inquiries in the office of the genial little notary of a village not a hundred miles from the "Palace in the Wood." It was the last thread I was gathering up, the last link I was forging.

Meinherr Schundel over convinced that I was the man I claimed to be, produced a mass of documentary evidence, left him, with the notarial business, by his late father, and to the latter by the grandfather of the firm's present representative, said papers having been deposited by Henry Lyndsaye some years before his death, the Meinherr Schundel of that day being the exile's legal adviser, and, indeed, only friend. In him he had confided, and when he died left him executor to his testamentary wishes.

Among the papers was one added by Schundel, which had it been produced earlier would materially have affected individual lives and fortunes, the certificate of Henry's death.

As a legal necessity, it was of course, now of no value, as no Court in the world would in 1899 dispute the fact of the death of the man born about 1740.

Once and for ever then, it was established that I, Henry Calthorpe Lyndsaye was the true and only living descendant of the Henry Lyndsaye, who, in the year 1760, experienced so terrible an adventure off St. Annes, Port Royal, Jamaica. "Never despise the day of small things," so says the proverb, it is homely but wise.

For me it has a more than ordinary significance, and when I think as I often do now-a-days, of how the casual unearthing of a long-forgotten letter set the ball a-rolling, which will, so my legal advisers inform me, result in the course of a few months, in my undisputed accession to a princely fortune, I am more than ever disposed to echo the sentiment, and to look upon nothing in this world as being too small for consideration and respect.

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BIG JACK'S OUTBREAK.

. . A Convict Story. . .

THERE were those who said that convict 1280 was innocent of the crime which sent him to prison for such a long term of years that there was scarce a hope of his ever being a free man again. They meant that he was technically guilty. He had sought to save a woman from a beating at the hands of her husband, and in the struggles and excitement he had struck a blow which caused the death of the man. It was an accident in a sense, but it was also manslaughter.

"Big Jack," as the convict was sometimes referred to, was like most big men—a child in his gentleness and good nature. He went to prison weeping. He did not complain, but he grieved. He thought of the years and years which must drag away before the prison doors would open to him, and he moved about like a weak old man.

The prison officials felt to pity him, but a convict is a convict and all must be treated alike—all who show obedience to the rules. They sized him up as child-like and good-natured, and yet they said to each other as they talked of him:

"Look out for Big Jack. He will break loose some day and do some desperate thing."

They thought it would come during the first six months of his term. Then during his second. Then they almost became afraid of him. Men who are slow to anger—who go on grieving, brooding, and bearing a mental burden for weeks and months—are devils when the climax comes.

Big Jack had the management of the trip hammer in the machine shop. Had they put him in the shoe shop or tailor shop he would have rebelled at once. His place was beside the biggest piece of machinery in the shops—two pieces of machinery as it were—"Jack and Trip."

Day by day, week by week, and month by month the ponderous hammer rose and fell, and its blows shook the very earth for yards around, making the convict smile and look proud.

The guards had an eye on him, and kept saying to each other:

"It will come. It is only delayed. When he breaks loose he will kill somebody and have to be killed in turn."

Nearly half of the second year had passed and the giant convict had never even sulked, when one day there came into the shop as sightseers a husband, wife, and little girl four or five years old. Children are seldom seen in prisons, and it is a rare thing that they are taken into the shops in the yards.

If anyone in that prison knew that convict 1280 had a daughter—a fair-haired, handsome child, who could only walk alone when the jury pronounced his verdict of "guilty"—he had forgotten the fact. His wife had visited him as often as visitors were allowed, but the child had never been seen within the grim walls.

Knowing that her husband had killed a man by accident, the wife could bear to see him wearing the horrible stripes of a convict, but to let the child look upon him, to gaze in wonder at the iron bars, to ask why all those men were there—a thousand times no! And so this was the first child Big Jack had seen since the heavy door shut him in.

Father, mother, and child came close to him and gazed at the ponderous hammer with wondering eyes. You would have argued that the sight of the child would have softened the convict's heart and brought tears to his eyes, but it did not. It brought a feeling of madness, of desperation, of frenzy.

To save a woman from a brutal beating at the hands of a drunken, worthless thing not fit to be classed with men, he had struck a blow. A jury had called it murder in the second degree, and he was here in prison on a sentence almost never ending. He had been wronged, and the knowledge of it fired his heart and brought the long-expected outbreak.

With a sudden cry that startled everyone in the noisy shop, Big Jack made a spring forward, seized the child in his arms, and there was a shout of defiance on his lips as he held her at arm's length and glared about him. The mother of the child gasped for breath and staggered back to the wall and sunk down. The father stood staring, as if struck dumb, but presently held out his hands in silent supplication.

Big Jack glowered and muttered a reply. He was a convict—a childless father. He was dead to his child; she was dead to him. He could not make another father's heart ache and throb as his did, but he would secure revenge.

After muttering he was silent. No one cried out. Guards and convicts were seemingly stupified. There was the hum of machinery but not of voices. Convicts turned from forge and anvil and bench and lathe and held their breath. The two shop guards leaned forward in their chairs and looked and looked, but they did not move or cry out.

What will he do with the child?

The two men working at the trip hammer with Big Jack had fallen back. He had control of the machinery which worked it. The answer to the question could be read in his eyes. Men had wronged him under cover of the law. He had been deprived of liberty, degraded, and disgraced.

Death were more merciful than such a sentence as his, and in dying he would secure revenge. A piece of metal had been left under the hammer. There was the sound of "crash! crash! crash!" as the mass of iron rose and fell at regular intervals—the sound above the monotonous hum of the machinery.

"He will thrust her under the hammer!"

So thought each guard and each convict. So thought the father, whose feet seemed chained to the floor and whose face was whiter than the dead. One of the guards could have touched a button and signalled the engineer to shut off steam, but he did not move a hand. Either guard had a fair mark to shoot at, but their pistols were not lifted.

Up and down, up and down went the hammer, but suddenly the belt was thrown over on the loose pulley and the mass rested on the anvil. It seemed to those who looked as if they had been looking through a mist, such a mist as rises from the earth of a summer's morning. It seemed to them that this mist thinned out, cleared away before the influence of a rising sun, and by and by they saw the child nestling on Big Jack's hairy breast, one hand smoothing his cheek, and, seeming to come from a long distance off, they heard her childish voice saying:

"No, you wouldn't hurt Nellie—you wouldn't hurt Nellie! What makes you cry? Have you a little girl, too? Won't they let you go home and see your little girl?"

And the convicts advanced step by step, and the guards crept forward, and lo! Big Jack's tears were falling, and he hugged the child more tightly and kissed her hair and rosy cheek. There was silence yet—silence as he walked to and fro and wept and kissed and lifted the child till she could clasp her tiny arms about his neck and rest her cheek against his. Not a whisper among the convicts—not a move from father or mother or the guards.

By and by Big Jack placed the child in her father's arms, wiped the tears from his eyes on his striped jacket, and with a "God bless the little darling!" and a "Thank ye, sir!" he returned to his work, and the hammer was lifted and held in waiting for the hot iron to be placed on the anvil beneath.

The guards motioned for the other convicts to go back to their benches and forges, and a minute later the visitors had gone, and work was in full blast. The long-expected outbreak had come and gone.

A POINT OF HONOUR.

THE military-police patrol was out.

It was on the stroke of "eleven," and Knightsbridge, where the 'buses stop just opposite Lord Strathnairn's equestrian statue, was lively, as it always is at this time of night. The "patrol" consisted of two privates and a sergeant.

According to custom, they visited, one after another, the various public-houses in the neighbourhood in search of "defaulters."

One establishment, especially, appeared to have more than the usual official attraction for them, through its several entrances the "guard" successively passed, making a searching round of each crowded compartment (it was Saturday night), but without meeting with that for which they were evidently and particularly looking.

This operation was repeated two or three times, but with the same result.

"Ain't 'ere," said Private Tom Jones to his mate, as the three came out on to the wet, greasy pavement for the last time. "Where to, Sergeant?"

Sergeant Halliwell did not reply for the moment.

Puzzled, and vexed at his non-success, he was inclined to be a bit irritable.

"Down Sloane Street," he at length growled, and down Sloane Street the trio accordingly moved at a slow walking pace.

The two privates kept up a low-voiced conversation, the sergeant following at their heels in dignified, if somewhat sulky silence.

"Rum 'e wasn't in the 'Clock House,'" said Tom Jones, "they says as she always meets 'im there about this time."

"She! Who?" queried Private Wallis.

"Why, I dunno; some says as it's 'is missus, as 'e spliced 'off the strength'; an' some says as it's 'is sister, but that's gammon; you don't give up yer walk-out every time to yer sister, does yer? 'Tain't likely!"

"No," replied Wallis, "'tain't likely. I'll bet it's 'is missus."

"Well, it may be or it mayn't," said the other, "the p'int is where's 'e now? It's rum as 'e shouldn't be there to-night, jest when 'e's wanted so badly, ain't it?"

"I suppose it's right as 'e oughtn't to 'ave bin out to-night?" asked Wallis.

"'Course not; 'e's under fourteen days 'C.B.' Desertion, that's wot it amounts to," said Tom Jones, a trifle sententiously.

"Well, I 'opes as we don't spot 'im," said Wallis, forgetting caution, and speaking rather more loudly than was prudent.

"Oh! you do, do you?" snapped the sergeant from behind. "If I hear anything like that again, you'll toe the mark in the orderly-room to-morrow morning, Private Wallis, and don't you forget it. Shut up both of you, and keep your lamps trimmed."

The delinquents drew themselves up to "attention," grips their "swaggers" tighter, and at once became "wooden" men in obedience to order.

Private Harold Daubigny was a "gentleman ranker;" one, too, of the most pronounced of the class.

Of course he was a failure (they most of them are, socially, that is), a failure of the sort that seldom or never gets head above water.

The thing that specially led to his applying for "Her Majesty's shilling" was reprehensible, certainly, though not particularly "out and out." It was on this wise.

Harold Daubigny was the heir-presumptive to one of the oldest baronetcies in the kingdom; being next in succession to his elder brother, a sickly man whose days were nearly numbered.

His father had been dead these many years, his mother, the late Sir Gaspard's widow, living mostly with her two sons (her only children) at the country seat of the family in Kent.

Rare visits to London broke the monotony of life at Tower Crecy, the most perfect of all the many beautiful historic houses in the garden county, or, for the matter of that, in Great Britain.

The Tower Crecy estate had come into the family by marriage in Queen Anne's time, the lady whose dower it was having been a noble ward of the Crown, and a "Lady of the Bedchamber" to Marlborough's Royal mistress.

It was her wealth that had turned a poor family into a rich one. The first holder of the title, one of James I.'s batch of baronets, having been near of kin to the traditionary church mouse.

Now, young Harold, the hero of this little true history, had in him but a very small share, if any, of the family "cuteness." He was all for pleasure; the passing hour, and how to lounge it away; the sunny side of life, and how to secure it; for these objects, and these alone, he existed and schemed.

But time-killing is a costly pursuit, that sooner or later lands the individual in either the Bankruptcy Court or in that which is every whit as bad the slough of social ostracism.

Persuade your best friend to read "The Golden Dwarf."

The latter is always the most unpleasant, for the reason that "Society" is ruthless, and never forgets.

His money gone—wasted; his reversionary interests mortgaged up to the hilt, and in some instances sold outright, there was but one end possible to it all.

His mother, who worshipped him (it is ever the scapegrace who gets the mother-bestowed "Benjamin's mess"); had pleaded day and night long almost, but without avail.

The bit once between his teeth, he would not be restrained; was soon far beyond the reach of remonstrance and control.

Still, he was not all bad. Once face to face with the end of the tether, he, like the prodigal of old, came to himself, and to his right mind, a feeling of intense self-shame swept over him, and—he fled.

A visit to the recruiting depôt at St. George's Barracks; a brief interview with a complaisant sergeant-major of the Foot Guards; a rapid, but satisfactory medical examination, and magisterial attestation, and Harol Daubigny passed out of his own "set," into the society of Tommy Atkins.

All this happened eighteen months or more before the period of the episode in his career herein related.

Officers, it is well known, have a rooted dislike to the "gentleman ranker," and for obvious reasons.

Harold Daubigny was no exception to the rule, for his high spirit, his aristocratic contempt for authority, and his reckless disregard of discipline, both moral and military, brought him into frequent and unpleasant collision with the "powers that were."

It seems that three days before the night initially referred to, he had been sentenced to "Confinement to barracks" for fourteen days for insubordinate conduct on parade.

Early in the evening in question he had been missed; and as his haunts and habits were at least more than suspected, the ordinary street "patrol" were instructed to keep a special look-out for him.

It was known that that morning he had received a letter which had appeared to considerably disturb him.

All through the day his comrades had observed that he was uneasy, and more than usually irritable, although there was no official suspicion that he would attempt to "break barracks."

It was therefore thought that there might possibly be a connection of some sort between the letter and his escapade. Anyway, it was technical desertion, and as such, must be promptly punished.

All very well, but the cooking of the hare must, undoubtedly be preceded by its capture.

So with Harold. The cooks were ready; but of the hare not a sign was to be seen or heard.

In one way this was not surprising, as his real name was unknown in the regiment, he having enlisted in the name of Henry Shaw.

Still, the military authorities thought he ought to be found (they never admit the possibility of failure in their subordinates) and "combed" unmercifully the unfortunate patrol sergeant for not finding him.

* * * * *

"Tower Crecy" is a landmark for miles; the central keep with its flagstaff and machicolated battlements rising well above the wooded land surrounding the buildings on every side.

The village of the same name nestles near the gates, forming, with its noble neighbour, a charmingly picturesque example of bygone simplicity and grandeur.

Up the long, dusty road from Canningford station, in the dim dawn of the winter's morning, trudged a figure, clad in a long ulster and a golf cap.

A quarter of an hour later, and the lodge-keeper saw the same man pass rapidly through, and along the drive leading to the house.

There was not time to stop him, and enquire his business, even had she been able for the stranger was energetic, and the lodge-keeper old and rheumatic.

"Go round to the back. You've no bus——"

"Get out, Byles. I'm going up to my mother's room. Is Miss Cicely there?"

"I beg pardon, Mr. Harold. I didn't know——"

"Never mind that. Answer my question."

"Yes, sir, Miss Cicely has just gone up to my lady's room. Can I get you any——"

With a bound, Harold was past the butler, and in a moment was at the door of his mother's room.

What should he see? He was afraid, this "six-feet-three" guardsman, to face the possibility of death.

Then, while he hesitated, the door gently opened, and his cousin Cicely, the adopted daughter of the house, stood in the entrance way.

Harold's cap had fallen off, disclosing his fair, curly head, while his outer coat, now unbuttoned, revealed beneath it "Her Majesty's scarlet."

"Harold! You had my letter, then? Hush! Come in and close the door. See, you are only just in time."

It was not a cry; it was a wail of bitter remorse and anguish.

"Mother!"

The big fellow dropped on his knees by the bed and buried his face in the coverlet, the sobs, which shook him from head to foot, making the very room to tremble.

Presently a thin, white hand stole out from above him, and sought his head. Cicely saw it and went out, leaving the mother and son together.

No one knows what passed within that death-chamber, only that when Cicely returned a little later she found the dead mother with her hand still upon her boy's head as if invoking a blessing.

* * * * *

The morning after the funeral a soldier passed through the gate of Wellington Barracks to be immediately challenged by the sergeant of the guard.

When brought before the Colonel, he was asked what he had to say in his own defence.

"Not much, sir. Just this. I broke my mother's heart—God forgive me! and—I have just returned from her grave side."

"Yes, very sad, no doubt, but you should know that the true point of honour is to be faithful to your colours."

"Colonel, I'd fight for King and country like a devil! but the point of honour with me being a last look of the face of the mother, whose life I had made to be one long sorrow. I have only to say that I don't regret it, and would do the same again if I had to be shot for it!"

* * * * * *

Punished, of course he was, but he had gained a place in the estimation, both of his officers and of his comrades, that as long as he wears uniform (and he has no intention of quitting soldiering) he will not readily lose.

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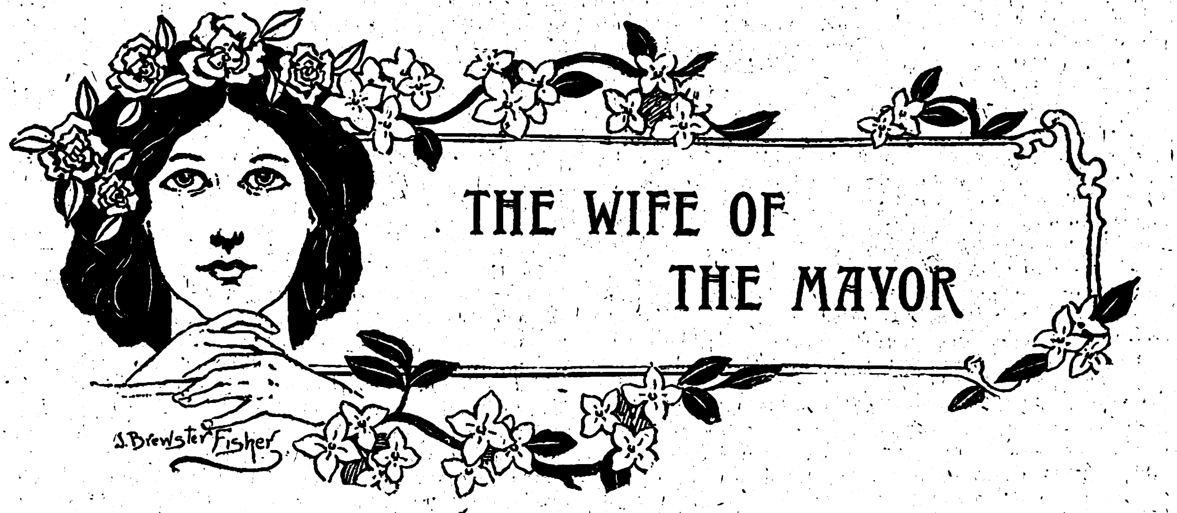


THE WIFE OF THE MAYOR

CHAPTER I.

When the Mayor of Uptown Station lost his mother bets were freely taken in the township as to whether he would marry.

Everybody knew that he had made up his mind to remain single as long as the old lady, who idolised him, was alive. It was just like his unselfish good nature. Now that she was gone, we were on the tip-toe of expectation to find out how great his sacrifice had been. We were all romantic in Uptown Station, and the chance of discovering a hidden love story in the history of Tom Carwithen made the whole settlement excited.

I was one of the unfortunate people who gave long odds that the Mayor would marry within a year, and I lost twenty pounds over the business.

For the year went by, and no sign of a romance peeped out in the life of Tom Carwithen, the most popular man in Uptown Station.

I felt quite aggrieved about it, and told him he ought to pay me over twenty pounds.

Carwithen laughed.

"I am awfully sorry," he said, "but who was I to marry?"

"Why surely you used to be in love once, in the old country; perhaps before you came out here?"

"I don't remember ever experiencing the sensation!"

"On your honour?"

"On my honour!"

I knew then that Tom Carwithen was, for a man of thirty, a phenomenon. For there was no doubting the word of our Mayor, who had been elected again, as usual. When he solemnly said a thing, you might take it for gospel.

I was startled to hear, therefore, not three months after this declaration of his, that Tom Carwithen was going to marry a lady from England. Old Lamont, the store-keeper, gave me the news. He and Carwithen had emigrated together from the same town, and he happened to know the girl.

"Belle Aruth and Tom were playfellows together in York," said Lamont over his counter, beaming with the satisfied consciousness that he was the best informed man in the place on a subject of such popular interest. "I remember seeing them playing together there about twenty years ago now. She'd be five or six, and he a year or two older. Old Aruth had a shop in Coney Street—cornchandler's or something—and when Tom's father died, he took an interest in the lad and took him on, first as errand boy and then as shop boy. He was the making of him, Carwithen always says. You've heard him talk about old Aruth?"

"Yes, but I never knew he had a daughter."

"And I never thought Tom cared for her. I suppose she wouldn't marry, like him, while her old people wanted looking after. Old Aruth is just dead, I believe."

"Well, old Aruth has robbed me of twenty pounds, by not dying a little sooner," I said. "I shall want a little explanation from Tom Carwithen concerning this, and I went straight to the Mayor's big house to demand it."

"Look here, Carwithen," I said, "you told me you had never been in love!"

The Mayor appeared rather worried, I thought. He looked up almost angrily.

"Well?"

"And you were waiting all the while to marry your boy-love, as soon as the coast was clear. It seems to me, old man, the nearest thing to a lie I've ever heard from you, and six years we've been chums together."

The Mayor pushed me his cigar box.

"Lamont told you, I suppose?"

"Yes; did you tell him?"

"No, he got it from friends in York. But it is true enough that I am going to marry Miss Aruth. I guess Lamont has spread it all over the township by now!"

"He is doing solid business in that direction. The only thing that made me think his news was wrong was the talk we had a month or two ago."

"When I said I had never been in love?"

I nodded.

"Well it was true enough."

"But you haven't had much chance of forming an attachment since then?"

The Mayor puffed steadily at his cigar.

"Well, I suppose I had better tell you the truth of the matter," he said, after a few minutes' pause, during which I suppose he had been considering the question. "You can let out a little, judiciously, to the boys, too, or else they'll be looking at me and my marriage in far too romantic a light, which would make it unpleasant for both of us. The truth is that my marriage to Miss Aruth is not the result of an old love affair exactly. We were always good friends, and I never thought of marrying Belle till her father died. I owe everything I am or have to that man, you know. When he died, a few months ago, he left nothing behind him, and he wrote to me almost in his last moments, begging me to see that his daughter did not want. He was unable to make any provision for her, and she had no friends, unless I would prove myself one. Of course, there wasn't a moment's question on the score."

"Yes, but seeing that a girl does not want does not necessarily imply that you must marry her," I said, feeling a good deal disappointed to find that good Tom Carwithen seemed as intent on self-sacrifice as ever.

Tom took a puff at his Havana.

"If you think the thing out, you'll see that it does imply marrying," he said deliberately; "it is the only satisfactory way of doing it. At any rate, I thought so and wrote back at once, and asked Miss Aruth if she would come out here and be Mayoress. I did not, of course, pretend to be in love. I said we had always been good friends, and had no doubt we should make each other happier."

"And she accepted promptly?" I interrupted.

"She wrote me a very nice letter by return, thanking me, and saying she would come out if I wished it, and marry me. She arrives in three weeks time, by the *White Lion*. I shall meet her of course at Melbourne."

"Very promptly arranged," I said whistling. "I hope you'll like it old man."

"Thanks. So do I," said Tom gloomily, with the ghost of a twinkle in his eye, all the same. Then he got up and laid his hand on my arm. "Look here, old fellow," he said earnestly, "I've been telling things to you to-night, that I wouldn't tell anybody else in the world. I feel a mean sneak telling you, but I felt I must have a little real sympathy from someone; and I want you to spread an impression—I would rather hang myself than let you tell the boys I am marrying like I am——"

"From generosity," I interposed.

"Well, call it what you like; but you must not tell anybody. Only, you might spread it round that my marriage is more or less a business arrangement. I could not stand everybody getting romantic over it, nor, I am sure, would Miss Aruth like it."

"All right old man; you may depend upon me giving the exact impression," I said; and I set about doing it at once.

But I found it pretty hard work toning down the enthusiasm of Uptown Station over the marriage of their Mayor. They began right away, making presentations, and arrangements for public celebrations on a big scale. There was no restraining their exuberance. The township had come to the conclusion that the occasion called for a grand effort, and it rose to the performance of its duty like a man. It was only by argument that the Mayor was allowed to go to Melbourne alone to meet his bride-elect. The popular wish was to send the whole town council with him, in full civic dress —and we boasted some remarkable civic dresses at Uptown Station—to receive Miss Aruth in a manner befitting her future position as wife of our popular Mayor. I voted dead against it, of course; but it was only with the greatest difficulty that Carwithen got off by himself, and the disappointed council set to work at once, running up elaborate triumphal arches for his return.

CHAPTER II.

THE *White Lion* was expected to arrive on a Sunday. Carwithen was to meet the lady on board, conduct her to her hotel, and bring her next day to Uptown Station, where the wedding was to take place on the same afternoon, with all the pomp and glory that the township could think of. Everybody was wild with excitement to see the happy woman who had secured Carwithen and when on the Monday the couple arrived, they found the decorated streets full of people. I suppose every able-bodied person in Uptown station was in the crowd which followed Carwithen and his bride-elect under the triumphal arches and bedecked clothes-lines from the station to the hotel, where they rested, and from the hotel to the church. At the hotel I had to give an address of welcome on behalf of the town, to the lady, and a very good opportunity of forming an opinion on her charms,

On the whole it was a very favourable one. Her hair was of a shade which I had always associated in my mind with hair-dye; and even under her veil, her black eyebrows lent support to the idea that she understood cosmetics; but there was something very sweet and girlish in her voice, manner and figure, which won my admiration at once, and knocked 75 per cent. off the feeling of pity with which I had been regarding poor Carwithen. Old Lamont had privately told me—and everybody else in the township—that Miss Aruth was no beauty. From his remembrance of her, and a description which his York friends had sent, he had managed to conjure up in my mind the image of a bony and masculine person, with a large nose and a cast in her eye.

The lady to whom I had to present the address of welcome formed a very pleasing contrast to this imaginary personage. Perhaps it was the contrast and surprise which made me fall in love with her at sight—as much in love that is, as a man may honestly be with the wife of his chum.

When the ceremony at church was over and I got the opportunity of speaking to old Lamont, I took him to task roundly for spreading such a misleading description of our future mayoress throughout the township. I did not speak quite as severely as I had intended to do, however, because I found a score of men at him on the same point.

"My dear friend," said Lamont smiling blandly, and addressing himself to me as the latest opponent, "allow me to explain. It was desirable, wasn't it, that the lady should creat a favourable impression when she arrived? You agree. Well, if I had accurately described all her charms, you might all have been a little disappointed at the reality. Instead of saying, 'What a charming figure!' you would have grumbled that she dyed her hair"—Lamont had evidently the same opinion as myself about the bride's golden tresses—"now you are all pleased, because she is better instead of worse than what you expected."

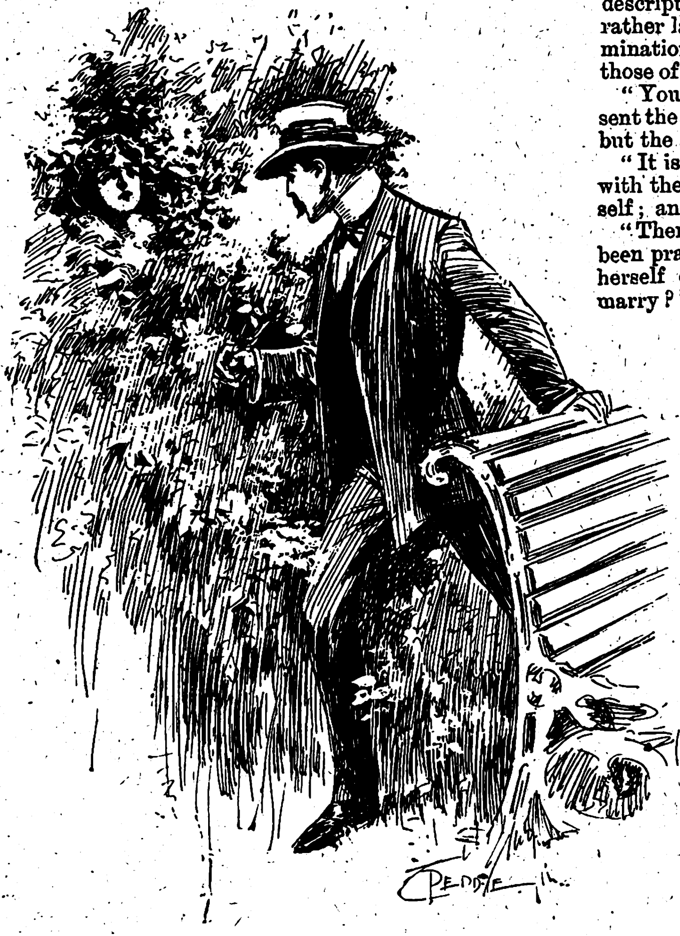
There was a grand guffaw at this piece of worldly wisdom on the old storekeeper's part, and the score of men went away apparently satisfied. But I knew

Lamont better than they, and put my arm in his as we marched off to the wedding feast at the town hall.

"Look here, Lamont," I said, "your explanation is good enough for men who don't know you, but I'll eat my hat if you weren't in earnest when you described Miss Aruth as a gawky fright, with dull black hair and a squint."

"That is so," said Lamont.

"Then how do you account for the transformation?"



"She was crouching there among the shrubs where she had been hiding ever since her escape from the hotel."

"Hush," said my companion, dropping his own voice to almost a whisper; "I am as puzzled as you, my boy, and a good deal more so, although I did not care to tell the other fellows. As you say, I was in dead earnest when I described Carwithen's girl; and I'll eat a whole hat-shop if the woman Tom married just now is Belle Aruth, of York. Why, I remember that girl as well as I remember anybody. I saw her when I went my trip home, five years ago, and she had black hair, a squint, and a bottle nose. It was certainly five years ago, and she may have changed a little in the time, and, of course, a woman can do a good deal with cosmetics; but my sister in York sent me a full description of her and a photograph, and they both make her out just the woman Belle Aruth would grow into. We have plenty of time before we begin; come in and see the photograph."

We were passing his store, as he spoke, and I followed him inside and upstairs to his parlour, thoroughly interested in the old man's bewilderment. The photograph did not make Miss Aruth quite so plain as his description. The squint was only a slight one, and the rather large nose gave character to a face full of determination. But the face and figure were certainly not those of the lady who had just been married.

"Your friends in York must have made a mistake and sent the portrait of the wrong personage?" I suggested; but the storekeeper shook his head.

"It is impossible. My sister lives in the same street with the Aruth's and got the news from the girls herself; and besides, I saw her myself only five years ago."

"Then, what do you think? Has some adventuress been practising a fraud on poor Carwithen, and passed herself off to him as the woman he had agreed to marry?"

"Tom does not suffer if she has," said Lamont, energetically. He was evidently prejudiced against Miss Aruth.

"And what do you propose doing?" I asked next.

The storekeeper threw the photo into the fire.

"Nothing!" he said, promptly. "Whoever this lady may be, Tom Carwithen has married her, and if you can judge anything by appearances, she will make him a better wife than the *bona-fide* Belle. If he has been cheated, I am not going to open his eyes. If he knows what he is about, I don't want to interfere with his affairs. Trouble enough to mind my own. Come along. We must not be late, as we have both healths to propose."

"But you have been showing that photo all round the place, haven't you?" I said, as we passed through the store again, on our way out. "How shall you explain the photo?"

"As you heard me just after the wedding. It was a happy idea of mine, and will satisfy most people, I think. The rest will have to remain unsatisfied."

CHAPTER III.

I cannot deny that Lamont's assurances made me very uneasy. It seemed impossible that he could be mistaken. Besides, I had heard from Tom Carwithen himself that Miss Aruth's age was only a few years less than his own, and the lady with whom he had gone through the ceremony of marriage looked scarcely twenty. I wished that I could feel as satisfied as the old storekeeper about my duty in the matter, and be content to let things take their course without my interference. But I could feel none of Lamont's confidence. Was it a friendly thing to do, I kept asking myself, if my chum had been cheated, to stand by and give him no enlightenment?

If the sweet-faced woman, who had taken my fancy so, was proved to have married the Mayor by passing

Persuade your best friend to read "The Golden Dwarf."

herself off as another woman, under that other woman's name, surely the marriage was not a legal one, and could easily be annulled. If I had not heard such an unfavourable opinion of the real Miss Aruth, I should not have hesitated to tell Carwithen all I knew. But from all I heard, I thought the Mayor might come off worse by keeping himself free for that young lady than by sticking to the fair pretender, whose appearance had certainly prepossessed me in her favour. So I let the day go by and said nothing, behaving at the wedding feast in the Town Hall as if everything was as it should be.

It was not a very merry business, however, in spite of the labour and expense which the town had expended on it. The bridegroom seemed to make himself gay by an effort, and Mrs. Carwithen was pale and nervous throughout the whole affair. I, for one, was devoutly pleased when it was all over, and I was left free to go home and wonder what on earth I ought to do.

I was foolish enough to go on wondering after I went to bed, with the result that I did not get a wink of sleep all night, which I might not have regretted if I had found myself any nearer a solution of the question in the morning, but I was as far away as ever.

You may guess how glad I was, then, when Jack Elliott dropped in to breakfast.

Elliott was the very man of all others whom I would have chosen to consult over poor Carwithen's business. He was as much the Mayor's friend as I was, and he could see further through a mystery than most men; as he ought to do, seeing that he was Chief of the Melbourne police. The Mayor's influence—and his own abilities—had secured him the post when he left Uptown Station.

He had coolly given my housekeeper orders to bring in double breakfast, and was calmly attacking the meal when I came down, all the worse for my sleepless night. It would have surprised me to see any other man, whom I had imagined 200 miles away, sitting at my table, but nothing surprised me about Jack Elliott. It was just like him—pouncing upon a fellow whom he had not seen for a year, and nodding coolly, as if he had met him an hour before.

I had learnt the Chief's way, and acknowledged his presence with nothing more than a smile and a nod till I had cracked my egg. Then I ventured to remark:

"Down here on business?"

Elliott took a sip of coffee.

"Partly," he said. "I am having a holiday, but there is an interesting little case which I am looking after at the same time, just to pass the time."

"A fraud?" I asked.

"A murder. You have heard of it, of course—the murder at Lean's Hotel?"

"Oh! yes it was in the papers. A rich Melbourne man was murdered in his bedroom at the hotel, by a woman, whose acquaintance he had made. She escaped."

"Exactly so. I mean to find her. After finding out a little of her history, I marked down six places she might try to reach. I shall take a little holiday tour through the lot."

"And has Uptown Station the honour of coming first?" I asked.

"No; it is not on the list. I just came here on the way to see you and old Carwithen. Is he all right?"

"Is it possible you have not heard?"

"What?"

"That he is married."

"Gracious! No! What has he done with his mother, then?"

"Buried her! You are more than a year behind date."

"Yes, that is the worst of forswearing friendly correspondence and newspapers. They both interfere with business. But to whom has Tom given the best husband in the market?"

Whereupon I told him the whole story.

"Oh! yes," he said, when I had finished, "it sounds as though there may be something interesting in it. I'll find out who the lady is. And, meanwhile, you had better say nothing about it to Carwithen. If I am lucky, I'll give you his wife's genealogy in full to-morrow. Meanwhile, I may as well have a look round at her, if she is in town still."

"Yes. They are having no honeymoon. Carwithen is too busy, he says."

"Then I will call. You may expect me to-morrow to supper."

And till supper-time next day I did not catch a glimpse of my friend, the Melbourne policeman.

He came in with his usual air of expressionless calm, just as the meal was ready, and nodded to me as he sat down in his chair at the other side of the table.

"Well, have you discovered anything?" I asked, eagerly, when he was seated.

Elliott nodded.

"Is it Miss Aruth that Tom has married?"

"No."

"Who on earth is she then?"

Jack Elliott looked straight across at me.

"She is a Miss Dorothy West—the woman who murdered Mr. Langley five days ago at Lean's Hotel."

I started up from my chair.

"What! the woman you are searching for?"

Elliott nodded.

"And Tom Carwithen has married her?"

"It appears so."

I burst out laughing.

"Why, man, it is impossible!"

"It is perfectly true," said the policeman. "I recognised her directly I saw her, from a photograph I have with me. But, of course, I made quite sure before telling you. I was in Carwithen's house less than an hour ago, ransacking the place for any stray belongings of the lady. I did not find any, though. Didn't it occur to anybody here that 'Mrs. Carwithen' didn't bring a scrap of luggage with her?"

I had given no thought to the matter, and said so.

"Not a scrap," repeated Elliott. "They are buying everything here, or ordering it from Melbourne. Tom sent off five letters to-day to different firms. Mrs. C. did not even bring a handbag with her. I had to wait till she came home, and to pick her pocket, while I was talking to Tom."

"Pick her pocket? What for?"

"To see the initials on her handkerchief, of course. I was luckier than I expected, for it had her whole name written in the corner—Dorothy West. That is pretty conclusive, eh? And I have other evidence on the point."

"Why, this is terrible!" I said. "Poor old Tom! What are you going to do?"

"Have my supper, if you'll be good enough to carve that fowl," said the Chief of the Melbourne police; and he would not say another word about his startling discovery till he had made an excellent meal.

For my part, the news had taken away any chance of my eating; and I was thankful when my companion pushed back his chair from the table.

"I can never come to a decision when I am hungry," he said. "If you'll hand me the cigar-box, we will think out what to do."

"You will arrest her, I suppose?" I said somewhat regretfully.

I could not forget that Jack was a policeman, and the remembrance of Mrs. Carwithen's sweet face made me feel absolutely sick to think of the position in which she was placed.

Elliott took a puff at his cigar.

"It is not certain that I shall make an arrest," he said. "The affair of the murder at Lean's Hotel is not in my hands, you know. But we must find out how our friend the Mayor really stands. I wonder if he knows who his wife really is?"

"Let us go and ask him," I suggested. "We three ought to act as friends in this matter, Elliott."

And, to my surprise, Elliott agreed with me, and accepted my suggestion.

CHAPTER IV.

It was after ten when we got to the Mayor's, and the servants showed some hesitation about admitting us at that hour. The Mayor usually retired at ten, they said; but when we were finally shown into the drawing-room, Carwithen and his wife were both there. The latter was singing to her husband's accompaniment a pathetic little ballad, which we both knew.

"That is not the voice of a murderess," whispered Elliott, before entering, as we stood in the passage with the servant, waiting till the song should be finished; and I thoroughly agreed with him. For the singer had one of those sweet voices which win our hearts instantly.

The music ceased suddenly. They had evidently heard that slight commotion in the hall, and Tom came to the door of the drawing-room, and pushed back the heavy curtains to see what it was.

"What, Elliott, is that you again?" he said, catching sight of my companion first. "Do you want a bed? I forgot to ask you whether we could put you up, when you were here this afternoon."

He led the way into the room as he spoke, and I was quite startled to see how lovely the woman looked, whom my companion called a murderess. She had changed the travelling dress which she wore at the wedding, for a creamy dressing-gown. I suppose she must have improvised it, if Elliott's news about her luggage was true, but nothing could have suited her more perfectly. She looked in it a lovely, ethereal spirit, as she came towards us slowly from the piano. Perhaps she looked all the more spiritual from the fact that her face was perfectly pale, and her great, dark eyes seemed full of fear; but she spoke and acted quite calmly and with a charming grace which seemed natural to her.

It seemed absolutely absurd to me that we could come to accuse such a beautiful creature of a terrible crime. If I had been alone, I should have lacked confidence to go through with the affair.

But Jack Elliott was not so susceptible to womanly charms as I, perhaps; and in the fewest possible words he told Carwithen—who seemed to get more agitated every moment that we had something important to talk over with him, and should like to be alone.

He apologised gracefully to the lady as she left us together, for disturbing her and her husband at such an hour, and in another moment or two we had Carwithen to ourselves.

I had not the heart to watch his expression, nor that of the lady as she left the room, but now that I happened to catch sight of the Mayor's face, it made me feel quite bad to see how nervous and ill he had grown.

Jack Elliott formed his own deduction from the fact, and said, as soon as the door was shut:

"Well, old man, you seem to know what we have come about?"

"Oh, no. I am quite in the dark," said poor Carwithen, with a feeble attempt to appear at ease.

"It is about your wife, then," said the Chief of the Melbourne police.

"Yes?"

The Mayor's voice plainly trembled.

"Come, it is no use pretending, old man," said Jack, with something of his police manner; and, hating to hear my chum tortured, I put in quickly.

"We have found out that your wife is the Melbourne murderess."

Carwithen showed no shock or surprise.

"She is innocent!" he said, with a dogged defiance in his voice.

"Of course," said Elliott with his police manner again, "but the case looks pretty black against her, and I will admit that I should have arrested her on the spot if it were not for the unaccountable fact that you appear to have married her."

Carwithen seemed to jump hopefully at the "if."

"Oh, yes, I have married her," he said, eagerly coming forward.

"You won't send my wife to prison, Jack?"

It struck me that Elliott was beginning to look a trifle uncomfortable for the first time in my experience of him.

"Sit down, man, and let us talk it over calmly," he said. "I am not likely to forget what I owe you. But I certainly shan't let you make a fool of yourself over this business. Suppose you tell us the whole story from beginning to end? We are both in the dark. Where is the real Miss Aruth? How on earth did you pick up this pretty murder—well suspect? And what possessed you to marry her? If you'll take us into your confidence, we'll do the best we can to make things straight for you. If not, of course, I shall have to take the police view that Miss West—or Mrs. Carwithen—is a murderess, and arrest her."

"For God's sake don't do that," pleaded the Mayor, his whole soul in his voice. "I shall be glad to tell you the story from beginning to end and I don't care if you call me a fool for what I have done, as long as you don't spoil my plans."

"Well, start ahead with the story," said Elliott, looking round for the Mayor's cigar-box.

"I will just go and tell my wife what you have come about, first," said Carwithen. "The truth is bad enough. I did not think anybody would imagine, however great the resemblance, that Dorothy West and my wife were one and the same person. But, to know it is found out, is better than suspense. Will you excuse me for a moment?"

The wife will enjoy "Short Stories." Take it home.

"Certainly," said Elliott, who had taken the matter into his own hands and ignored me; then he added, as the Mayor walked to the door, "Of course, you won't be so silly as to try and spirit the lady away. I assure you it would be very bad policy on your part."

Carwithen conjured up a sickly smile.

"I perceive that perfectly, Jack."

CHAPTER V.

We were both silent while poor Carwithen was out of the room. Elliott discovered the cigar box for which he had been looking lighted one of Tom's Havanas and stretched himself out luxuriously in an easy chair. By the time that he was fairly settled, the Mayor came back looking more haggard than ever. He stood in front of the fire and started his story straight away, He had evidently been arranging it on his way.

"It begins with my going to Melbourne to meet Miss Aruth, whom I had asked to marry me," he said; and Elliott interrupted him.

"Excuse me, you really intended to meet Miss Belle Aruth, and marry her? It was not a blind?"

"Oh, yes, I never dreamed of not meeting or not marrying her, although, as I explained some time ago to our friend here, I did not pretend to be in love with her. I reached Melbourne two days before the *White Lion* was expected, took rooms in the New Hotel, and in order to be quite proper, engaged others at another Hotel for Miss Aruth when she should arrive. The next day I thought I would have a look round the town, which I had not seen for more than three years. I turned into a public park—I forget its name—and sat down on one of the seats to read a Sunday paper, which I had just bought in the street. It contained a full account of the murder at Lean's Hotel. A young lady, found in the room with the corpse, had been accused by the hotel people of being the author of the crime; she had protested her innocence, and in the general excitement over the finding of the body, she had managed to disappear. A rough sketch and a description was given, and the impossibility of her really escaping was enlarged upon. There was a shrubbery behind me, and while I was reading, something made me turn round and look among the bushes. I thought I could see something moving there; and, after taking a look round to see that there were no gardeners or officials about, I took a few steps into the shrubbery to satisfy my awakened curiosity."

"And there you found the suspected woman hiding?" asked Elliott.

"Yes, she was crouching there among the shrubs, where she had been hiding ever since her escape from the hotel. Well, she made no attempt to explain her presence there; she just fell on her knees, begging me to spare her, and not to deliver her up to the police. Then, before I could say anything, she told me she was quite innocent."

"And looked so beautiful that you took her word for it?" said Elliott drily.

"No, Jack. I did not until I had heard her account of it. I made her come out and sit on the seat near me, thinking that would be safer than talking in the shrubbery, and tell me all about it. I will call her and ask her to tell you also, and then you will believe her innocent, as I did."

"Possibly," said Elliott. "But suppose you tell us your story first without troubling Miss West."

"You ought to hear my wife," said Carwithen with a stress on the last word, and he took a step towards the door as if to call her, but Elliott stopped him.

"I shall hear the lady's story with more sympathy, most likely, when I hear what her relationship really is to my friend," he said gravely. "For the present you might give us her statement of the case briefly in your own words."

Carwithen looked unwilling, but he felt, no doubt, that he was in the policeman's hands, and he told us a most remarkable story which the accused woman had given him as an explanation of her position.

According to her own story, Miss Dorothy West was staying a night at Lean's Hotel, before leaving the country on the morrow to seek her fortune as a governess in England. She was quite alone in the world. She was writing till late, and went to bed shortly before midnight. After undressing and blowing out her candle, she discovered that a valuable ring had disappeared from her finger. It was the only memento she retained of her dead father, and the very thought of losing it made her quite miserable. Then, when she tried to recollect where she could have dropped it, or had it stolen, a remembrance flashed back into her mind—as remembrances will do in such cases—of a slight sound she had noticed in coming up the hotel staircase twenty minutes before.

She had stopped a moment then, wondering if she had dropped anything, but seeing nothing in a cursory glance down at the carpet, had proceeded to her room. Now there occurred to her, of course, the hope that the sound had been caused by the falling of her ring, and that the trinket might still be lying on the stairs. If so, of course she ought to secure it before anybody passed. With this intention, the girl slipped on her dressing-gown which she had hung on the door, without re-lighting her candle.

Then she passed out into the empty corridor outside her room, which was lighted dimly by a gasalier at each end, and down the stairs to the spot where she thought she had heard the ring drop. She did not find it, but was obliged to retreat quickly to her room by hearing steps approaching. She ran back hurriedly, afraid of being seen with bare feet and uncoiled hair, and must have gone into the wrong room, where Mr. Langley was already lying murdered.

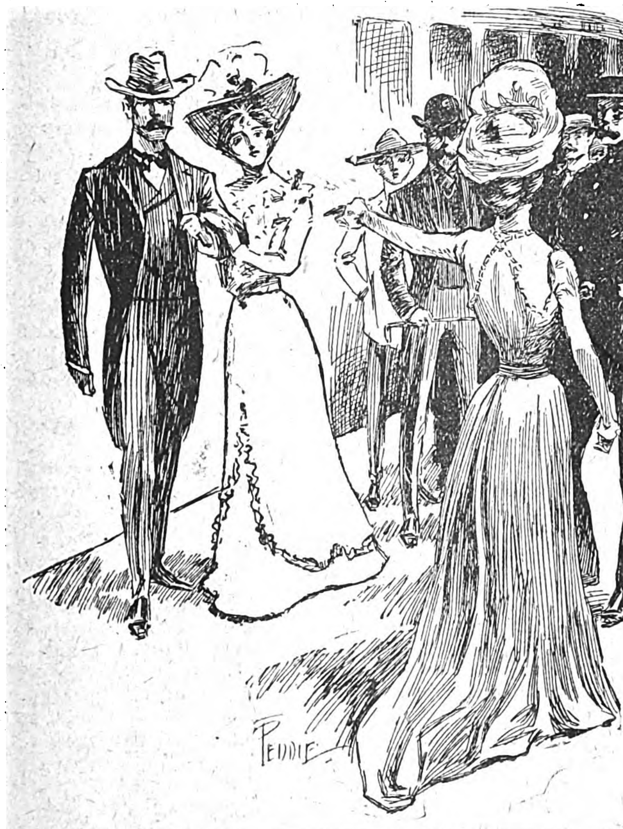
She remembered afterwards feeling the carpet wet under her feet, but was so excited at the time by her hurried flight from the approaching steps, that she did not think anything about it, and she was too frightened to venture out again, even for her father's ring. So she lay panting with her exertions till the steps passed her door, and then after lying awake some time, wondering whether she would get her ring back, she fell asleep, and did not wake till she heard a loud battering at her door in the morning. A servant in passing had seen a tiny stream of blood coming under the mat, and had run to call assistance. At the moment that Miss West awoke the butler forced the lock, and half-a-dozen servants burst into the room. The poor girl wakened suddenly, sat up, rubbing her eyes, and inquiring what this extraordinary commotion meant. For reply, she found everybody pointing dumbly at the foot of the bed.

"Where Mr. Langley lay murdered, I suppose?" said

Jack Elliott, when the Mayor reached this point in his story.

"Yes. He must have been lying there when she entered the room," Carwithen went on. "The poor girl sprang out of bed horror-struck at her position. As she did so, the servants fell away from her, screaming and pointing at her feet. They were stained with blood.

"Well, it was not long, of course, before my wife discovered that she was considered by everybody to have killed the man beside whose corpse she had passed the night. When she realised the impossibility of making anybody believe the true explanation of her presence in his room, she seized an opportunity when she was for a moment unnoticed, to escape from the place before the police who had been summoned had arrived. She took refuge immediately in the park, where I found her, and had remained in that shrubbery hiding. That is my wife's story," Carwithen wound up.



"Why it is the woman who murdered Mr. Langley in Lean's Hotel at Melbourne. Here, policeman, arrest her!"

"Not a bad one," said Jack Elliot, in his dry way. "An exceedingly good one, under the circumstances. The case is certainly interesting."

I thought it was my turn to make a remark.

"You may think what you like, Elliott," I said, "but I, for one, believe that explanation. It is much more easy to believe, than that such a gentle and beautiful woman should commit a terrible crime."

Elliott sniffed and took no further notice of my remark, but poor Carwithen grasped my hand and wrung it.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Chief of the Melbourne police selected another cigar and lighted it.

"We have not heard how you proceeded, Carwithen?" he said, and the Mayor went on with his story.

"I can understand you," he went on, "imagining, from hearing my account of it, that the story was a clever invention; but if you had heard it, as I did, from the lady herself, I am sure you would have believed it. I did, thoroughly, and all my sympathies were aroused for this beautiful, friendless girl, who found herself in such a terrible position."

"So you threw Miss Aruth over, and brought the lady here instead?" said Elliott, with a laugh.

"No," said Carwithen quickly; "wait a moment. I told her to remain in hiding in the park, and promised to return with some disguise or other for her to wear. Then I went into the streets, and bought a ready-made dress and other things—all I could think of that a woman would wear—and took them with me to my seat by the shrubbery. I must have looked rather comical idling around the place with half-a-dozen drapers' packages; but, luckily, nobody seemed to notice me, and our part of the park was quite deserted. All my packages went into the shrubbery—and out came a new young lady, not so badly dressed, either, I flatter myself. She wore a veil, so that her face could not be recognised, and walked out of the park arm-in-arm with me. She left her own clothes in the shrubbery."

"But, unfortunately, brought her handkerchief," put in Elliott. "I suppose you forgot to supply that detail?"

"Yes—we never thought of it."

"I did," said the policeman drily; "that was the most important point in my discovery. But I must congratulate you on the idea of walking together. Of course, everybody was looking for the suspect among unaccompanied girls."

"So I thought," said Carwithen. "So I rooted up still another hotel, and took rooms there for 'Mr. and Mrs. Smith,' and sent for a dressmaker to measure 'Mrs. Smith' for a new dress."

"Good," said the police officer.

"Yes, but the worst of it was that the lady who really should belong to me—Miss Belle Aruth—might turn up at any moment. Her arrival would complicate the affair very much."

"Well?"

"I called at the Steamboat Company's office to hear the latest about the *White Lion's* arrival, and was surprised to find a note waiting for me there. It was from Miss Aruth herself. She had changed her mind and come by the *King of France*, so she had actually been in Australia three days when I reached Melbourne, She left a note to thank me for my kind intentions with reference to her, and to inform me that she had been better suited, and was about to marry a gentleman whom she had met on the way out and who had proposed marriage. It was the coolest and most comical note in the world; but you may guess how it relieved my mind. Of course, things were still sufficiently arkward. I could not think, for the life of me, what I was to do next. Here was a young girl staying at an hotel in the town as my wife—and what on earth was I to do with her?

"Then I began to think how foolish I should look when I came back to Uptown Station, with all its triumphal arches built for my wedding, and told the boys that I had been jilted. I felt mad about it, although I was glad to know the bride-elect was out of the way. Then, of course, a brilliant inspiration came into my head—a way by which my two puzzles might solve each other. Why not take back 'Mrs. Smith' in Belle Aruth's place? I thought that by making the poor girl my wife, I should remove her from the very possibility of being suspected, and the boys would not be cheated out of a grand wedding. I had a little trouble persuading her, of course, but the poor girl was so distracted by her danger, that I believe she would have agreed to anything. I made sure, of course, that she had no love affair in the way, to prevent her tying herself. Of course I had none.

"Well, after seeing her and arranging everything, I gave out at the hotel that I was leaving Melbourne on business and slept two nights in the room I had originally taken at the New Hotel. Next day we came down here and were married."

Elliott coughed.

"Of course you know the marriage is not a legal one?"

The Mayor started perceptibly.

"Why not, man?"

"Because the lady married you under a false name, and you both knew that it was a false name."

Carwithen turned red and white in turns.

"For Heaven's sake don't tell that to Dorothy," he said earnestly. "It would kill her. I am sure she never suspected such a possibility, and I smothered what little doubts I had on the subject. Swear you won't tell her. I shall marry her again as soon as we can manage it safely; but you must not tell her till then."

"Oh, no, I will not tell her," said Jack Elliott; and I said the same with my eyes.

"And you will not arrest her?" Tom went on pleading. "For my sake Jack, promise you will help me to save her? I swear she is as innocent as the driven snow."

"Excuse me asking the question," said Jack, "but are you in love with the lady?"

The was a long pause, while the police officer puffed at his cigar, and Carwithen looked straight before him. Then the Mayor looked up with his face all red that had been so white.

"That is the wonderful part of it all," he said. "I love her as my own life."

"And she cannot very well help loving you, old man," said Jack Elliot.

"Of course, that settles the matter. I think Mrs. Carwithen did a foolish thing in running away, but it is too late to think of that now. What little chance she had of getting people to believe her story, she has lost now, by her flight. You know, of course, that you are making yourself liable to a long imprisonment for helping her?"

"I'd serve twenty years to save her from arrest," said Carwithen, eagerly.

"I am afraid we shall have to bear him company if we meddle any further with the business," said the Chief of the police with a smile at me.

"Which we certainly shall do, eh Jack?" I responded, and Elliott's face puckered into a grimace.

"As our old friend has got himself into a mess I suppose we shall have to stick by him," he said mournfully.

CHAPTER VII.

"CARWITHEN is pretty hard hit," said Jack, as we left the house.

"I rather like the girl myself. She certainly does not look like a murderess, but you never know."

"I'd wager my existence on her innocence," I said.

"Possibly. I wouldn't. But I'll admit that I've felt some doubts of the lady's guilt from the first, which her story strengthens. If she had told it at the time, she might have got off. You see it is absurd to think of a woman sleeping voluntarily in the same room with a man she has murdered, and the doctor decided that the man had been dead ten hours or so when the discovery was made."

"Was there anything to connect the two?" I asked. "I did not read the newspaper report through."

"No; but there was nothing to connect Langley with anybody else in the town. He had a wife in Australia, but she did not know of his arrival. He had been to Europe, and only reached Melbourne a few days before the murder. It was supposed that Miss West had come to the hotel by arrangement with him, but had been careful not to show that they were friends for fear of his wife hearing. One of the waiters saw a lady entering the room with him about ten o'clock on the night of the murder, but could not say whether it was Miss West or not. Our people are now trying to find some previous connection between the two, but the whole affair is in my substitute's, Denver's, hands, so I know nothing about their success. If they find any connection at all, her chances are nil."

"And do you think Carwithen's plan will save her?" I asked angrily, for Jack Elliott's opinion must be nearly infallible on the point.

My heart sank when he shook his head.

"No, Carwithen can't save her," he said. "His plan is clever, and has been managed admirably, but there are a host of dangers to encounter."

"But she was going to marry and change her name."

The police officer merely shook his head.

"It must be found out sooner or later."

"And nothing will save her?"

"Oh, I did not say that. If she is really innocent I think I shall."

"How?"

"By leaving her alone altogether and dropping on the real murderer."

"Perhaps it was a case of suicide?"

"No; the doctor's evidence at the inquest proved that to be impossible. I shall return to Melbourne to-morrow, and take up the case."

"Losing your holiday?"

My companion only shrugged his shoulders for reply.

We had reached by this time the end of the street where the Mayor lived. In the light of the street lamp at the end, a four-wheeled cab crowded with luggage had stopped, and the driver who must have been new to the township, inquired which house was Mr. Carwithen's.

At the same moment a lady who occupied the cab, put her head out of the window.

"Please tell him very clearly," she said, in a shrill voice, "I am afraid he has been drinking. I shan't get there to-night."

Her face showed clearly, as she spoke in the light of the street lamp—a determined face, which was only prevented from being handsome by a slight cast in her eye.

"I seem to know her face," I whispered to Elliott, who had been pointing out the Mayor's house to the driver.

And then, as the remembrance flashed into my mind of the photograph I had seen at Lamont's, I added, in a forcible undertone.

"Great Scott, Jack, it is Belle Aruth!"

The police officer took in the words instantly, and was ready to act upon them.

In a moment he was at the cab window, with his hat in his hand, speaking in a bland voice, as different from his ordinary voice as oil from emery cloth.

"Is it possible that I have the honour of speaking to the intended bride of my dear friend the Mayor?" he asked; and I heard a pleased reply in the affirmative from the cab.

"I expected Mr. Carwithen to meet me at Melbourne," said the lady. "I have been waiting there since my arrival, and have just decided to come on here. I suppose Carwithen will see that I have rooms at an hotel. I do not like calling at his house so late; but, of course, I am a stranger."

Jack's voice had evidently won her confidence. His calm answer surprised me.

"Mr. Carwithen, our beloved Mayor, has already set apart rooms for you at our provincial hotel, madam. I shall feel it an honour if I may have the pleasure of conducting you to them. Carwithen is ill, unfortunately. Surely you were met by the friend he sent in his place?"

"Indeed, I was not," said Miss Aruth, shrilly, "I am sorry Mr. Carwithen is ill. I suppose I had better go to the hotel."

She seemed a little undecided; but Elliott did not allow her to remain so.

In a few minutes the horse's head was turned, and my companion whispered hurriedly in my ear:

"Run like the wind to Swan's. See that they have the best room ready for the lady. Say it is Miss Aruth, Mrs. Carwithen's sister. Be sure they seem to expect her."

Then he stepped into the cab, and the man drove down a street which certainly was not the nearest way to Swan's, the best hotel in Uptown station. I cut along the nearest way, and did my best to carry out the police officer's instructions. Luckily I was pretty well known there, or I might have had more trouble at that hour. By the time that the couple drove up on the cab, they found everybody expecting them, and the proprietor himself ready to lead Miss Aruth to her sumptuous apartments.

We waited till he came down again, and Elliott chatted a little while to him in an easy way, and then drew me out, with his arm through mine, into the street.

"This is getting hot," he said, as soon as we were alone. "The old girl swears she never wrote that letter to Carwithen—it must have been an hoax from somebody in Uptown Station. Says she came by the *White Lion*, as she had agreed. I asked her flatly about the letter."

"It is fearfully awkward!" I said.

"Awkward! Why, it is scarifying!" said Elliott. "It would be a tight enough fix for Tom, if the murder and his wife's danger in that direction were out of the question. But as it is—why, the moment that woman says who she is, everybody will ask who is the Mayor's wife, and the moment that question is asked the game is up."

"Well, what are you going to do?" I asked. "You have shown yourself a genius so far."

"I am afraid I have committed myself irremediably. There is nothing for it but to go on now. You would not like to marry Belle Aruth yourself would you?"

I was surprised that he should joke at such a time, and said so; but Jack protested that he was in sober earnest.

"We must keep the woman quiet in some way," he said, "till we've shipped the Mayor and his wife off on a honeymoon to America or Japan, and that would be the best way of keeping her quiet, I guess. I have a night to map it all out, thank Heaven! Do you think you could furbish up another supper? I am getting hungry again, and can't think."

CHAPTER VIII.

It did not take the Chief of the Melbourne police twelve hours to arrange his plans. The cold supper which I raked up from my larder, the household being in bed, was so successful that in half-an-hour everything was arranged. To my dismay, I was to be entrusted with the carrying out of the whole of the arrangements.

The first thing in the morning I was to call on Carwithen, tell him of the new turn of affairs, and advise him to leave Uptown Station with his wife, nominally on a quickly-decided honeymoon, travel to any port other than Melbourne, and ship to the States. Then I was to keep Belle Aruth quiet until he was gone. I was to call upon her early, state that the Mayor was too ill to be seen, but that he had entrusted me with the pleasant duty of seeing that she was not dull. Then I was to escort her as quietly as possible to our show-place on the river, twenty miles away, and so keep her out of Uptown Station. Next day I was to take her somewhere else, if necessary. At all costs I must keep her in my sight, and prevent her worrying after Carwithen, or informing anybody who she was.

"And what are you going to do?" I asked when my companion had given me these directions in much detail.

"Oh! I must slip back to Melbourne as soon as possible to get to the bottom of that murder."

"Then we had better turn in," I suggested, "as we shall both have to rise early." And Elliott's reply surprised me.

"Oh, I am starting in half-an-hour, as we have every-

The wife will enjoy "Short Stories." Take it home.

thing arranged. A train passes through at half-past two, and every moment is important."

I tried to persuade him to have a sleep first, but it was no use.

"Look here, old man," he said, "I owe a good deal to Tom Carwithen, and this is the first chance I've ever had of making things level. It would upset him a good deal to have that girl arrested, whatever is proved afterwards; and to prevent it. I'd do anything short of marrying this Miss Aruth. And I might do that, if the worst came to the worst. Now that things are so critical, every moment is important."

"Yes," I said, "perhaps you had better go;" and I put on my hat to accompany him to the station. But Elliott insisted on my going to bed at once.

"Remember you have a trying day before you," he said as he left me.

In spite of the need for sleep, however, I got none that night. The responsibility placed upon me weighed too heavily on my mind, and I tossed about all night trying to arranged every detail of my procedure.

Perhaps that is why, when the morning came, I got through my duties so badly.

It was all right calling at the Mayor's and there was no doubt that I made him feel thoroughly the urgent need for him to leave Uptown Station with his wife. He began to make preparations at once for leaving that very afternoon.

But with Belle Aruth I was altogether unsuccessful in my attempt to carry out Jack Elliott's programme. She absolutely refused to go with me sight-seeing. She must see the Mayor, she said. If he was ill, who so fitted as his future wife to see that he was properly attended to. I talked, and talked, and talked, and the upshot of it all was simply that Miss Aruth put on her hat, and asked me whether I would escort her to the Mayor's house, or whether she should go alone.

Elliott, I knew, would have thought of some excellent way out of this embarrassing *contretemps*, but all I could do was to delay her visit a little on one pretext and another. If we only waited long enough, Carwithen might have started on his flight.

But the most energetic talking of which I was capable could not delay the inevitable visit long, and as Miss Aruth was perfectly determined to call on the man she was expecting to marry, I thought my best plan would be to accompany her.

The way to the house turned out to be rather a long one under my guidance, and when we finally arrived, I was rejoiced to hear the servant's declaration that Mr. Carwithen was not at home.

"But he is ill!" said my companion. "Where has he gone?"

"No, indeed, ma'am, master is quite well," said the servant. "He has just gone to the railway-station."

I thanked my stars that the girl did not add—"with his wife." She had said enough, however, to ruin Miss Aruth's confidence in me. I shall never forget the look she gave me through her crossed eyes as we turned away from the door.

"I shall not need your escort any further," she said, coldly; and calling a passing cab, told the man to drive to the railway station.

I seemed left to follow on foot; but as I managed to fall in with a friend driving in the same direction, I succeeded in reaching the platform at the same moment as she did.

The news of Carwithen's departure had managed to creep out, in spite of his efforts, and the town band had come out in full force on the platform to do honour to the occasion.

As I reached him, he was standing on the platform with a smile on his white face, shaking hands with quite a formidable band of his admirers and well-wishers, while his wife hung trembling visibly on his arm.

It was a pathetic sight to one like myself who knew the real state of affairs, and I could have cried to see Tom Carwithen smiling.

I felt that I ought to do something; but before I could decide what, Belle Aruth was upon him. She advanced to him with open hands, and then drew back, while everybody looked at her.

Poor Carwithen looked like a sheet, as the two stared at each other. Then the woman said so clearly that everybody could hear:

"You don't seem glad to see me, Mr. Carwithen? And pray, who is this lady?"

"My wife!" said the Mayor, in a whisper; and the woman broke into a discordant laugh.

"I thought there was something wrong. Allow me to introduce myself to you, madam. I am Miss Belle Aruth, to whom your husband promised marriage not two months ago."

Then, as she looked into poor little Mrs. Carwithen's face, her eyes lit up with malicious delight, as she cried aloud, in genuine surprise:

"Why, it is the woman who murdered Mr. Langley in Lean's Hotel, at Melbourne. Here, policeman, arrest her!"

She looked round, and had caught sight of Jack Elliott in full uniform, who seemed to have sprung from the ground.

He had really just left the train which came in from Melbourne just as they were speaking.

I was so ashamed of my failure to carry out his plans that, at the sight of him, I shrunk back behind the band, which kept on playing the "Wedding March," quite unconscious of the turn that affairs had taken.

Elliott strolled up slowly, and Belle Aruth turned to face him.

She did not appear to recognise him as the police gentleman who had escorted her to her hotel.

"Don't you hear?" she called to him, in her shrill voice. "That is the woman who murdered Mr. Langley. I was staying at the hotel, and can swear to her face, although the creature has dyed her hair."

Carwithen and his wife both stood motionless, with white, scared faces; while the friends who had been showing them off stood motionless with astonishment in a ring, and the band stopped one by one, as it dawned upon the players that something remarkable was happening.

Then I think a very admirable idea came into my head by which the Mayor might, at least get a start of his pursuers. I pushed my way into the ring, and said that the woman was evidently mad—that everybody knew who Mrs. Carwithen was—and that as the train was just about to start, it was a pity to delay the pair by listening to a mad woman's ravings.

The speech seemed to enrage the lady from York all the more.

"She is not Mrs. Carwithen," she screamed. "She is a murderess and is running away with my promised husband."

Elliott tried to calm her wrath, but the woman would not listen to him.

"You are a policeman. Why don't you arrest her?" she said.

And Jack answered coolly:

"Because she is innocent, Madam. You do not seem to have much respect for her feelings," he said, "making a public accusation like this."

"Respect for her feelings? I should think not," said Miss Aruth.

"Then you cannot blame me for producing this warrant here. It is a warrant for your arrest."

The woman's red face turned quite white.

"My arrest! What on earth for?"

"The murder for which you try to make this innocent lady accountable. I think you will have more trouble than she to prove yourself innocent of it."

Miss Belle Aruth must have been a woman of courage, for she managed to laugh quite naturally.

"And pray what is your evidence against me?" she asked coolly.

"Do you care to have it recited before these people?" inquired Elliott, who was dying all the time, I know, to let us hear what a very remarkable discovery he and his staff had made.

The woman certainly had nerve.

"I have no objection to them hearing your nonsense," she said, and my friend, the Chief of the Melbourne police, stated the case against her in a concise and masterly manner.

Miss Belle Aruth had travelled in the *King of France* with Mr. Langley, and had given out that she was engaged to him.

She had written the letter to Carwithen, which showed that she expected to marry Langley.

A letter of hers had been found among the dead man's papers, from which it appeared he engaged the room she occupied at Lean's Hotel for her, but wished her to keep their connection a secret for reasons which he would not explain.

And, lastly, the knife, which had been left in the dead man's heart, had just been identified by a passenger on board the *King of France* as one belonging to Miss Aruth.

"Rather damning evidence," said Elliott when he had finished, "and when all the details are heard, conclusive. Perhaps you will accompany me to the waiting-room, madam, until you return to Melbourne in my charge. I don't think it will be necessary to detain you or your wife, Mr. Carwithen. The train is about to start."

* * * * *

The evidence which Elliott managed to collect against Miss Belle Aruth was certainly conclusive. The eminent counsel whom Tom Carwithen engaged—for her father's sake—to defend her, accepted the impossibility of refuting it, and directed his wonderful energies to proving that her crime was manslaughter, and not murder.

The deceased man had made love to her during the voyage to Australia, and passing himself off as an unmarried man, led her to believe that he wished to marry her.

Then, on the night of the murder, in his room, he had explained his desire to keep their tie a secret. It was because he was already married. He brutally laughed away his promises. Did she imagine that a woman so old and ugly was good enough for anything but to relieve the monotony of a voyage on a ship which contained a woman worth looking at?

"Was it to be wondered at," the eminent counsel eloquently asked, "that this poor, outraged woman, stung to frenzy by his words, and the thought that he had ruined all her prospects, should reply with a knife in her betrayer's heart?"

A sympathetic jury decided that it was not to be wondered at, and Belle Aruth only disappeared from the world for a twelvemonth, after which she returned to England, I believe, on a small pension which Tom Carwithen allowed her.

"But what I liked about the woman," I said to Jack Elliott when we talked the matter over afterwards, "was her supreme impudence in trying to disown her own letter and marry the Mayor after all."

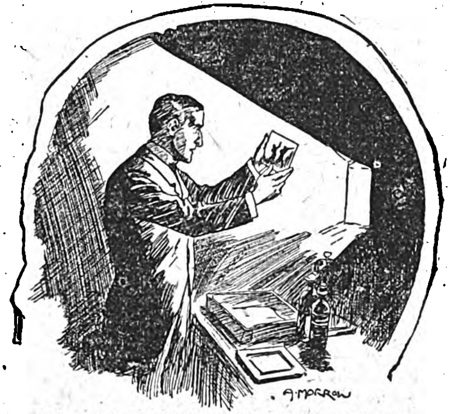
"It was her only chance," returned Jack. "She stayed a day or two at Lean's Hotel, so as not to excite suspicion by leaving too hurriedly; but, when we began making inquiries into her history, she had to marry Carwithen then to explain her presence in Melbourne. So she packed up in a hurry, and things would be queerer than they were, if we had not met her before she found old Tom out. It has been an exciting little story all round, hasn't it?"

"Yes," I said; "but I don't think the Mayor regrets it."

And both Tom Carwithen and the lady—who is really and legally Mrs. Carwithen now—assure me that they thank Heaven every day for the dangers and difficulties which brought them together. H. F.

The Clue of the Lightning Flash.

A thrilling story of innocent and guilty, wherein figure the famous characters of Graydon Garth, Kenyon Ford the Up-to-Date Detective, and his pupil, Nestor Keen. Written by Herbert Wentworth.



IN THE PHOTOGRAPHIC DARK ROOM.

He took the last film from the acid bath, and looked at it through the ruby light of his lantern: a cry of astonishment burst from his lips, and the film almost fell from his fingers. For there, in photographic image, was shown the last moments of the death struggle between Geoffrey Masterton and his murderer.

Read more about this thrilling scene in the long complete story—

The Clue of the Lightning Flash

in next Thursday's number of

THE BIG BUDGET, 1d.

Persuade your best friend to read "The Golden Dwarf."

Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, July 15th. Postcards only, please. The first prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. A. W. Henton, 5 James Street, Rugby, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

"THEY are talking of putting in long distance telephones for the farmers' use." "How charming! Of course they can be utilised in calling the cows."

MERCHANT (to his clerk): "I am sorry I cannot let you have to-day your last month's salary; but since, as you very well know, time is money, I will give you a month's holiday."

"YOUR lawyer made some pretty severe charges against the other fellow, didn't he?" said Ford. "Y-e-e-s, but you ought to see how he charged me," said Smallwort.

HUSBAND (reading): "Nobody has ever seen a dead mule." Wife (who is thinking of something else, and not listening): "Don't you think that the money paid for your life insurance is spent uselessly?"

"AH, Miss Nightingale, that 'Winter Song' was charming; it carried me back to the days of my childhood." "I am so glad you like it," said Miss Nightingale. "Why, I could actually hear the cattle bellowing, the old windmill creaking, and the discordant winds howling about the door."

A WOUNDED soldier opened his eyes and asked: "Where am I?" "On the operating table," answered a surgeon, putting away the chloroform bottle. "We have taken out of you a fragment of a shell, a grape shot, two rifle bullets, and the point of a bayonet." "Just my luck!" mused the wounded soldier. "Everything goes against me." "It seems to me," the surgeon said, "that everything comes your way."

* DURING the recent interational occupation in China, a team of eleven Highlanders played a game of cricket with twenty men of the French force. The Scots won by a handsome margin, and the French captain could not conceal his chargin. "We don't care much for cricket," he said, "we are more at home on the battlefield." "I shouldn't wonder," replied the victorious captain with a smile, "you would doubtless make more runs there."

A YOUNG man and a young woman lean over the front gate. They are lovers. It is moonlight. He is loth to leave as the parting is the last. He is about to go away. She is reluctant to see him depart. They swing on the gate. "I'll never forget you," he says, "and if death should claim me my last thought will be of you." "I'll be true to you," she sobs. "I'll never see anybody else, or love them as long as I live." They part. Six years later he returns. His former sweetheart of former years has married. They meet at a party. She has changed greatly; between the dances the recognition takes place. "Let me see," she muses, with her fan beating a tattoo on her pretty hand. "Was it you or your brother who was my old sweetheart?" "Really, I don't know," he says. "Probably my father."

"PAPA, what do football men do in the summer?" "Oh, they brag about what they did in the winter."

WE cannot impress too strongly upon all correspondents, when in doubt whether the postage of a letter is a penny or twopence, the force of the old proverb, "Two heads are better than one."

CLEVERTON (at the seashore): "What have you got that life-preserver on for, old man? I thought you were a good swimmer." Dashaway: "I am; but I am going to give a girl a swimming lesson."

"IT'S a mighty good thing to have a retentive memory," said Figg. "That depends," said Fogg. "If the memory is yours, it is a mighty good thing, as you say; but if it happens to be the property of your wife, that's another matter."

"WOMEN are still pushing their way into every trade," said George. "That's so. I have just been discharged to make way for a woman," replied Jack. "You have. Well, well! What are you going to do now?" "I am trying to marry the woman."

YOUNG BURGLAR: "These spoons ain't silver. They are the cheapest kind o' imitation." Old Burglar: "That's lucky." "Lucky?" "Yes, take 'em along." "What for?" "The lady of the house will be afraid to set the detectives after us, lest they should find them spoons an' describe 'em in th' papers."

"I HARDLY know whether to be angry with little Charley Tapecounter or not," said Miss Summermaid. "Why, dear?" asked Miss Ennygirl. "He said he could guess my age, and when I dared him to, he said he thought too much of me to do so before others."

"TELL me honestly," said the novel reader to the novel writer, "did you ever see a woman who stood and tapped the floor impatiently with her toe for several moments, as you describe?" "Yes," was the thoughtful reply, "I did once." "Who was she?" "She was a clog-dancer."

DR. BINKS (head of young ladies' seminary, delightedly): "Ah, my dear Mr. Smith, so glad to meet you. The father of my dear pupil, Miss Smith, I believe. Ah, yes. What a large and devoted family you must have, Mr. Smith?" Smith: "Large and devoted family—really, my dear sir, I don't understand ——" Dr. Binks: "Why, yes; all last year nine of Miss Smith's brothers used to call on her constantly and take her out almost every evening."

WIFE (who has just returned from the dentist's): "I shall be awfully stupid now." Husband: "Why so, my dear?" Wife: "I have had all my wisdom teeth pulled out." Husband (with the best intention in the world) "Of course, my love, you know its nothing but a superstition the idea that wisdom teeth have anything to do with wisdom. If you were to have every tooth in your head drawn it couldn't make you any stupider, you know." He succeeded in smoothing matters over, but it was a narrow escape.

IN railway travelling one meets with curious characters. Recently there was a crowded third-class compartment in a slow train on a railway which had better be nameless, and one of the passengers thought to beguile the tedium and relieve his feelings by descanting on the proverbial slowness of that particular train. "I've been travelling," he said slowly, "on this railway for twenty years now, and——" "Twenty 'ear," exclaimed an inexperienced lady, breaking in, "good gracious me! And what station did ye get on at?"

Mr. GEO. R. SIMS'
HAIR RENEWER.

Called by him **"TATCHO."**
Romany: "GENUINE," "GOOD," "TRUE.")

And why, pray, is the successful poet, playwright, and journalist an eminent authority on hair restorer? Eager for an explanation, a *Daily Mail* representative sought out Mr. Sims. . . .

Now Mr. G. R. Sims, as many people know, is one of the busiest men in the kingdom, but hastily affixing his signature to a letter, he looked up and extended a characteristically cordial welcome. Then he said: "I will explain. I found that I was rapidly going bald. Not seriously, you understand, but the thinning out was sufficiently marked to set me thinking out a remedy. I went to two specialists, both of whom cheerfully assured me that I should be absolutely bald in two years.

"Then I discovered the preparation which is now placed upon the market. **I found that I had hit upon a remedy capable of working wonders. Look at my hair now, isn't that convincing evidence of the value of my preparation.**

"Ladies confirm my good opinion of it as a dressing for daily use. Mrs. Brown-Potter, whose beautiful hair is the admiration of the entire lady world, writes that she uses nothing but 'Tatcho.' There is nothing to prevent every woman from making her hair silken in texture and bountiful in volume, for she can obtain a bottle of 'Tatcho' now in every town or even village."

In order that the public may be able to test the superlative value of Mr. Geo. R. Sims' discovery, the Company is issuing large 4/6 size test bottles post free for **1/10**, under plain cover, one of which may be had on application. Please cut off the corner of this advertisement where marked, and send with name and address, legibly written, to the—

GEO. R. SIMS CO.,
81c GREAT QUEEN STREET, LONDON, W.C.

Mr.
GEO.
R. SIMS'
HAIR
RENEWER
Large 4/6 Bottle
Post 1/10 Free.
COUPON. S.S. ....1901.

JUNO CYCLES FOR LADIES & GENTS.
£10
16/8 mo.
THE VERY BEST.
FREE or FIXED WHEELS
The most up-to-date.
Carriage Paid.

	Monthly,
£8 10s. ...	14/2
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Write for New Season's List.
LISTS POST FREE
JUNO Cycles and Accessories (over 100 pages) sent Post Free.
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JUNO	£10 ...	16/8 monthly.
Lady Safety ...	£11 ...	18/4 monthly.

Wood Cycle Stand, 2/6. Handlebar Basket, 10½d.
METROPOLITAN MACHINISTS CO. LTD.,
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DRUNKENNESS

CURED. This can be done with or without patient's knowledge. Send me a stamp and I will tell you how. (Send no money.) Address, in confidence, Mrs. C. H. (Room 8), 195 Oxford Street, London, W.

DO GO
to your chemist or store for a bottle of
"ANTEXEMA."

The price is **1/1½**, or post free for **1/3** from the Antexema Co., 83 Castle Road, London, N.W. It is the most wonderful Skin Cure ever discovered. It at once allays itching, and cures every form of

ECZEMA.

A treatise on "Skin Troubles" is included.

ESTABLISHED 1851.
BIRKBECK BANK,
Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, London.
2½ % DEPOSIT ACCOUNTS repayable on demand. 2½ %
The BIRKBECK ALMANACK, with full particulars, post free.
FRANCIS RAVENSCROFT, *Manager.*

2/9 CHALLENGE TO THE WORLD—OUR WARRANTED TIMEKEEPER, 2/9

With a guarantee to keep correct time for three years, will be sent to any address on receipt of P.O. or stamps value 2/9, and three stamps extra for postage. To every purchaser during this month we give with it ABSOLUTELY FREE a strong Mexican SILVER CHAIN. All we ask of you is to show them to your friends, as by doing so you advertise our business.
GENEVA WATCH IMPORTERS,
148 Old Street, London, E.C.
(Please mention paper.)

KEATING'S
POWDER
KILLS
BUGS
FLEAS
BEETLES
MOSQUITOS
TINS: 3d. 6d. & 1/- EACH. FILLED BELLOWS: 9D.

SILVER QUEEN CYCLES.
ON MONTHLY PAYMENTS
Enormous Stock. New and second-hand. From **10s. MONTHLY.**
Carriage paid.
ILLUSTRATED PRICE LISTS POST FREE any address.
SILVER QUEEN CYCLE CO. LTD.,
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A. LEES RAY, South Castle Street, Liverpool, is a Specialist on Ugly and Red Noses. Send stamp for particulars of his Patent Scientific Nose Improver. Medically-approved Red Nose Cure, 3/9. Pamphlet, "Cause and Prevention," 1/-. Machines for Prominent Ears. Blackhead Cure **1 9.**

SEND 6D. and secure one of our Complete **Printing Outfits.** Agents wanted for the above and other novelties.—Apply Dept. Y, 89 Aldersgate Street, London, E.C.

ALL FAT PEOPLE

can safely **Reduce Weight and cure Corpulency permanently** by taking **TRILENE TABLETS** (Regd.) for a few weeks. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to IMPROVE both HEALTH and FIGURE without Change of Diet. An English Countess writes: *"Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."*

Send 2s. 6d. to **THE TRILENE CO.,** Sole Proprietors,
66 Finsbury Pavement, London.

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 87 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 28lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Comston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

DOUBTLESS by this time you are thoroughly interested in "The Golden Dwarf." Personally, I have rarely read so fascinating a novel, and those of my friends whom I have spoken to on the matter agree with me as to its merits. And scores of letters which I have received confirm the testimony.

Probably, in some remote corners of the country, there are people who are not reading it. I want to reach them—through you.

I want you to persuade your sister to read it, or your brother, or your wife, father, mother, uncle, aunt, sweetheart, neighbour, landlady, or lodger.

All will be delighted. And the beauty of it is, they can start it this week with the help of the specially-written summary of previous chapters. This fact is worth bearing in mind when you mention the tale to your friends.

* * *

BY the way, I shall be glad to hear from you regarding "The Golden Dwarf," and the other features of the paper. Anything you don't like, mention, and I will do my best to remedy the defect. It is your paper, and I am desirous of meeting your wishes in every possible manner. So drop me a line.

* * *

"MISS DOLLY" has been engaged to a man for two years, and he has now told her that he has been mistaken in his feelings towards her, and it is her younger sister whom he really loves. He asks her to forgive him the pain he has caused her, and says he will not speak to her sister until she has had time to give him his *congé*, and so behave as though she had tired of him. She feels very sore and miserable, and asks my advice as to the best thing to do.

Be a brave girl, "Miss Dolly," and show your lover that you, too, can be straightforward and honest, as he has been. Give him up, and in time you will see how far better it is that he should have told you how matters stood. Your sister need never know the real facts of the case, and you, I am sure—hardly as you have been treated—will be too sensible to wear your heart upon your sleeve.

* * *

A CORRESPONDENT sends me the following all the way from Yokohama:

Even the most gentlemanly of British burglars have much to learn from Japan in the way of politeness. Three men broke into a dyer's house while he was away, and gently asked his wife how much money there was in the house.

She answered that there was just twenty-four yen and eighty-four sen.

The robber laughed and said:

"You are a good old woman, and we believe you. If you were poor we would not rob you at all. Now, we only want a couple of kimono and this," laying his hand on a fine silk overdress.

The old woman replied:

"All my son's kimono I can give you, but I beg you will not take that, for it does not belong to my son, and was confided to us only for dyeing. What is ours I can give, but I cannot give what belongs to another."

"That is quite right," approved the robber, "and we will not take it."

* * *

"BILL-POSTER." — The largest amount ever paid for a single advertisement was the sum given by a jeweller for a model of the Eiffel Tower, which was ordered to be executed in diamonds as an advertisement. The model was complete, including the monumental fountain under the tower. This golden marvel, wrought by one of the most celebrated Parisian goldsmiths, is 20ft. high, and the fountain, of gold, seven to eight inches, the cost being £20,000.

The proprietors of an American patent medicine offered a subscription of £5,000 towards the gigantic Statue of Liberty at New York Harbour, provided they were allowed to affix an advertisement upon it for one year.

The largest advertisement in the world is that of the *Glasgow News*, cut in the shape of flower beds on the side of a hill, back of Ardenlee, Scotland. The words *Glasgow News* can be seen and plainly read at a distance of four miles; the length of each letter is 40ft., the total length of the line 323ft., and the area covered by the letters 14,845 square feet.

As to newspaper advertising, the biggest advertisement on record was that giving the signatures to a Conservative address to the King agreed to at a public meeting in London on December 23, 1834. The words amounted to nearly 6,000, and occupied twenty-four columns of *The Times*.

On October 16, 1860, the whole libretto of Macfarren's opera, "Robin Hood," was inserted in *The Times* as an advertisement, and occupied four and a half pages.

* * *

"AN ENQUIRER."—We occasionally get an excellent definition in an anagram; as, for example, when astronomers are described as "Moon-starers," and telegraphs as "Great helps." Old England is characterised as "Golden land," and Parliament said to be made up of "Partial men." Readers can probably tell me of others.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I AM open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

SHORT STORIES
ADVERTISEMENT RATES.

Single column, per inch, per insertion	£0	10	0
Double " " "	1	0	0
Full page inside, facing page of matter, either white paper or 2nd or 3rd page of cover, or back page, per insertion	10	0	0
Half-page " " "	5	0	0
Quarter-page " "	2	10	0
Eighth-page " "	1	5	0

All spaces above one-eighth of a page are charged at per page rate.

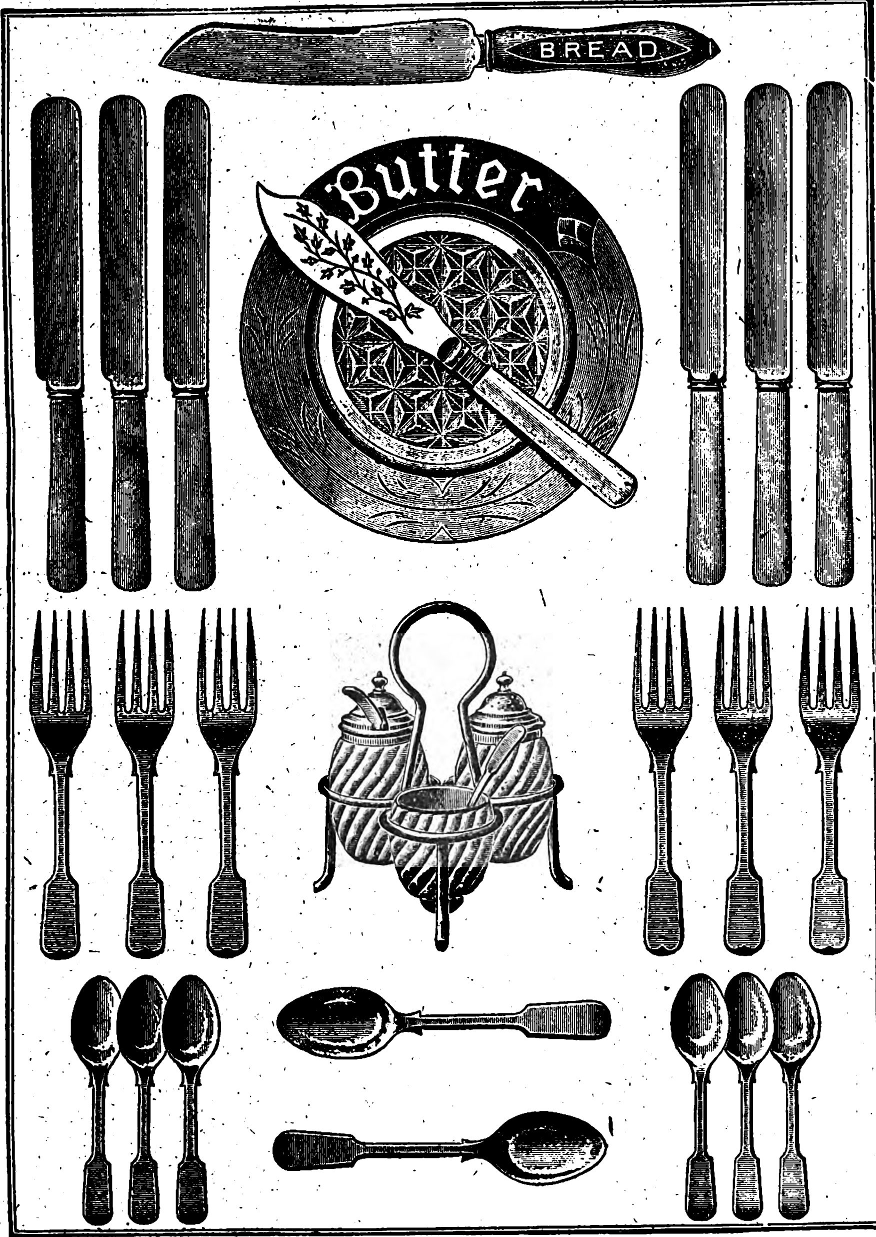
Series discount: 5 per cent. for 13, 10 per cent. for 26, 15 per cent. for 52 insertions.

Black blocks are charged 25 per cent. extra. All advertisements are subject to approval. All copy must be sent in by Noon on Tuesday, July 16th, if intended for the issue on sale July 30th, and dated August 3rd. The Proprietors reserve the right to hold over or suspend the insertion of any advertisement without prejudice to other insertions on order. All communications should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, "Pearson's Weekly" Offices, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

THE BEST AND MOST COMPLETE PARCEL EVER OFFERED.

THE "DUCHESS" SET OF 26 PIECES FOR 16/6



COMPRISING:

	s.	d.
6 Fine Bone Handle Dessert Knives ...	5	0
6 Fine Hard Nickel Silver Dessert Forks	3	9
6 Fine Hard Nickel Silver Teaspoons ...	1	9
2 Fine Hard Nickel Silver Dessert Spoons	1	3
1 Carved Butter Dish...	2	0
1 Electroplate Butter Knife...	1	0
1 Carved Handle Bread Knife	1	3
1 Silver-plated Cruet, with 3 Glass Bottles	7	6
1 Mustard Spoon ...	0	6
1 Salt Spoon	0	6
	24	6

The Set complete in box,

16/6 cash.

EVERY ARTICLE GUARANTEED.

Sent securely packed, carriage free. Will also be supplied on receipt of a deposit of 3/-, and your promise to pay 5 monthly instalments of 3/-, or will be sent on receipt of deposit and if satisfactory, a further remittance of 13/6 will be accepted in full settlement. If not satisfactory return the set, and your deposit will be refunded.

Catalogues containing 2,000 Illustrations of Watches, Clocks, Jewellery, Household Requisites, &c., sent post free.

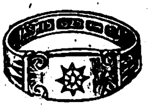
FATTORINI & SONS,
DEPT. S.S.,
WESTGATE, BRADFORD.

AGENTS WANTED

Respectable men in regular employment desirous of taking up an agency for our goods should apply for terms and particulars.

RINGS ON MONTHLY PAYMENTS.

We will send you any Ring on receipt of small deposit of 2s. 6d. in the £. If approved of, balance can be paid monthly, or 2s. in the £ discount or cash.



No. 284. 15ct. Solid Gold set with one real diamond, £2; 9ct. Gold, 32s. 6d.

MIZPAH RING.
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THE TWO RINGS.
22ct. Gold Wedding Ring and Solid Gold Keeper. Government Hall-marked **30/.**

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ACCIDENT AT LIVERPOOL LANDING STAGE,

BOOTLE MAN'S NARROW ESCAPE,

PONTOON OVERTURNED

READ.

100 Olivia Street,
Bootle.
June 5th, 1901.

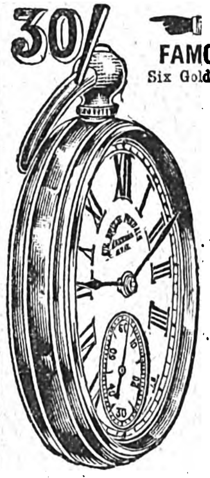
TO MASTERS, RYE.

Just a line to tell you about an accident that happened to our gang. We were shifting a pontoon from under the stage. Just as we got it out the pontoon turned over, and the ten of us went into the river. There was four watches in the gang, and I am happy to tell you that mine was the only one that did not stop. All the others filled up with water. It was one of

MASTERS', RYE 6 P.M. WATCHES.

It has turned out quite a success. Wishing your firm all success, Yours truly,

H. KINGDON.



☛ **MASTERS' FAMOUS WATCH.**

Six Gold and Bronze Medals Awarded.

PRICE **30/-** NETT. CASH.

WE will send post paid to any address on receipt of 2s. 6d., one of our celebrated Six Prize Medal Watches, fitted in Solid Silver Cases, value 30s.

IF you approve of it you send us 2s. 6d. more on receipt, and 5s. each month for five months—30s.

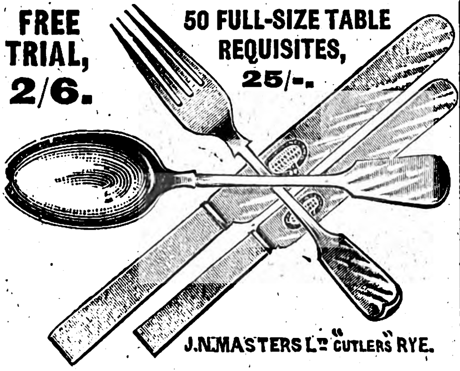
BUT should you prefer to send the balance at once send only 24s. 6d. more, as we allow 3s. discount to those who pay cash.

IF you do not approve of it we will return your deposit in full.

FITTED with specially close fittings. Silver Cases.

FREE TRIAL, 2/6.

50 FULL-SIZE TABLE REQUISITES, 25/-.


J.N.MASTERS Lᵀᴰ "CUTLERS" RYE.

MASTERS, LTD. will send, post paid, one of these famous parcels of cutlery, 50 pieces, value 25/-, on receipt of 2/6.

IF you do not approve of the parcel we will return your 2/6 in full.

IF you approve of it, you send us 2/6 on receipt and 5/- each month for four months—25/-.

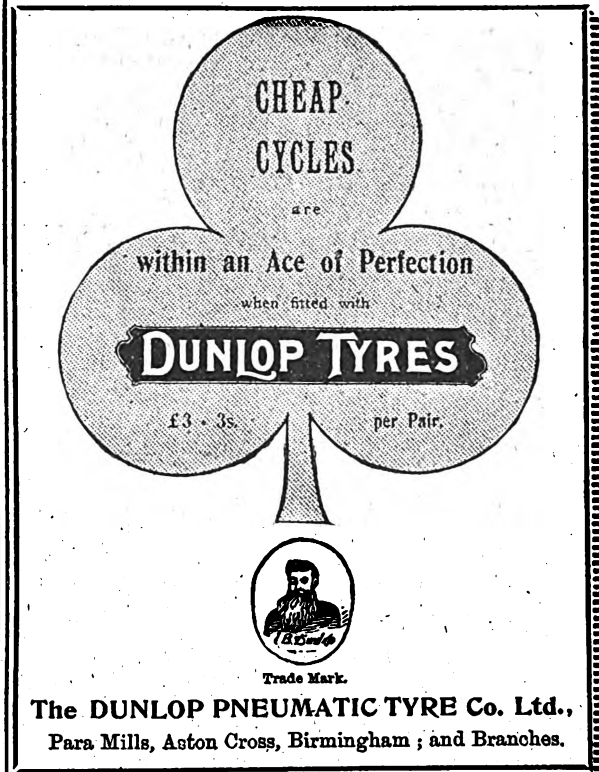
BUT should you prefer to buy for cash, send only 20/- more, as we allow 2/6 discount to those who pay cash.

PRIVATE

No one likes going into a shop to buy an "Engagement" or "Wedding" Ring or Present. YOU can have one privately from us by post in a few hours.

WRITE for our Catalogue and Ring Size Card, POST FREE to any address on application.

J. N. MASTERS LTD., (Dept. 201 S), RYE, SUSSEX.


CHEAP CYCLES are within an Ace of Perfection when fitted with DUNLOP TYRES £3 - 3s. per Pair.
J.B. Dunlop

Trade Mark.

The DUNLOP PNEUMATIC TYRE Co. Ltd.,
Para Mills, Aston Cross, Birmingham; and Branches.

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Supersedes Raw Suet, Lard, and Cooking Butter for Puddings, Cakes, Mince Meat, Pie Crust, Frying and Cooking. Made from best English Beef Suet only! Saves trouble of Chopping! One pound goes as far as two pounds of Raw Suet! Always sweet!

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Of All Grocers and Provision Dealers
SOLE MANUFACTURERS—
HUGON & Co. LTD, PENDLETON, MANCHESTER.

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Samples sent FREE if this paper is mentioned.

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A WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR HOME AND TRAIN.
H.M.L.
ACME

Shilling packets

Kaputine "the" safe Remedy for Headache

WARNING. *Instead of using the common White Headache Powders, which generally consist entirely of a crude drug, which has been condemned as dangerous by the medical papers, insist on having a bona-fide anti-quack remedy, recommended by such eminent medical authorities as Dr. RAMAGE, L.R.C.P., Dr. THURSTIN, L.R.C.P., late Dr. BOYD-WILLIAMS (Liverpool), the Editor of the Medical Journal, "Health," etc., etc. The name of this safe remedy is KAPUTINE.*

ALL LEADING CHEMISTS SELL IT, OR CAN GET IT FOR YOU IN A FEW HOURS.

Sold by BOOT'S, TAYLOR'S, DAY'S, WHITE'S and other Stores. Most Co-operative Stores sell it.

PACKETS, 1/-. SAMPLES ONE PENNY,

or **KAPUTINE LIMITED, HUDDERSFIELD,** will send it FREE for 12 stamps.

WORTH A CROWN A DOSE.

TAKE A KODAK WITH YOU ON YOUR HOLIDAYS

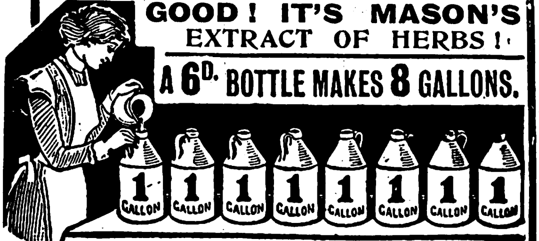
No holiday is perfect without a means of photographing interesting incidents, places, and persons. Kodak cameras are light, compact, and eminently suited for all holiday makers. They are readily mastered by anyone in a few minutes, and require no dark room for changing the films. Kodaks from 5/- to £7 7s. each. Of all photographic dealers, or of KODAK Ltd., 43 Clerkenwell Road, London, E.C.; 60 Cheapside, E.C.; 115 Oxford Street, W.; 171-173 Regent Street, W.; 59 Brompton Road, S.W.; also at 96 Bold Street, Liverpool, and 72 and 74 Buchanan Street, Glasgow.

WRITE FOR PARTICULARS OF THE GREAT BROWNIE KODAK COMPETITION FOR BOYS AND GIRLS.

50 VALUABLE PRIZES AMOUNTING TO UPWARDS OF £100 IN VALUE.

GOOD! IT'S MASON'S EXTRACT OF HERBS!

A 6D. BOTTLE MAKES 8 GALLONS.



This is what you get with

MASON'S EXTRACT OF HERBS

Makes the most delicious and wholesome HERB BEER

There is no PURER
There is no BETTER
There is no STRONGER
and
There is no CHEAPER

Makes MORE BEER and BETTER BEER than any other Extract.

Agents Wanted Everywhere.

Sold everywhere. Bottles, Post Free, 9 Stamps.

NEWBALL & MASON, Nottingham.

"WORTH A GUINEA A BOX."

BEECHAM'S PILLS

FOR ALL

BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS, Sick Headache, Constipation, Wind and Pains in Stomach, Impaired Digestion, Disordered Liver, and Female Ailments.

SALE OVER SIX MILLION BOXES YEARLY.

In Boxes, 1s. 1½d. and 2s. 9d. each, with full directions.

Prepared only by the Proprietor,

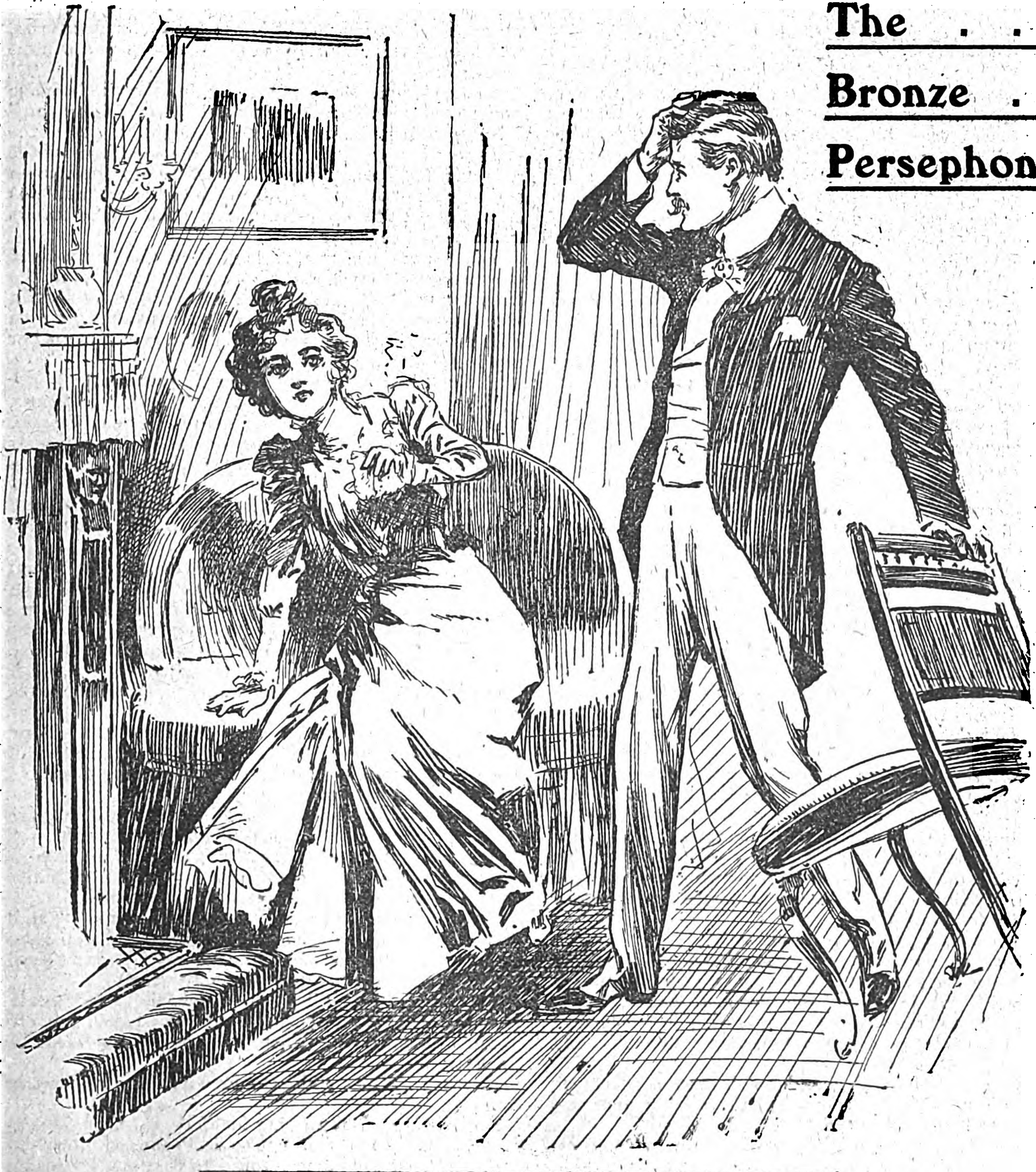
THOMAS BEECHAM, St. Helens, Lancashire.

Sold by all Druggists and Patent Medicine Dealers everywhere.

SHORT STORIES.

No. 655.] For the Week Ending July 20th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

The . . . Bronze . . Persephone.



"Great heaven! Do you think that I am guilty?"

All rights reserved.]

THE BRONZE PERSEPHONE.

By the Author of "Dr. Delamere's Patient," "What No Man Knew," etc.

CHAPTER I.

PAPA GUILBERT.

EVERYONE knew Papa Guilbert, who kept the queer little poky curio store in the Petite Rue Trois Etoiles, at the back of the Palais Royal—everyone, that is, who took an interest in curios, and, of course, his immediate neighbours.

A queer little place it was, that shop of Papa Guilbert's. You went down three steps from the street, and the tall, handsome Englishman who came in one day, had to bend his curly head to pass through the low door.

He had stepped in in passing, and asked the price of several curios—two he bought. The prices of two or three more were beyond him, he said, smiling. Then he noticed—he had keen eyes, for it was not prominently forward—a bronze statuette of Persephone, and before Papa Guilbert knew what he was doing, he had it in his hand. It was an exquisite work of art—a gem. and the customer's handsome dark eyes glowed as he looked at it.

"What is the price?" he asked.

"One thousand francs, Monsieur."

The Englishman laughed, and shook his head. Beautiful though the figure was, the price was preposterous—and this was intentional. In truth, Papa Guilbert was in no hurry to sell the Persephone.

His daughter Jesuita had taken an immense fancy to it, and the old man was torn between his love for her and his desire of gain—gain which was mainly for her, though, perhaps, some of that strange, miser love of bald acquisition found also a place in his heart. He had scanned the Englishman when the latter entered the shop, and noticed the outward signs of a wealthy customer.

Monsieur looked an aristocrat, was extremely well dressed, wore a diamond ring, but when he rejected one article because it was three hundred francs, another because it was two hundred and fifty francs, Papa Guilbert perceived that, despite his air of distinction, his faultless apparel, and his diamond ring, he was not a rich "milord," and therefore he named a prohibitory price for the Persephone.

The customer put down the statuette.

"You take me for a rich man Papa Guilbert," he said, laughingly; "but I am only a poor dramatist. Eh, bien! I will do without the Queen of Hades."

He gathered up the few comparative trifles he had bought, bade the old curio dealer "adieu!" and departed.

Half-an-hour later Jesuita came in from a rehearsal, and Papa Guilbert told her about the tall foreigner who wanted to buy Persephone.

The handsome Englishman came again two or three days later and had quite a chat with Papa Guilbert, and asked the prices of several articles of interest; but he only bought a curious little sixteenth century crucifix, which was comparatively cheap because it was a little damaged.

"Adieu, Papa Guilbert," he said as he was leaving; "or, I hope, *au revoir*. I am off to Italy this afternoon."

Nevertheless, Papa Guilbert thought he saw the stranger that evening. He passed the shop, crossed the road and disappeared down a court nearly opposite—a not very reputable place, so perhaps the old man was mistaken. But, then, what would you? Who knows where a man may go?

Still, it was nearly dark, and Papa Guilbert's sight was not what it once was. He only thought he saw the Englishman—he was not sure; but he had told Jesuita about *ce beau monsieur* coming again and chatting with him, and when she paused to bid him good-bye on her way to the theatre, he said:

"I think I saw Monsieur l'Anglais just now."

"Then he is not gone to Italy," said the dancer, laughing. "*Au revoir, chéri!*"—and away she went.

Then old Marthe, the charwoman, bade her master *au revoir*, and trotted off to her own dwelling, and Papa Guilbert was left alone.

The shop did not close until quite an hour later, and there were no shutters put up, the window being defended by a close iron cage-work.

Jesuita, when she came in from the theatre, let herself in with a key, and barred up the door behind her.

It was just on twelve when Jesuita returned home to-night. There was a smile on her pretty lips as she put her key in the lock—a funny incident had occurred at the theatre, with which she would make her father laugh, and the smile deepened, as she pictured the old man's enjoyment of the joke.

She opened the door. "*Me voici*," she began. Then, with a choking cry: "*Chéri—chéri!*" she flung herself down by the dark form lying prostrate on the floor, and lifted the grey head on her arm.

Even in the dim light she could see that the old man was dead. She felt his face—it was already cold; the lines were settling into rigidity. She felt his heart—there was not the faintest throb; and as she withdrew her hand, she saw that it was covered with blood.

Blood! Then her father had been murdered! Half frantic with grief and horror, yet preserving a singular presence of mind, the girl sprang to her feet, and turned up the light that she might see more clearly.

Yes, Papa Guilbert had been stabbed to the heart. His shirt and vest were saturated with blood, but the wound was not large. There was scarcely any blood on the floor.

Murder! Who could have done it? For robbery, of course!

But Jesuita cared nothing for that; she thought only of her father. He could not be dead—he could not!

She pressed her warm young lips passionately to the cold lips that could give no response, that would never

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speak again; then she rose once more, to go for the doctor.

On his arrival Dr. Simon saw in a moment that he could do nothing.

"My poor child!" he said, looking up to the agonised young face, "your father has been dead more than two hours. He has been murdered—stabbed to the heart. He could not have lived more than two seconds."

"I will find out who has done it, and kill him!" said the girl, fiercely, the fiery Spanish blood leaping in her veins, flashing in her splendid dark eyes.

"We must not move him," said the doctor, "until the police have been."

The motive of the robbery was clear. The till had been rifled, though of how much could not yet be known and some of the curios had been taken also, as would appear from others being knocked over, as if the thief had been hurried in his work.

CHAPTER II.

MISSING.

THE next day Jesuita was taken before the *commissaire.*

She was able to answer questions now, and to tell what she knew. Indeed, a strange, stony calm seemed to have taken possession of her—as if she had wept away last night all power of weeping.

She was as white as marble; but her beauty looked all the more pathetic for her grief, and even the *commissaire*—few people are less sentimental—was deeply moved when he questioned her.

Well, she knew little enough. She could not tell how much was taken from the till, she did not know what was in it.

She mentioned two curios that she missed, but she had only a limited knowledge of the stock, she was busy with her own profession. She was never in the shop, knew of no one likely to rob her father. She testified to his habits and those of the household generally; had not seen anyone about last night when she went to the theatre.

Then she was questioned about her own life.

Had she any lover?

She flushed at the question, but answered it quietly.

"No—no one."

The police spoke to the same end. Mlle. Jesuita had led a blameless life.

Old Marthe was examined, but could throw no light on the matter. The *sergent de ville* had noticed no suspicious character in the street.

Other witnesses were called with a like result. Nothing had been seen to excite suspicion. In truth, the crime was, in itself, commonplace enough; the only wonder was that Papa Guilbert had not been murdered long ago, when you came to think how easy it was, with that disreputable alley, too, opposite, to run down and hide oneself.

The old dealer's stock was sold, and the proceeds and the money he had saved made pretty Mlle. Jesuita quite a well-off young lady. She received (though she was not yet sixteen) many offers of marriage. The management of the Opera offered to double her salary, and the management of the Eden wanted her as *première danseuse*; the double attraction of her beauty and of her father having been murdered would be quite a "boom" for the management.

But Mlle. Jesuita turned a deaf ear to all offers, legitimate or otherwise, and disappeared from Paris; but within a year she came back and entered herself as a pupil of the Conservatoire, where she speedily became a favourite scholar, and carried off the first prize in tragedy.

But why had Jesuita Yvetot kept back from the police what she had heard about the handsome Englishman who came to the shop twice, and the second time bought a mere trifle, but chatted with Papa Guilbert?—the man, who, though he was a gentleman and dressed well and wore a diamond ring, had not much money; who, though he said he was going to Italy in the afternoon, was seen near the shop in the evening, and went down a very shady street. There might not be anything suspicious in all this—or there might be. Jesuita could not have forgotten it, surely? and certainly she could not have forgotten that she missed the Bronze Persephone; but she kept that to herself, too.

CHAPTER III.

MLLE. SAINT LYS.

"I HATE matinées," said the dramatist, laying down his cigarette, and leaning back in his chair.

He was a tall, slightly built, decidedly handsome man, with curly, dark hair and moustache, brilliant dark eyes, and finely-cut features; but, despite the grey on his temples, he did not look more than two or three and thirty.

"Naturally enough," said the young man—an ordinary-looking man of the journalistic type, to whom the above remark was made; "but you might come to this one."

"What's the attraction of this one, Clement?"

"This new girl—the French girl—Mlle. Saint Lys."

"Oh, yes!—I remember. I forgot for the minute whether she was playing in to-day's matinée, or Thomson's next week. But, my dear boy, you know as well as I do, what these 'new people' generally are. This girl isn't an amateur, certainly. She's a trained artist—has played in Paris—why didn't she stop there if she's so good?—but she isn't likely to compensate for sitting out a stupid piece."

"They say she's awfully good-looking."

"The new people always are," replied the other cynically; "and if she really is beautiful, she is so much more likely to act badly; the beauties generally do. However," he said rising, "I'll come with you, and if your Mlle. Saint Lys is a fraud, I'll hold you responsible."

"Very well," said Clement laughing, and Caerlyon went off to change his coat.

He joined his friend in a few minutes, and the two walked across to the Vaudeville where the matinée was. Caerlyon's chambers were in Adelphi.

The beginning of the first act promised fairly; towards the end Mlle. Saint Lys made her appearance. She had not what dramatists call an "effective" entrance, though she was playing the principal part in the piece. No matter, she made her own effect, without any aid from stage craft. She was young, she was beautiful, she was charming, she was an artist.

Clement said, "by Jove!" under his breath, and looked at Caerlyon. Other people, the men especially, applauded. It was spontaneous—the newcomer was so handsome, so altogether out of the common; but

Hazel Harlow's stage career will fascinate you.

Caerlyon said nothing, and didn't applaud, he drew in his breath silently; he was moved to something more than admiration, but Clement saw only the admiration, and whispered, "What do you think of her, eh?"

Caerlyon half smiled. He didn't feel as if he could criticise just yet. He was of impassioned, emotional temperament, as an artist should be; and the face of that girl on the stage had touched deeper chords than calm criticism could reach; but he was the last man to give out the sound of those chords, being, as regarded his own inner life, intensely reserved. So he said:

"She is very beautiful. Her face would make her fortune, even if she couldn't act."

"You make sure she can act, then?"

"Of course. There's brain as well as heart and soul there."

The actress swept the scene and the audience along with her, whirled them up on the top of her passion, and made them weep with her pathos; it was verily a making of bricks with a modicum of straw, if not altogether without straw. The triumph was the artist's, not the dramatist's, and it was a complete triumph.

"Are you going round to be introduced to Mlle. Saint Lys?" asked Clement, as they rose.

"No, thanks. There'll be a dozen press men bowing and smirking about her. I'll keep my illusion for a little while."

Mlle. Saint Lys had an offer from a London manager the same day; it was not a big part—there was none such open, but it was worth playing, and she accepted it. She was to attend a rehearsal the next day at two o'clock.

She sat in her apartment the morning after the *matinée* and read the daily papers. She had taken rooms in Bloomsbury-square, because they were large and old-fashioned, and near the Strand. All the notices praised her—her beauty, her talents, her "sympathetic charm;" all prophesied for her a great future. She laid the last down and covered her face, the hot tears fell through her fingers.

"How proud and happy *chéri* would have been!" she whispered. "How he would have taken me to his heart and kissed me, and that would have made me happier than all that the whole world can say of me!" Then she lifted her face; a change had come over it—it looked stern and resolute, almost pitiless. "But I will never rest, father," she said, as if addressing a living being, her eyes gazed upwards, "until I have found your murderer and avenged you. I am here—in London—at last. Shall I find him? Is he the guilty man—the Englishman? How shall I know him? It seems so hopeless." She dropped her head in her hands again. "And yet I cannot help hoping. I know I shall one day find him. He said he was a dramatist; but that might not be true. He was tall and handsome —a dark man, and spoke perfect French; those are guides. But then, he may be innocent—perfectly innocent. Still, I shall find who is guilty, and I will not spare him. It is my right to avenge my father. Our Lady will help me to find his murderer."

CHAPTER IV.

MEETING.

"Is Mr. Darley here?" asked Caerlyon at the stage door of the Ionic Theatre.

"Yes, sir; he's on the stage, I think."

"A rehearsal?"

"Yes, sir."

Caerlyon went on, and in a minute was on the stage; and the first person he saw, coming out of the light into the semi-darkness, was Jesuita Saint Lys. She was standing by a table in the centre of the stage, going through a scene with the villain of the piece, of course reading her part. Darley, the manager of the theatre, was standing near the "T" piece with the stage-manager. A few other artists were standing about the wings, two or three looking sulky; actors hate to be called down to rehearse a piece they know backwards and forwards, just for the sake of a new comer.

Caerlyon's business was with the manager; but he paused at the side, waiting until the scene was over, and he was not sorry, for his own sake, to do so. It was something more than pleasure to watch Mlle. Saint Lys; but Darley saw him, and went up to him at once.

"You've lost no time," said Caerlyon, as they shook hands.

"No, indeed. I'm lucky, I take it; the town will go wild over her. I'll introduce you in a minute. She's reading the part charmingly. Did you want me, old fellow?"

"Only about that front piece; there's no hurry. I'll look on at the rehearsal."

"All right. The scene's over now. Come and be introduced. Mlle. Saint Lys——!" as they went forward; the girl turned, and glanced up in the dark, handsome face of the tall man by Darley's side.

"Mr. Caerlyon," said the manager, "I daresay you know his name. He speaks French as well as you do, and Castilian also."

The simple words sent a strange, swift shock to the girl's heart. Yes; she knew Caerlyon's name. She had seen a one-act piece of his abroad, which she had admired as a gem; and here he was before her—the dramatist, who spoke a Frenchman's French; who was tall and handsome, with dark eyes and dark, curly hair. Surely this was the man who came to the little shop in the Petite Rue Trois Etoiles! But an assassin—with that face, that mien! Impossible! Just a moment was the change in her face—a startled and pained look in the large eyes, which Caerlyon noticed and wondered at; then she held out her hand frankly, and said, in her pretty English:

"Of course, I know your name, Mr. Caerlyon. I saw a play of yours—in Berlin—and liked it so much."

"You are very good to say so, Mlle. Saint Lys. And what shall I say of your performance yesterday?"

"Pretty things—naturally—to my face," said she, with demure gravity. "What else?"

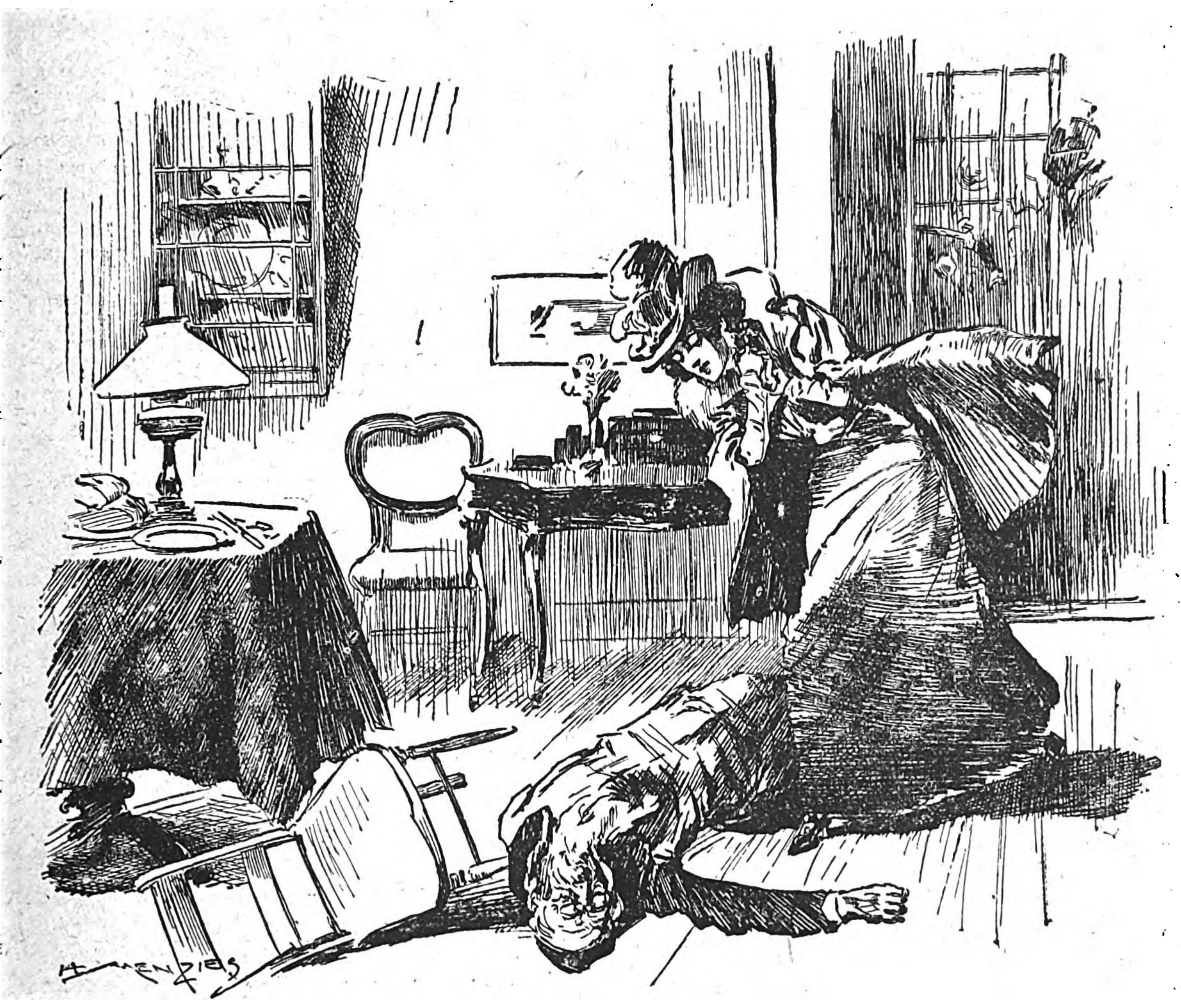
"To your face—or to anyone," he answered. "Only 'pretty things' won't cover the ground. I mean to say that I was simply charmed. You have your future in your own hands."

"You really think that?" said the young actress, with an earnestness, a manifest belief in the value of his judgment, which was clearly genuine.

"Don't you know it yourself?" Caerlyon said, smiling at her *naïveté*, marvelling how she had kept it till now, how long she would retain it.

"Not fully," she replied, with a touch of perplexity on her mobile features. "I feel so distrustful of myself, often."

"You have no cause to be, believe me; though some self-distrust is good for an artist. I must not detain



Then, with a choking cry, she flung herself down by the dark form lying prostrate on the floor.

you now. Perhaps I may have the pleasure of seeing you again when the rehearsal is over."

He bowed and turned away, and Jesuita went back to her work with a tumult of emotion in her heart.

Caerlyon got through his business with Darley during the rehearsal, and by that time it was over, and the dramatist went up to Jesuita again and walked with her out into the Strand. There they paused.

"I must run home to study," the girl said. "I play to-morrow night."

"I shall come and see you," Caerlyon said.

"The first night? I shall be nervous."

"Never mind; you will play well, all the same. Can I put you in a cab?"

"Thanks so much."

A hansom cab was near; the driver had his "weather eye" on the well-dressed couple, so it was only for Caerlyon to hand his beautiful young companion into the vehicle.

"What address?" he said, as she gave him her hand.

"99A, Bloomsbury Square. A thousand thanks, Mr. Caerlyon."

Then he released her, and, lifting his hat, turned away and gave the address to the driver.

The cab drove off, and Caerlyon walked to his chambers in Adelphi. He had work to do that afternoon, but he could not get on with it. Jesuita's face was between him and the paper; her words—all she had said, trivial or not—kept repeating themselves in his mind; the touch of her hand lingered in his.

He met the young artist on Sunday, at Darley's house. The rooms were crowded, and Jesuita was surrounded. Everybody wanted to speak to her, and Caerlyon at first made no attempt to get near her. Presently there was a break, and Caerlyon made his way to Jesuita's side. She turned and gave him her hand, with a bright smile.

You've spoken to your friends about "The Golden Dwarf," of course?

"I saw you when you came in, Mr. Caerlyon," she said, "but you were talking to someone at the time."

"And I," he said, "have been waiting my opportunity to get near you. But let me find you a seat. Have you had any tea or coffee?"

"Oh, yes, thanks."

Caerlyon found seats; they were somewhat out of the way of the crowd, and for that reason had perhaps, hitherto escaped observation, but they were so much the more attractive to Caerlyon; and Jesuita would have been quite content to spend the rest of the afternoon in his company. She did feel flattered, or rather, happy, that this gifted, brilliant man singled her out, as it were. Of course she knew she was beautiful, and that all men liked the society of a beautiful woman; but Caerlyon talked to her as if she had brains, and not merely a huge capacity for swallowing compliments.

"I am afraid," he said, as they rose, "that I have been playing the part of usurper. You must do your best to forgive me—mercifully considering the temptation."

"But, then, I have nothing to forgive, Monsieur," said the girl, "but a great deal to be grateful for!"

"Grateful?"

"Why yes. You have made the time pass so pleasantly, and it is so good of you to talk to me."

"Is it?" Caerlyon said, with a slight smile. "I think—if I am good at all—it is in resigning you to others."

A faint colour crossed the girl's cheek, but she laughed. "I prefer it my way," she said, as they moved slowly towards the principal room—they had been sitting in the back drawing-room.

"Very well," returned Caerlyon quietly, "I hope you will let me have the pleasure of calling upon you one day, Mlle. Saint Lys."

"I shall be very pleased, Monsieur. By-and-bye I must have an 'At Home' day; but I think I shall be at home in the afternoons for the present. I might have to be out——"

"Never mind, I must take my chance, and call again if you are out."

Then they mingled with the crowd, and Caerlyon did not speak to Jesuita alone during the remainder of the afternoon.

CHAPTER V.

A GIFT.

"MLLE. SAINT LYS!"

It was two days later, and Caerlyon and the actress came face to face in a street off Soho; she was just emerging from the low-browed shop of a curio-dealer. There was a flash of something more than pleasure in his dark eyes as he held out his hand; in hers, for a second, that odd, strained look he had noticed at their first meeting, and noticed again now; but it passed, and she smiled, giving him her hand over which his closed fast and close.

"Who would think of meeting you here?" he added smiling. "How did you find your way to such an out-of-the-way place?"

"I make inquiries and find out things!" she said. "I am fond of curios—but there was nothing in that shop I cared for."

"So you prowl about Soho, curio-hunting! Is that it?"

"Sometimes. I used to poke about among the curio shops in Paris. Do you care for such things?"

The question was put with a purpose; her eyes went to his face as she asked it.

"I don't know that I do care very much," he answered; something in the tone—or was it her fancy?—implied, "not *now!*" He added, almost directly:

"Am I detaining you? Where are you going—if I may ask?"

"To a curio shop in Greek Street—and then home."

"May I escort you to this curio shop?"

"Will you? That will be a great pleasure."

So they walked on to Greek Street, and at the door of the shop Jesuita paused.

"You will not come in?" she said. "I shall tire out your patience!"

"You could not!" he said, his hand on the door, and something in look and tone brought a quick throb to the girl's heart. "I will come in—if I may?"

"Oh, yes," she said, a little hurriedly, "only I was afraid you might be bored."

"There is no danger of that."

He opened the door and they entered the shop.

Jesuita certainly looked the stock well over, but she bought two or three things which were tolerably expensive, so the dealer had no cause of complaint, and Caerlyon stood watching her, and wishing he could buy any and all these things she admired, and give them to her.

"I shall have finished in a minute," Jesuita said, turning to her cavalier.

She had been rummaging at the opposite side of the shop.

"I am in no hurry for you to finish," said Caerlyon smiling. "I shall be sorry when you have done so."

She did not answer that, but bent over some things on the counter.

The dealer brought out a small, curiously-chased silver bowl.

"A gem, miss," he said. "It is from Spain—you see—underneath—the name and date—one hundred years old—and so beautiful! Only five pounds—that is very cheap."

Jesuita looked wistfully at the curio. She could see it was genuine; she knew a great deal about such matters, from her father; but she shook her head.

"No," she said. "I have enough for to-day. Put the things up, please."

"And the bowl with them," said Caerlyon, taking out his pocket-book. Jesuita flushed, and spoke in a quick undertone, in Castilian:

"Señor! you must not!—indeed, you must not!"

"You cannot deny me so small a pleasure!" he said softly, in the same language; and he gave a five-pound note to the delighted dealer.

"Ah, Señor!—it is so good of you!—but you take me at a disadvantage! What can I say?"

He laughed a little then.

"Is it unfair to snatch happiness when one can?" he said. "There is not too much of it in this world, is there?"

"And you give me some of what there is!" said Jesuita. "I don't know how to thank you!"

"You have done it—if thanks are needed—full measure, well pressed down."

He took the package from the dealer, and they went out into the street.

"Is it home now?" Caerlyon added. "Let me drive you up. I have almost to pass your door."

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That was an elastic way of putting it. His destination was a good bit wide of Bloomsbury-square; but Jesuita could not suggest that, even if she suspected it. He handed her into a cab, and took his place beside her, devoutly wishing that Bloomsbury was ten miles off instead of one, and that he could tell the cabby not to drive so fast! He asked Jesuita if she would be at home to-morrow afternoon, and she answered, yes.

"Then I will give myself the pleasure of calling," he said, "if convenient."

"Oh, yes!—quite convenient!" and then the cab stopped, and he sprang out and handed her down.

"And I must thank you again for that dear, old bowl!" she said, her hand in his.

"You honour me infinitely by accepting it," said Caerlyon; unconsciously his clasp tightened as he spoke.

Jesuita put down her treasures tenderly on the drawing-room table—the tenderness was for the silver bowl. Her lips were parted, in a half-dreamy smile; a strange, sweet tremor was thrilling through her veins. How happy she had been that morning, and she had not dreamed of being so; and to-morrow again!—and then, athwart the golden haze, rose a shadow—the vision of the little, dark, old-fashioned shop in the Palais Royal, and a dark, handsome man standing there, as he had stood in the shop to-day. Did he remember? Why should he? Yet—the tone in which he had answered the question. Did he care for curios? Oh, but what frightful thoughts to have of him! Noble, chivalrous, tender! What then? Was she at a deadlock?

"If I could only find the Bronze Persephone," she said, inwardly.

CHAPTER VI.

"JESUITA."

THE next two days Jesuita spent among the curio shops; the third she had to commence rehearsing for the *matinée*, for she found the part to be a good one, and the piece was far better than that in which she had made her London *début*.

She met Caerlyon as she came out from rehearsal, and they walked down the Strand together, she telling him about the play; and when they parted, he asked her if she had seen the piece at the St. James's—it was very good.

"Why don't you go on Saturday?" he added.

"Not this Saturday," said Jesuita. "I am going to see your play."

"You have seats?"

"Yes; I was going to write for them, but the stage-manager at the Ionic gave them to me."

"Do you know," said Caerlyon gravely, "you are treating me very badly? You were going to write for seats to the theatre—instead of asking me!"

"Monsieur! You are so kind already—and you must have so many people troubling you; it would be like an impertinence for me——"

"Hush! child; don't talk so!" Caerlyon interrupted in quick pain. "I can't bear it! Yes. I know how you felt; only, if you had asked me! Well, never mind"—as her colour rose and her eyes dropped—"I mustn't scold you here—in the Strand. Who are you going with on Saturday?"

"With Miss Morton, at the Ionic."

"You have asked her?"

"No, monsieur; I shall ask her to-night."

"Please, don't! Be very good to me! Let me take her place?"

The girl glanced up, under her long lashes, with a kind of flash in her dark eyes, a sort of quiver on her whole face; her heart spoke for her before her lips answered: "I shall be so pleased, monsieur!"

"Will you? Thank you so much! Then I will call for you. You can give away the seats you have; they won't be needed."

Then they separated, and Jesuita went home, walking in a haze of rainbow tints. And on Saturday—this was Thursday—Caerlyon came in a hansom, and they drove down to the theatre, where Caerlyon led his young companion to a grand tier box.

Unlike most authors, he had no particular pleasure in seeing his own plays; but he wanted to know what she thought of this one. For himself, all his pleasure was centred in her.

And Jesuita certainly enjoyed the play the more because Ernest Caerlyon had written it, though it would have delighted her whoever wrote it.

He leant back, watching covertly every change of the mobile features, as she followed, with absorbed interest, the action of the opening scene, and when the act-drop fell, she turned and met his smile.

"Oh, monsieur," she said with glowing eyes, "I like it so much!"

"I knew that, by your face," he said softly. "I am so glad—so glad that you like my work!"

In the second act, the interest, as it should do, deepened, and it closed in a powerful and pathetic scene.

Jesuita flung all her dramatic soul into the scene. Her lips trembled, her dark eyes burned, filled with tears; her colour went and came. She was as much excited as if she looked on reality; and Caerlyon, in the shadow, held his breath as he looked at her. And had she, in her profound interest in the play, forgotten him? Or was there a subtle sense of his presence, shedding—though she might not know it—its own glory on that scene on the stage?

She sat quite still when the curtain had gone down, too deeply stirred for word or movement, and Caerlyon knew far too well in himself what such emotions are, to break through the spell that was on her. But when she turned with a tremulous smile on her lips, but her eyes not meeting his full, he smiled too.

"You couldn't say more," he said, in that soft, almost caressing tone, "with any words your tongue could utter."

She shook her head.

"No," she answered in a half whisper, and paused.

"It is hard," he said in the same tone, "to come back to the everyday world."

"Yes." She spoke in a half-dreamy way. "Only—I don't seem to have come back—yet."

The curtain rose on the third act almost directly afterwards; but for a little while Jesuita did not know what went on on the stage.

When the act-drop fell, Caerlyon said nothing for a few minutes. The girl, too, was silent; her heart was beating fast; she had no power to break the silence that was so sweet, yet that, in a way, frightened her.

Then Caerlyon spoke in his gentle way. How did she like the heroine's part?

"A glorious part!" she said, half turning to him then.

Hazel Harlow's stage career will fascinate you.

"And you would play it gloriously," he answered; "but you are too young, that is all; you could not look a woman of thirty."

Jesuita flushed and caught her breath. Praise from him was incense indeed. All other praise seemed poor and worthless beside it. Would he, perhaps, one day write her a part? She dared not ask him now.

Caerlyon drove her back home. He would not relinquish her until he was compelled to do so, and on the way asked her if she was very busy just now. She answered, yes. To-morrow she must study her part in the *matinée* piece—a long part—for it was only ten days to the performance; the lady who was to have played had fallen ill; and there were the rehearsals and dresses to see to. Caerlyon bit his lip, but said, quietly:

"Well, I must try, in spite of all, to see you soon again. If you are too busy to see me, you must send me away."

"I couldn't do that," she said, in a low voice. "In a few days I shall have more time, perhaps."

A few days! A day seemed cruelly long to him—dividing him from Jesuita! But he said nothing of this, for the cab stopped just then, and so they must part. Jesuita knew he could not come in, for he had told her he had an appointment at twenty minutes past six, and it was six now, so they said good-bye on the step. It was a very close clasp he gave her hand.

"It is so hard," he said, in a sort of suppressed way, "to say good-bye, even for a little time. *Au revoir*"—he bent lower—"Jesuita!"

He dropped her hand, and turned away.

CHAPTER VII.

The Story of Persephone.

Hard to say good-bye—hard, indeed, for Jesuita, as for Ernest Caerlyon; hard to go down to the theatre and play; and, oh! hardest of all to study, with that soft, half-passionate "Jesuita" in her ears, in her heart; while she lived over again all that time of exquisite happiness with him, and wanted only to give herself up to dreaming—to bathe in "the light that never was on land or sea."

"He loves me—he loves me!" kept throbbing in her heart; and lines grew blurred and confused, and would not range themselves in her memory. How could they, when all that Caerlyon had said yesterday took their place? It took Jesuita longer to get part of the first act of that part in her head than to learn a whole play at any other time.

There was a rehearsal on Monday morning, but it was over before one—the stage was wanted for someone else and Jesuita took her way, before returning home, to a curio shop in Wardour Street, of which she had incidentally heard at the theatre,

The dealer had an immense collection, and Jesuita at once professed her liking for bronzes, of which she had seen several in the window and in the shop. The dealer, a French Jew, was ready to display his best wares; the lady was handsomely dressed—she evidently did not mind spending money.

"If mademoiselle will come upstairs," he said, presently, "I have some lovely bronzes."

And he led her up to a fair-sized room on the first-floor, where there were bronzes galore.

She looked at gods and goddesses, horses, stags, Jacoöons and saints, lamps and inkstands; and suddenly she caught her breath, and went white to the lips.

The dealer, moving some things to get at something he wanted to show her, was beginning, "Here, mademoiselle, is something——" But looked up at a movement from the customer, and saw that she had a little statuette in her hand, and was looking at it intently.

"This—Persephone!" she said—she spoke quietly, lifting her eyes—"how much is it?"

"That, mademoiselle—ah! that is a gem—twenty pounds. I could not take less. That is quite a bargain."

"I will have it," she said. She felt as if something were gripping her round the heart. She had found it at last—by a mere chance, as it seemed—the bronze Persephone! And now what would be the end? She almost shrank from asking the question that quivered on her tongue, yet it must be asked. She spoke with an effort, though it was not apparent. "Do you mind telling me who sold you this statuette, and how long you have had it?"

The man looked at her a little curiously.

"Mademoiselle knows the statuette?"

"Yes—it belonged once to a friend of mine—he must have sold it. I should like, if I can, to know to whom. There is no harm."

"Oh! mademoiselle, no. I have had it—it is now nearly nine months. A gentleman sold it to me."

"You can describe him?"

Her heart was throbbing heavily.

"Oh, yes. He was a man you would notice—very handsome, tall, with dark hair, curly hair and moustache—no beard or whiskers. And very distinguished looking."

Ernest Caerlyon! What could it mean? The description was the same Papa Guilbert had given! If Caerlyon had bought the statuette of anyone, he would not have sold it again. Yet there was scarcely a pause before Jesuita spoke again.

"Would you know this gentleman again?"

"Yes."

He looked interested. Was there some romance connected with the Persephone?

Jesuita drew out a photograph of Caerlyon, which she had bought in a shop—there was no name under it. She held it before the man.

"Yes," he said at once; "that is the gentleman who sold me the statuette."

"Thank you. Ah! then I understand," the girl said, with admirable self-control.

She gave the dealer the bronze to wrap up for her, and paid him for it in notes, taking her treasure with her. He whole soul was in a tumult. She could not believe Caerlyon an assassin; but how had the Persephone come into his possession? That could be accounted for, if it were not for his having sold it. He was not a needy man—nine months ago he was well off; he was a lover of art; he had wanted to buy this very statuette. Why should he sell it, and for what must have been to him a paltry sum?

If he bought it, it would not be to sell it again; if it was a gift, so much the more would he be bound to keep it. He knew something—he must know something—of the murder of Guilbert Yvetot.

Torturing thoughts, memories, came to the girl, to be hurled back with horror; but suspense, uncertainty, was unendurable—she must find out the truth. All that

Stage Life Revelations. See page 96.

night she lay awake, every pulse in her body beating, her brain on fire.

What was she to do? How probe this mystery? And gradually thought shaped itself from an idea, essentially dramatic, that sprang to her mind.

"He knows the truth," she said to herself, her lips parched, her eyes burning. "He shall tell me, or I will never see him again—and he loves me! Though I should break my heart I will avenge my father!"

There was no rehearsal to-day. She would anticipate any chance of Caerlyon calling in the afternoon. She wrote a brief letter to him:

DEAR MR. CAERLYON,

Can I see you to-day, if possible, on a matter of business? Shall I call upon you, or will you call here—any time in the afternoon? Please forgive me for troubling you.

Yours faithfully,
JESUITA SAINT LYS.

That letter puzzled Caerlyon not a little. It seemed somehow—and yet he could hardly tell why—a strange letter for Jesuita to write to him, especially after all that had passed between them on Saturday; but he telegraphed that he would be with her by three o'clock, and waited with what patience he might, torturing himself, as lovers are wont to do, with all manner of fears and conjectures.

And to Jesuita the time of waiting was far more terrible. How would Caerlyon meet her—how would she meet him? It is so useless thinking of such things in these crises of our lives, and yet we always do it, and never by any chance act as we imagined we should do.

Jesuita started with a rush of almost sickening emotion, as she heard a cab stop outside. But she did not move from where she stood, near the window. She heard the door close, steps on the stairs, then the room door opened, and the servant said, "Mr. Caerlyon," and he was in the room. She turned then, and went forward to meet him, but something in her face checked the almost passionate words on his tongue, though he caught her hand in both his.

"Jesuita!" he said, involuntarily, "what is it—what has happened?"

"What should have happened?" She drew her hand away. "Please sit down, I wanted to—to ask you something."

"Ask me what you will, only don't speak to me like that. Jesuita, I——"

He would have taken her hand again, but she drew back.

"No, no!" she said, almost vehemently. "Let me speak to you first—it is an idea I have."

She swept her hand over her forehead.

"Will you sit down, please?"

Caerlyon looked at her sorely perplexed, as well he might be, his cheek paling. What strange mood was this? But he must for the present yield to it.

He did not sit down, but drew back to the mantelpiece, leaning on it.

Jesuita sat down in a low chair opposite. It was better like this, she felt, then if he was more on a level with her.

She bent her head, clasping her hands round her knee.

"I have been thinking," she began, "what you said on Saturday, about that part; and you have told me before that I could do anything. Well, I wanted to ask you if—if you would write me a play."

"Is that all?" said Caerlyon, with a quick indrawn breath; and yet he felt, in his heart, it was not all. "You only anticipate me; it is what I long to do, what I mean to do."

"Yes—yes!" she said hurriedly. "But I want a play written partly on my own idea—a story, at least, part of a story, that I have in my mind—and you might not like to do that."

"I would do anything for you that it is possible to do," said Caerlyon, more and more puzzled, yet resolved to let this scene, as he would have put it dramatically, "play itself out." "What is the story?"

"It is fragmentary—of course, it would need working out. I can only give the opening idea ——"

"Yes—go on!"

She caught in his tone the strain of suspense, and it made her task yet more difficult; but she obeyed, speaking hurriedly:

"The story should open with a murder!" she did not lift her head; she dared not look at Caerlyon—"an old man is discovered dead—stabbed to the heart! It is in France—in Paris; the old man is a dealer in curios—works of art, and so on. He lives a blameless life; there seems no motive for the crime ——"

"A rather melodramatic idea!" said Caerlyon, calmly, as she paused. "Yes?"

"Suspicion, of course, points to the hero," Jesuita went on, "who is—guiltless. But he has been to the shop; he has asked the price of certain things and has not been able to buy, saying, at any rate, that he could not afford them. On another occasion he has called and talked for some time with the old man, seemingly to find out when he was likely to be alone. On the night of the murder ——"

She stopped, for Caerlyon had made an involuntary movement then. Her eyes crept upwards to his face; it was bent down, shaded by his hand; but something about it gave her a sense of tension in the man. Her breath failed her for a moment. Caerlyon broke the pause.

"Are you speaking," he said, in a quiet, level voice, "of some real case?"

"One might think of such things," the girl answered.

"Oh! yes. Go on from where you stopped."

"On that night," she said, "the old man had seen the man who is accused of the murder; but the man is not taken at the time. There is a clue of which only one person knew at the time——"

"What person?"

"Why, naturally, the heroine. The till has been robbed and several objects of art stolen; among them is one which is not mentioned to the police or to anyone——"

She stopped again.

"What is it?" Caerlyon said, without moving.

"A little bronze statuette of Persephone."

She rose as she spoke, stretching out her hand to a little table near her. For a second her eyes met Caerlyon's full; his face was ashen white, even his lips are bloodless.

"And who," he said, slowly—the words came in a hoarse whisper—"who is the heroine?"

"Guilbert Yvetot's daughter—and the bronze Persephone is here."

She placed it on the mantelpiece before him. He looked at it—at her.

"Great heaven!" he said, under breath, and as he

You've spoken to your friends about "The Golden Dwarf," of course?

moved, staggered slightly. He caught the back of a chair near him, and dropped into it, covering his face. There was a minute's deathly silence. Then Jesuita made a step towards him; he lifted his face.

"Do you think," he said slowly, "that I am guilty?"

She flung herself on her knees at his feet.

"No! no!" she broke out, almost wildly. "Not that! never that! But you know who is guilty! Tell me who it is—tell me!"

Caerlyon took her hands in his, holding them fast.

"The man is beyond your vengeance," he said, "beyond all vengeance. He is dead."

"Dead?" She looked into the speaker's agonised face. "Dead!" she repeated. "But who—who?"

"My brother!"

He dropped her hands, and rose; the girl started to her feet with a smothered cry.

"Your brother!" she repeated. Her hand was at her throat; she felt choking. She sank down in the fauteuil, trembling like a leaf.

Caerlyon made a step nearer to her.

"I only knew it when he was dying," he said. "He sent for me and confessed his crime. I'll keep back nothing from you now. You shall know the whole truth; you have a right to know it."

He was close to her now; she did not shrink from him. He sank to his knee by her side.

"Jesuita," he said passionately, "is there blood between us? Does my brother's sin part us?"

"Darling! No! no! You are guiltless!"

She turned to him, and as he gathered her to his breast, wrapping her close, she clung to his neck sobbing.

"My love! my love!" Caerlyon said brokenly, and again and again his quivering lips pressed hers, she giving herself up to him in perfect faith, in love that never questioned or doubted.

By-and-bye, when both had grown a little calmer, Caerlyon spoke again, very low and tenderly, caressing the dear head laid on his heart.

"Dearest, let me tell you now that terrible story! Can you bear to hear it?"

"Yes," she whispered. "Tell me; but, oh! how you have suffered!"

"Suffered——!" He broke off and bowed his head for a moment on hers. "But if you had turned from me," he went on after a pause, "I could not have endured—I could not. Jesuita, look into my eyes—let yours tell me. There is no shrinking in your heart from me for that hideous wrong to you?"

"You know it," she said passionately, "you know it!" But she lifted her eyes to his, and all her soul went out to him in the look he met.

Then he told her that miserable story of how the bronze Persephone came into his possession.

"My brother Bernard," he said, "two years younger than I, was always an idler and a profligate. There were only he and I—no other brothers or sisters. In our youth we lived a great deal abroad; and before I came to England, Bernard had left home. He got involved in some shameful entanglement, and I managed to get him out of the way. That is how scarcely anyone I know in England was aware I ever had a brother; those who did know thought he was dead, and I did not undeceive them. Heaven knows I tried my utmost to redeem him, Jesuita, but it was thankless work. He was only happy in low haunts, among his inferiors, who made much of him, and thought his superficial cleverness talent. He sank lower and lower, and at last I lost sight of him altogether. I tried to find him, but failed, for I would never have let him want, or descend to crime, for the sake of bread. For the honour of our name I would have warded off the last. It was I, Jesuita, who went to Papa Guilbert's shop. I remember the old man well, and the Persephone I admired, but could not buy. But it was not I, it was Bernard, he saw near the house on the evening of that terrible day. Bernard was nearly of my height, but not like me otherwise; but his figure, seen in the dusk, might easily be mistaken for me by anyone who knew me imperfectly. I went to Italy that afternoon. I read the first account of the crime, but missed the rest. The matter seemed to have no very special interest for me, and I was very busy at the time. I remember a daughter being mentioned, but forgot it later."

Involuntarily he pressed the girl's yielding form closer to him, and was silent a minute before he went on.

"Two years ago, I received a letter from a priest in Rome. My brother was dying; I went at once. Bernard was dying in a poor lodging-house in the Trastevere. To him he had already confessed what he told me. He was in Paris three years before, herding with gamblers—and worse. He was poor, he grew desperate. He heard at first by chance of Papa Guilbert and the secluded life he led. He made further inquiries, and found that robbery would be comparatively easy. But he vowed to me, Jesuita—he was a dying man—that he had not intended to commit murder. Yet he took a murderous weapon with him, for self-defence, he said. Still I dare not believe he was anything but reckless as to whether he took life or not. When he knew Papa Guilbert to be alone, he entered the shop and shut the door. The old man, instantly suspicious, made an exclamation, and Bernard sprang upon him——!"

He stopped abruptly. Jesuita was clinging to him, trying to keep back her bitter weeping, trying, too, to soothe the man she loved, in his anguish. How awful a burden he had had to bear! Murder wrought by his own flesh and blood—his mother's son!

"Your father died—without a groan," Caerlyon said, almost in a whisper. "Bernard, panic-stricken when the deed was done, robbed the till, and seized a few of the smaller curios in the shop, among them that bronze Persephone, and fled. But the crime was his own death-blow; he lived in an eternal terror, tortured by remorse; the things he had stolen he dared not part with, or even throw away—he kept them. So he came to his death-bed. Then he gave these things to me, to do with what seemed best to me. To restore them to the rightful owner was impossible; I did not know who that owner was; and how could I confess the story of my brother's crime—the foul blot on my father's name? The money value was not great. I did at least what seemed best to me. I could not keep things stolen; I could not restore them. I sold them, and sent the money to the good priest who heard my brother's confession, for the church, or for the poor, as he should judge. That is the story, Jesuita, of the bronze Persephone."

She did not speak for a long time; she only clung to her lover's breast, giving and taking comfort. So vengeance was, after all, taken out of her hands, and her

"The Adventures of an Actress" are coming. See Editor's Page.

own life given to the man who was flesh and blood of her father's murderer. But would Papa Guilbert, who so loved his child, have wished it otherwise?

By-and-bye, when she could speak, Jesuita told Caerlyon of her quest, and of her strange conviction that she would one day find the Persephone, and that it would prove the clue to the truth.

"But why," Caerlyon asked, "did you keep back all you knew from the police?"

"Why?"—her dark eyes flashed—"I wanted to keep vengeance in my own hands. I knew how such crimes are punished in France. They would easily find excuse for the murderer, and he would be sent to prison or to New Caledonia for a few years. Heaven took vengeance away from me, Ernest. It was better so," she said, laying her head on his breast, and he held her to him, and kissed her in silence.

* * * * *

The play was written for Jesuita Saint Lys, but she was the author's wife before it was even commenced; and it was certainly not written on the lines she had suggested. It is now running at a leading theatre to crowded houses, and Jesuita is the most admired, most popular actress in London. But she remains unspoiled. She loves her art; she loves applause—what true artist does not. But her husband's smile of approval is worth it all, and her happiest hours are the hours spent with him—her true Elysium, to sit by his side while he works, or rest within his arms, leaning on his heart.

The murder in the Petite Rue Etoiles remains, and will ever remain, upon the roll of undiscovered crimes. Only three living people, an old priest of the Trastevere, and Ernest Caerlyon and his young wife, know the story of the bronze Persephone.

◆

"They say very few authors sleep more than seven hours a day." "But think how much slumber they provide for other people!"

Nursemaid: "Oi'm a-going to lave me place, mum." Mistress: "Why? Don't you like the child?" Nursemaid: "Yes; but he's that afeard of a policeman that Oi can't get him near wan."

Mr. Stayer: "I remember when I was a little chap I used to go out nights and ring doorbells and then run away." Miss Freshie (with sudden animation): "Oh, what fun! Why don't you do that now, Mr. Stayer?"

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CARMILITA.

"You wouldn't think now," said Inspector Robert Bruce, of the N.S.P.C.C., (popularly known among us as "Bobby B."); "that innocent little mites of children would have such tragical life-stories, as I know from personal experience, many of them do have."

"Have you any particular one in your mind?" said I.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I have; and one, too, that shows up a certain sort of human, or rather inhuman nature, in a way hardly conceivable."

"Let us have it, then, Bobby," said I; (I don't know why, but somehow I am generally looked for to act as spokesman on these occasions); "The 'cry of the children' is just now being not uncertainly heard, and you, of all people, ought to know something about it worth the telling."

"Yes, poor little beggars!" said Bobby B., sadly meditative; "I ought to know, and I do know. Sometimes—very often, in fact—I wish that I didn't, for it makes me not only sorrowful for the helpless, but to lose all faith in my fellow-man, as being a good and true example of his Maker's image!"

Bobby B. is, I think, one of the kindest-hearted creatures on all God's earth. The proverbial fly is in no danger from him, children, animals all love him, and he them.

It is with the mature cruelty, hiding its unseemly doings in the "dens and caves" of the stately capital of the world, that he wages ceaseless, and relentless war. His "no quarter may well be bracketed with Grant's famous "Unconditional Surrender," for he implicitly believes in thoroughness; and that the detection and due punishment of the guilty, is the only way of Salvation for the innocent.

The following story: (true with the truth of fact) from his own lips, will exemplify this better than can any description I may be able to give of him.

* * * * *

"About two years ago," said Bobby, "at the close of the year, all amusement-loving London were going literally mad over the wonderful acrobatic, and sensational trapeze performances of a girl—a mere mite of ten.

"The child was certainly in her way a genius; accomplishing, as she did, eqilibristic feats that would have put to shame the best efforts of any adult artiste in the same line, then before the public.

"She was a winsome little creature, small, and tiny-limbed; but altogether without that sadly sterotyped professional smile, so typical of her class, little or big, and which to my mind is so pathetic, in that it may hide a sorrowful and aching heart.

"I don't know that I should have particularly interested myself in Carmilita, (her stage name,) though I must confess to having from the first thought the child to be somewhat thin and delicate-looking; and therefore, to all appearance, but little fitted for the strain and excitement of such a life; but that something I happened accidentally to hear concerning her awoke in me a desire to inquire a little into her history.

"It seemed that she was presumably the youngest of the three children of one, James Passmore, and Guiletta his wife; the woman being, as her name indicates, an Italian.

"It was not known exactly where the family lived, beyond the fact that they invariably came from and returned to some neighbourhood in the S.E. district.

"It was from the theatrical agent who did all their business that I got my information, but he could not really tell me much, except with regard to one point, viz., that the wardrobe-woman of the 'Odeon' had been heard to say that, while preparing the child for the stage, the mother would allow no one connected with the theatre (the largest variety house in town,) to be present, and that it was just the same at the close of the 'turn.'

"This set me thinking.

"Where there is unnecessary concealment, there is almost sure to be wrong-doing of some sort; something of which folks are ashamed.

"I was a bit suspicious of this class of people: such, I mean, as have a child, or children upon the stage. I have an idea, indeed, that somebody is making all the profit, while the little performer is doing all the work.

"Besides there have appeared, from time to time, strange revelations in the newspapers; showing how that boys and girls of tender age lead lives of hard, grinding, cruel slavery; the taskmasters being ex-gymnasts; acrobats; circus-riders; who during the best years of their little victims lives, drain the very last drop out of their endurance and intelligence.

"The other side of course, deny all this, and equally of course, it is open to me, and those who think with me, to take the denial as being genuine—or, the other thing.

"My first step was to attend a performance at the 'Odeon,' so that I might study 'Carmilita' at her business and to the best advantage.

"I could not but admire the gracefulness, and neat cleverness of the girl; but I was also peculiarly struck with her strange lack of healthy, wholesome freshness.

"I could see, through my glasses, her poor little arms quiver and tremble to a painful degree, as she threw the whole weight of her body upon them, when raising herself by sheer muscular power from a hanging to a sitting position on the bar of the trapeze.

"Too, I could see, plainly, the little lips whiten and droop at the corners, until my heart was sore with pity for the child.

"And yet it was not Carmelita alone that I watched and studied.

"Superintending the performance was a man in irreproachable evening dress, even to white kids, and with an expensive flower in his coat.

"A big man; brawny of breast and limb—swarthy to; and given to an ugly contraction of brow.

"This was, of course, James Passmore himself, who, however, contrived to preserve an appearance of fatherly tenderness of manner; a hovering protectiveness, which, to the majority of the audience may have seemed excessively charming, but which did not in the least deceive me.

"I was in the stalls, on the extreme left of the fourth row.

"'Q'vite—vat you call—marv'lleuse! eh!'

"The voice in my ear, the suddenness of it, startled me.

"Evidently the speaker, a foreigner, was immediately behind me.

"'I beg pardon!' I said, half turning my head.

"'Carmilita! is she not *une belle charmante*?'

"I am ever suspicious of strangers—especially foreigners—and mistrust them, and the glance I had of this somewhat obtrusive specimen, served but to confirm me in my prejudice—or opinion—which ever you like to call it.

"He let me alone for the remainder of Carmilita's turn; but upon its conclusion began again.

"'You know heem, M'ssieu Jims Passmore? *Sacré!* vat a spich is yours! it makes me to pain my tongue! So!'

"Upon finding that I did not answer him, he went on.

"'Ze large man vith Carmilita,' he said, Charmante Carmilita! You not know heem?' (Here he leaned over closer to me, and whispered me. speaking rapidly). 'I know heem! Vat you vatch heem for so close? Come outside. I tell you then all about Jim Passmore. You vill come?'

"I did not by any means like the look of my interlocutor, but I saw in a flash, that of his mouth, I might learn what I sought.

"'Certainly,' I said, rising, 'wherever you please.'

"'Dis vay! dis vay!' he whispered excitedly, and following him I speedily found myself outside the theatre, and in the wet street.

"My companion led me up by the side of the building to opposite a small, ill-lit, narrow entrance, the 'stage door,' in fact.

"In the shadow of the shuttered shops, we had a fair view of anyone passing out of the theatre.

"There was a brougham waiting with—on the box—a large professional costume basket.

"'Dat is hers—Carmilita's!' said the Frenchman softly. 'Now, vatch you! and you vill see!—you vill see!'

"Presently Passmore came out carrying the girl—a bundle of shawls and wraps, her face, deadly white, alone being visible—in his arms. Close behind him was the woman.

"Depositing his burden—none too tenderly, as I thought—upon the back seat, and, handing in his wife, he got in himself. It was what I saw by the light of the street lamp while the carriage was in the act of moving away from before the door, that told me, unmistakably, that I was on the track of a crime.

"The moment he had fastened the door, after taking his seat, I distinctly saw him take the child by the throat, shake her savagely, as does a bull-dog a rat, and deliberately strike her with his other, and clenched hand, a terrific blow upon the side of the head.

"The Frenchman at my side saw it as well as I, and, as the vehicle disappeared up the narrow street in the direction of Waterloo Bridge, he hissed in my ear:

"'You see! You see! Vell, I vill tell you more! me! André Secompt vill tell you of dat *canaille*—dat *cochon*—vat you call—peeg! Yes!'

"And truly his revelation, while it in no sense surprised me, certainly affected me powerfully.

"It was to the following effect.

"Passmore, it seems, had at one time been a 'strong man' in the same travelling circus company in which Secompt figured as 'droll'

"The two men in course of time became, well, not exactly friends, but—social intimates.

"Passmore, who was the husband of the 'star lady-rider' of the troupe, Guiletta Simondi, had two children, who, from a professional point of view, were a source of bitter disappointment to him.

"He could make nothing of them. They evinced—poor little souls!—no aptitude for any recognised line of 'business.' Whip them! Kick them! Starve them! The result was the same—a blank!

"Both he and his wife were past their youth, and were looking forward to a near termination of their course as active members of the profession.

"That they could depend upon their childrens gains, as a future means of livelihood, was now out of the question.

"Casting about for a likely substitute for their own unprofitable offspring they were not long in meeting with their opportunity.

"It was at Nimes, the last pitch Saroni's Circus was to make on fair French soil, before returning across the Channel for the English touring season.

"'*Hola!*' said Saroni to Guiletta, the day before departure. 'Vere you get de nice leetle "*enfant*" eh?'

"'Vich you mean?'

"'De fair-'air *petite*!'

"'Ah!—si!—si!—cara Carmilita!—si! she is my bambino!—my leetlest one!'

"'Dat so!' said Saroni, puzzled. 'Vere you 'ide her all dis long time-eh?'

"'My sister—in Milan—come back last night,' said Guiletta, a trifle confusedly.

"'*Ah—bien!*—she is charmante, the leetle Carmilita! Yes!'

"Guiletta moved away, as having had enough of the conversation; Saroni just muttering: 'Ver' strange!—from Milan, last ni'!—*Non!—bien*; *pauvre petite!* she vill 'ave ze bad time vith Guiletta—yes!'

"This little encounter had taken place in the ring during morning rehearsal.

"Quietly turning somersaults in a corner, on a square of old soft carpet, Andre Secompt, the 'droll,' appeared to be absolutely unconscious of everything in his vicinity.

"The others gone, however, he sat down; his legs tucked under him, the fingers of his left hand slowly stroking his chin in a meditative way, the while a peculiar smile played about his eyes and lip corners.

"'Cara Carmilita!—*bou*! Ah! *mon chere* Jims you not know I know. Zat Madame in ze *Rue d'Etoiles*; she veep dis morning for her leetle *fille*. I say not'ing, —I—*Non*. Some time I speak! and zen! look out you! *mon cher* Jims!—but yes!'

* * * * *

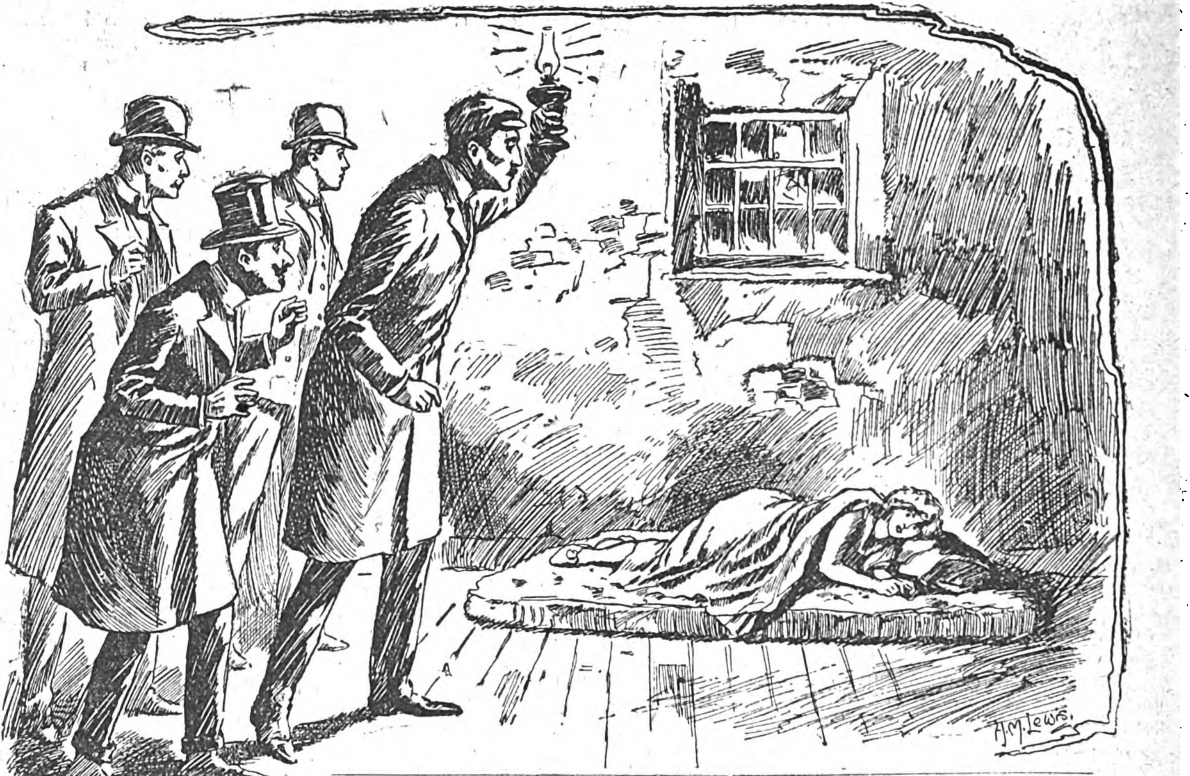
"During the telling of his story, Secompt fidgeted and shook with excitement.

"I couldn't quite make out why he should be so exercised in spirit.

"'Has this man, Passmore, ever injured you in any way?' I asked him.

"'Injure me! But yes! He marry Guilette!' spat

You've spoken to your friends about "The Golden Dwarf," of course?



Upon it, dressed precisely as when she left the theatre, was poor little Carmilita.

out the ex-droll, his teeth grinding viciously. 'He play "faro" and cheat! cheat! cheat! He rob me of my moneys! me! I would kill heem!'

"'No, you mustn't say such things,' said I, 'or you'll be locked up.'

"'It is that he should be locked up!' almost screamed the infuriated Frenchman. 'But come, my friend! come! Tere is something more for you to see! Come!'

"'Hold!' I interrupted him. 'Steady, man! just tell me where we are going?'

"'Going! to save de *pauvre* Carmilita! to make vat you call sving, *mon cher* Jims!'

"'Well, then, look here, wait a moment! I want to see someone I know! Get you a cab—a growler—wait at this corner for me, I shan't be ten minutes.'

"'Renton!' cried I, breathless; 'you are not on duty, I see!'—he was just putting on his coat in the hospital vestibule. 'Come with me, there's a good fellow! Now—at once!—it's a matter, for all I know, of life and death!'

"'All right, Bobby! I'm your man. Lead on, and—explain afterwards.'

"Diving into a certain restaurant, I found, (as I knew I should find him at this hour,) Detective Inspector Manacle, enjoying a 'chop and chips.'

"'I want you!' was all I said to him, and he, with the alacrity of discipline, rose and joined us on the instant.

"In the cab now, with Secompt, who, in the company of my two friends, (one of whom, I see, is listening to me now,) became suddenly silent.

"'You have told the man where to drive to?' I put to him.

"'But yes!'

"It was a long journey; and a chilly one; for the night was cold, and misty, though the rain had ceased.

"Over Westminster Bridge; along Kennington Park; and past the 'Gate' where the busses and trams stop.

"A little way up the Brixton Road, and then a sharp turn to the left up a bye-street of villa built houses of a fairish size and style.

"The street was not a long one, a cul-de-sac in fact. At the fourth house down, something special was evidently afoot.

"Lights gleamed in every window from top to bottom of it, while sundry hansoms and a few single-horse broughams set down festively-garbed people one after another.

"At Secompt's signal, our vehicle stopped at the first house in the street.

"We all got out; I telling the cabman to wait for us just round the corner in the main road.

"'Can I see Mr. Passmore?'

"'No, I don't think you can,' said the servant. 'We've a party on to-night, and he's busy.'

"The house appeared to be well, and even handsomely furnished and appointed.

"The Adventures of an Actress" are coming. See Editor's page.

"Through the half-open dining-room door, I could just see a gorgeously-spread supper table shimmering beneath an electric light chandelier, with the glitter of silver, and sparkling crystal.

"Flowers were everywhere; and from above came the strain of a lovely waltz, mingled with the hum and chatter of a throng of people.

"Secompt and the two others had remained outside, a couple of doors off.

"'My business is urgent,' I said. 'Give Mr. Passmore my card, and I am s——'

"'Hullo! what's the matter? Who's this? I can't see anybody! Shut the door!'

"It was Passmore, flushed with wine and, perhaps, with a presentiment of coming evil.

"'Pardon me!' I said, maintaining my ground, 'but I think you had really better see me.'

"'I'll be d—d if I do! Why should I? Who are you?' and the bully in the man showed not only in the tone of his voice, but in the savage thrusting of his clenched fists in my face.

"'Well,' said I, 'since you elect to take things in this way, I must needs do my duty in my own.'

"A shrill call on my whistle, and Renton and the Inspector ran up the steps into the hall.

"It would take too long for me to tell everything in detail that then happened.

"After a lot of trouble, and no end of obstruction from Passmore's male guests who by this time had interested themselves in what was going on, we made our way to the top of the house, halting at length before a closed garret door.

"It was locked.

"Kicking it open with a vigorous application of my right foot, I pushed into the room.

"The contrast with the downstairs display, was simply appalling.

"There was absolutely nothing in the room (which was abominably dirty) beyond a mattress (none too clean) on the bare floor.

"Upon it, dressed precisely as when she left the theatre, was poor little Carmilita; for all the world as though she had been dumped down and left.

"But a closer inspection disclosed a state of things more serious.

"Renton, after a hurried examination, found that in addition to the child being in a dangerously advanced stage of consumption, she was literally a mass of sores and bruises from head to foot.

"These the doctor pronounced to be the result of beating with some heavy instrument.

"Wrapping her in his Inverness cloak, Renton carried her in his arms down to the hall, where we found the way barred by Passmore and his wife.

"'Vere you take my child?' cried Guiletta.

"'You will know to-morrow,' I answered her meaningly. 'Let us pass please!'

"Probably we should have had more difficulty than we actually did have, but for Secompt, who hitherto in the background, now pressed forward, and confronted the pair.

"'*Mon cher* Jims!' he said, suavely, but very white. 'Madame Dardique—you know her, eh? *Rue d'Etoile. Nismes*, you know her?'

"There was no need for further fighting, both the man and his wife, seeming to shrink with fear and apprehension.

"Womanlike, however, Guiletta had the last word.

"'You think you win ze trick!' to Secompt, who just smiled in quiet derision, 'but we shall see who vins ze game!—beast!'

* * * * *

"The precious couple disappeared the next day not only from their house, but from all their haunts; so that the summons issued at the instance of the 'Society' fell abortively to the ground. In the interests of justice it was a pity, for if ever wrongdoers deserved the due reward of their evil deeds it was this pair.

"After all, however, it didn't much matter; we had the child, and that was the main thing.

"In due course Carmilita, or rather Adele Dardique was handed over to her mother's care, that lady having arrived in London, in quick response to my telegram.

"Madame Dardique then told me how that Adele's nurse had taken the child to see the show, and had suddenly missed her. Every inquiry as to the little one's whereabouts was fruitless, and until my communication, following hard upon Secompt's repentant information to the bereaved mother, nothing had been ever heard of her.

"The 'droll,' for his share in the business, was not forgotten, his almost criminal long-silence being quite forgiven. He was not at bottom a bad fellow, and in the end fully deserved the substantial appreciation he subsequently received.

"The public, of course, wondered for the usual nine days' over Carmilita's absence from the 'Odeon' programme, but were vouchsafed no satisfaction from either the management or from us.

"Marvellous to say, the child took a favourable turn that night; for following the course of treatment advised by Renton; now becoming widely known as a phthisis specialist, progress towards complete recovery was sure and rapid.

"Only a week ago I received this from Madame Dardique:—

"'Adele is becoming a perfect romp, and sends her love and kisses with both hands to dear M'ssieu Bruce and M'ssieu Renton.'"

GET THE ROYAL FOR JULY

Next Saturday.

Hazel Harlow's stage career will fascinate you.

The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"It is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Otto Hare would like to suggest that he did—Esther's mercenary mother accepts his hints. She wants the Golden Dwarf for a son-in-law.

Felix is secretly loved by Judith Garland, a striking brunette, Lady Dering's companion. She has a wastrel brother, Neal, who is unaccountably in Wyresdale, and who is demanding money. This, by an affectation of sisterly solicitude, Judith obtains, as a cheque, from Felix Dering. The cheque is payable to bearer.

Otto Hare has an ally, a strange German physician, Joseph Kraft, who lives with him at Wyresdale Park, the Golden Dwarf's residence. He is an object of much curiosity to Archibald Geddes, a clever assistant at the Wyresdale Pharmacy, which is kept by a drunken old chemist, Caleb Forester.

Caleb has a charming daughter, Connie, whom Geddes is making bashful love to. She is Esther's friend, and quarrels with Geddes for crediting the rumour that Felix killed his uncle.

A one-armed sailor has suddenly appeared in Wyresdale. At the chemist's shop he encounters Kraft, whom he follows, and on the strength of some past episode attempts to blackmail. Kraft repulses him, but is dexterously tracked by the sailor to a curious fort-like structure in Wyresdale Park.

While spying on this the sailor is attacked by a huge dog, which he stabs. He is seen by Kraft and the Golden Dwarf.

Esther tells Felix of her mother's plan to marry her to Otto Hare. They swear constancy in an old and picturesque oath. Felix returns to Dering House, to be asked by the child Brian if it is true Felix has taken his father away.

Judith Garland shows Felix several links of a chain he has been in the habit of wearing. They are bloodstained. She adds that they were found near the cross roads, where Sir Christopher's body was discovered, and that, moreover, Felix was seen near the place at ten o'clock on the night when he was supposed to be in Duchester. She assures him she will keep his secret.

Felix in vain protests his innocence. At this moment an inspector of the local police is announced.

Felix Dering staggers—is he dreaming, the prey of some hideous nightmare?

A caution sounds in his ears; Judith Garland is speaking to him. "Don't look like that," she whispers, "pull yourself together."

Notwithstanding their alarm, the police-officer—one Inspector Brasher—has merely called to arrest, on suspicion of being concerned in Sir Christopher's death, a certain Edward Spencer, a young Irish groom whom the baronet, shortly before his death, had given notice to leave. Protesting his innocence, Spencer is taken away. While on the route to the little country police-station, he was seen by Foley, with whom Dr. Kraft has been holding a mysterious consultation. Almost immediately afterwards, Foley, by chance, makes the acquaintance of Neal Garland. "Here, my hearty," asks the sailor in his maritime lingo, "what was it you picked up yonder and gave to the taut little craft you had with you?" He is referring to the meeting of Judith and Neal at the stile.

The scene changes. During a walk in the meadows on a pleasant Sabbath morning, Felix tells Esther that he was indeed in Wyresdale that fatal evening, and explains his return. A new sensation interrupts their conversation, Felix is called to the small local police-station. It has a single cell, and in this Ted Spencer had been confined over an adjourned inquest. This cell is now empty, Spencer has vanished. The barred window has been broken through—from the outside!

With the help of Neal, Esther kidnaps little Brian Dering, to further her ends with Felix.

CHAPTER X.

Caleb Forester is Indiscreet.

"Wilful murder against Edward Spencer."

The afternoon sunshine was streaming through the front of Caleb Forester's shop in a golden shower, tinged here and there with the colours of the large ornamental flasks behind the upper panes. A crimson bar fell on the stern, self-satisfied features of Inspector Brasher, and seemed to bathe his palms in blood as he rubbed them together. It was he who had spoken.

"Just so," remarked Archibald Geddes, pausing, with his finger on the lever of his pharmaceutical scales, to peer round the edge of the wooden screen which hid the dispensary table. "And allow me to say, Inspector," he added, as he tilted the drug he had been weighing on to a piece of white paper, "that the verdict is an outrage upon the intelligence of Wyresdale. Luckily, it's nothing but the view of a coroner's jury."

The Inspector fingered his smart black beard.

"You'll be telling me next, Mr. Geddes," he observed drily, "you're glad the station strong-room was broken into and Spencer helped off."

Geddes sniffed and proceeded to fold the last of a set of teething-powders.

"I can't say I'm overpleased by that fact," he owned; "till you catch the poor lad again there can't be a trial, and I imagine a trial would be most interesting. Yet I'd lay odds it wouldn't have been Spencer who'd have been found guilty."

Inspector Brasher leaned on the long glass case at his

Stage Life Revelations. See page 96.

back that, stacked with bottles and packets, formed the counter of the establishment.

"You're obstinate, Mr. Geddes," he said; "even for a Scotchman you're obstinate. But answer me this: If Sir Christopher's groom wasn't responsible for his master's death what did he want to escape for?"

Archibald Geddes began to write a label.

"Perhaps," he looked up to suggest, "you should ask the person who got those bars out of the strong-room window and persuaded Spencer to take flight. Not that you or I would need much inducement under the same circumstances, whether we were guilty or innocent."

"And who," propounded the Inspector, "do you reckon that person to be?"

Geddes finished his parcel and set it aside.

"My theories," he declared evasively, "wouldn't stand your expert criticism, Mr. Brasher. Nor do I wish to improve my acquaintance with the law of libel."

Brasher wrinkled his brows.

"If you are thinking," he said, "of a certain rumour about a quarrel having taken place between Sir Christopher and—a—relation the day prior to the discovery of the late baronet's body I will admit it reached our ears. But the—the relative in question spent the night at Duchester; I have checked his movements myself. He simply could not have committed the murder."

Geddes glanced from behind the screen, his small, keen pupils expressing some surprise.

"Upon my word," he ejaculated, "you are a smarter hand than I believed you, Mr. Brasher. And are you quite sure there is no doubt of Mr. Felix Dering's——"

"*S-s-sh!*" muttered the Inspector; "no names—better not, much better not."

"Well, of the relation's innocence," said Geddes; "as you prefer the mysterious way of putting the case."

Inspector Brasher nodded.

"If it could be proved," he answered, "that, at any moment of a particular night, the relation was in Wyresdale, I would nab him without hesitation. But since he spent the whole of the evening in Duchester, at his hotel, or at the theatre, he is free, Mr. Geddes, and, as you observe, there is the libel law to consider."

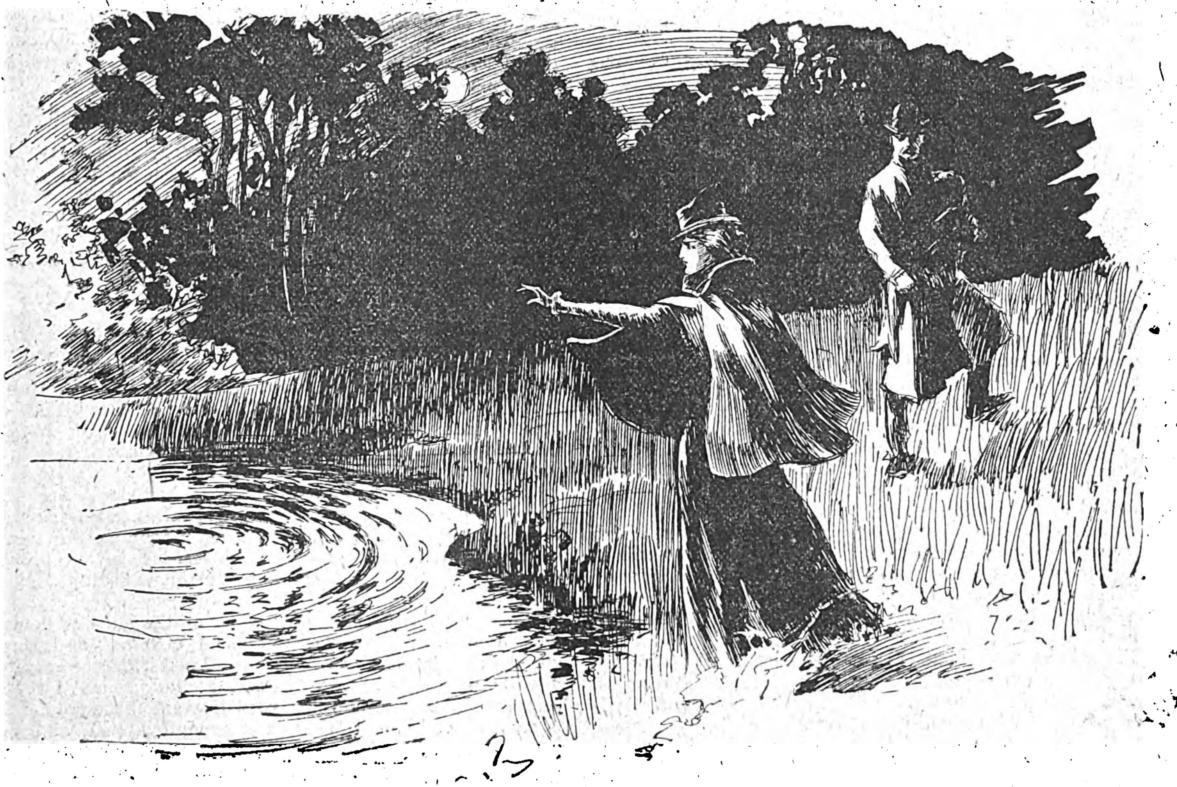
Archibald Geddes whistled.

"You see, Inspector," he said, "I was right when I warned you my theories would not survive your analysis. However, I am charmed to know that the Wyresdale scandalmongers are wrong again, and that I am a failure as a crime investigator."

Brasher smiled loftily; he was pleased with the Scotchman's discomfiture. Before he could pursue the subject a quick step sounded at the back of the screen, and Connie Forester entered the shop by the private door.

A warm glow suffused Mr. Brasher's cheek, all his official dignity deserted him; he bowed with an embarrassed eagerness. Geddes flushed also, but he devoted himself to clearing away his apparatus.

"I—I dropped in," stammered the Inspector, "to convey the verdict to Mr. Geddes."



Judith ran down to the water and hurled out into the lake the package she had made of Brian's bedgown.

You've spoken to your friends about "The Golden Dwarf," of course?

Connie's pretty face lost its air of elaborate indifference.

"Yes," she said; "may I know, too?"

"They found it murder against poor Ted Spencer," explained Geddes scornfully, "and I think less of a Wyresdale jury than I ever did."

Constance Forester sighed.

"Esther—Miss Carew will be sorry," she murmured. "Barbara, the housemaid at the Rosary, was walking out with him, and Miss Carew is very fond of Barbara."

She gazed pleadingly at the Inspector.

"Don't you fancy, Mr. Brasher," she urged, "that there is a horrible mistake somewhere? Sir Christopher must have dismissed Ted a dozen times when he was a little excited, but Ted was always kept on, and Sir Christopher and he were the best of friends. Getting notice is supposed to be the only reason for his harming the squire, isn't it?"

Inspector Brasher conceded the point.

"True," he said, "but Spencer was seen near the place that night, and when he was accused he had a cock-and-bull story about having noticed a horse, led, with a figure like Sir Christopher on it. If he'd volunteered the evidence before his arrest it would have been singular enough, but to bring it out after he was in custody made it more incredible. And, to crown all, he must escape from our strong-room and remove the last doubt in the jury's mind."

"Oh," cried Connie, with a fine burst of contempt, "why shouldn't he get off when he knew he hadn't done it? You police have no hearts. Mr. Brasher, I'm certain if I were accused of murdering Sir Christopher, you would arrest me."

Brasher drew himself to his full height, very red and bashful.

"If I had such a warrant given me to execute, Miss Connie," he said, "I would go down to the Black Pool, tie a stone to my neck, and jump in."

Constance Forester was no coquette, but she could not help a throb of flattered feminine pride at the tremulous significance of the big voice. Archibald Geddes, behind his screen, had a sudden thrill, yet it was one of jealousy.

"You are growing quite gallant, Mr. Brasher," Connie rallied her admirer, "though I'm afraid your being in the Black Pool wouldn't help me. I'd rather, instead of drowning yourself, you found the real criminal, which wouldn't be me any more than it is Ted Spencer."

The Inspector twisted his moustache.

"If I can pitch upon somebody else, Miss Connie," he promised, "against whom there is a crushing piece of evidence, or if I can obtain a clue which seems to vindicate Spencer, I will be the first to inform you of it. I assure you I shall be sufficiently rewarded by that privilege. Good-day to you, Miss Forester. Good-day, Mr. Geddes."

And, with a tender glance at Connie and a stride that would have done credit to one of the Three Musketeers, he marched into the High Street.

As he walked down the sunny thoroughfare, in which groups of Wyresdale folk were still discussing the result of the coroner's inquiry and the disappearance of the accused, the Inspector beheld Caleb Forester returning, as his demeanour showed but too plainly, from the Wheatsheaf Hotel.

The short frame of the chemist, beneath its silver tresses, swayed to and fro like an inverted pendulum. His mouth was expanded into a foolish smile, his arms stiff and dangling. Near the Inspector he halted unsteadily.

"So it's you, Mist' Brasher," he stuttered. "How do you 'preciate the verdict, eh? It's a great load off my mind—a great load."

"That I should guess," said the Inspector, scanning his neighbour's reeling form; "but don't you imagine you were better with the load on?"

Caleb Forester grasped himself by the lapels of a worn velvet coat.

"I told myself," he mumbled, the indistinctness gradually passing from his speech, though the limp quality of his limbs increased, "all will be well if he only lies low and says nothing. I will never betray him. He lent me money when my wife died and I nearly lost the shop. 'Let us hope nobody but me saw him,' I said, 'but we must chance that. Crouch down and let the hounds go by.' And he did—he did!"

Inspector Brasher seized the old chemist's arm and guided him up High Street.

"Yours was excellent advice," he observed quietly, "and, as you remark, it has been justified by events. I trust he is grateful."

"Grateful!" repeated Caleb. "Why should Mr. Dering be grateful to me? I should have been driven out of house and home but for him. No, no, I gave him no advice, but I kept his secret—yes, I kept his secret."

"Mr. Dering!" gasped the Inspector under his breath. "Michael Brasher, go easy—this is the case of your life."

The acute ear of the drunkard caught the opening part of the whisper, and a belated caution flared up in his brain. He wrenched himself from the affectionate Brasher, vaguely conscious in his muddled state that he had committed an indiscretion.

"Excuse me," he quavered, "but I am in a hurry. My daughter will be waiting for me—a dear girl, yet her mother's child, and impatient, just a little impatient. Good afternoon, Mr. Brasher."

He tottered off, morosely polite. As he swerved into the entrance of his shop a spider-phaeton and a pair of roans whirled by, Otto Hare driving the swift cobs. The Golden Dwarf was yet a novel sight in the thoroughfares of Wyresdale, and many a head was turned to mark his tiny figure, handsome profile, and the diamond rings that glittered on his child-like fingers.

"They say," muttered the Inspector, gazing at the impassive owner of the phaeton, "that you are in love with Felix Dering's sweetheart. If it be true you would be glad to know what I know now. He will not block your path for long, not for long."

Then the stalwart form of Michael Brasher lounged thoughtfully onward in the glow of the setting sun.

CHAPTER XI.

A Door is Knocked at.

The July moon looked down at Wyresdale between the driving storm-clouds, which, from time to time, threw their giant shadows over the panorama. A deeper blot of gloom against the dim perspective of the night, Judith Garland hurried on, the little baronet slumbering in her arms.

Once the breeze flung open a fold of her cloak, and the sweet, childish face, with its veined eyelids and fair curls, became visible. Judith contemplated it for a moment, then covered it up again. There was something in her proud, relentless features that made her strange beauty almost diabolical.

Among the lawns and plantations of the home-park she glided, to emerge on the vast meadow that skirted, hereabouts, the Dering estate. The wind buffetted her angrily, yet she pressed forward, directing her course by the scattered clumps of tall elms that diversified the field.

Beyond the last of these the ground dipped, and she perceived, carried on the air, the sharp scent of water. She had neared the curious and miniature lake known to Wyresdale as the Black Pool.

Vague under the changeful sky, it spread a ruffled brown sheet, the waves lapping the flat lee-shore like some thirsty animal. Close to, a bluff hillock commanded the pool.

"The Adventures of an Actress" are coming. See Editor's Page.

Here Judith paused, put one hand to her mouth, and uttered a single low call. A man crept out of some sheltered niche in the irregular mound. His muddied vesture, his unshaven chin, his defiant bearing, served to indicate the personality of Neal Garland.

"You've been a deuce of a while," he growled; "I'd given you up, almost. Have you got the kid?"

His sister divided the heavy wrap which concealed her burden. The child still slept. Grunting approval, Neal Garland led them to a recess shielded from the wind, but lighted intermittently by the moonbeams.

"I secured the toggery this morning," he said. "Walked to Duchester on purpose and bought it at a slop-shop there. I didn't pawn your ring, they wouldn't lend enough, so I sold outright for a fiver; that will enable us to keep intact the precious bit of paper with Mr. Felix Dering's signature."

He chuckled as he knelt down, unwrapped a parcel, and produced a tiny woollen shirt, soiled, a patched jacket and knickers, a pair of stockings, a cap, and a brace of cobbled shoes.

"Will the youngster howl?" he asked, coarsely, taking the first of the articles in his fingers.

"Let me manage it," recommended Judith, and took the thing from him.

Hollowing her cloak, she slipped off her charge's loose bedgown and whipped the rough garment into its place. Brian Dering woke and wailed.

"Curse the brat!" muttered Neal, and he would have laid a brutal palm on the small lips.

But Judith Garland evaded the motion.

"Don't be a fool," she snapped, and turned to the sobbing child, "Brian," she said, "you must be a good boy and you shall go to mother in a moment. There has been a big fire and Dering House is all burned up. But mother is safe, and when you are dressed you will be taken to her."

The little baronet checked his grief.

"Was it a great, huge fire?" he asked, "oh, I do wish I had seen it. And were my own clothes spoiled; these are not mine, you know."

Judith was completing his toilet with quick, feminine skill.

"They are the best we could get, dear," she told him; "fancy if we had not been able to find any for you!"

"Where did they come from?" inquired the child, shivering in the night breeze.

"This gentleman has borrowed them for us," said Judith, pointing to Neal.

Brian peered at him through the shadows.

"Thank you," he observed; "it is quite dark, isn't it, so I can't tell who you are. But I am much obliged, really."

Neal grinned. "You would be, my lad," he assented; "if you understood how far I had to go for them."

The child did not hear this retort, his head had sunk upon Judith Garland's shoulder and he slept again. Judith was rolling the bedgown, which Brian had worn, in the sheet that had contained the apparel fetched by Neal. She had enclosed with the packet a large stone and tied the bundle firmly.

"Hold out your arms," she whispered to her brother, and straightened herself from her crouching position. Neal obeyed; she yielded the boy to him. "Walk into Derby," was her advice; "don't risk Duchester. At Derby take the express to London. Where shall I write?"

"Hattaras Street, Pimlico," he instructed; "care of Mrs. Schwartz, but don't trust ink with anything dangerous."

"Am I the sort?" queried his sister, "and, by-the-bye, you had better leave that cheque with me, hadn't you?"

"What's the matter with my having it?" objected Neal. Judith sneered.

"You'd pass it the instant you struck a nasty corner," she said, "and deprive us of our best card. Felix Dering is powerless if we, who alone can explain the disappearance of this baby, possess a cheque for twenty pounds to bearer, signed by him. That cheque is worth more uncashed than cashed—it was paid to you, we will suggest, as the price of kidnapping Brian Dering, the child to whom Felix is heir. So he dare not repudiate the fortune we will procure him—for our private ends!"

"By Jove, Judith," ejaculated Neal Garland, settling the unconscious boy on his dingy bosom, "you are a perfect marvel! I had some idea of using the cheque as a lever, but my notion was hazy in the extreme. Yours is all cut and dried."

He dived into a cavity of his costume and fished up a document—a document showing at its edge the unmistakable traces of a counterfoil. Judith examined it—it was the cheque she had obtained from Felix, with a few artistic equivocations, a few mock tears.

Consigning it to her pocket, she ran down to the water and hurled out over the lake the package she had formed of Brian's bedgown and a suitable boulder. Then she stole up the bank; the wind had subsided abruptly and the massed clouds veiled the moon.

"Ta-ta," she said; "your share of the work will be finished by to-morrow. You shall hear how I progress with mine."

Neal nodded and would have moved off, but she detained him by a gesture, and, snatching the shawl from her neck, wrapped it about the slumbering boy.

"He will sleep sounder if he is warm," she murmured drily, as though to explain her action; "*au revoir*, my dear Neal."

She waved a hasty farewell and vanished in the gloom. Neal Garland balanced his burden and set out athwart the meadow.

Gaining the high-road, he adopted a characteristic stride that devoured the miles with singular speed. When the dawn began to suffuse the East he was still on the march, a lean, tireless figure. The sun sprang clear of the horizon, the odours and noises of the day grew to right and left, the wind rose again. But Neal Garland pushed forward, carrying the drowsy child.

Once he halted at a grassy knoll, and, gathering some mould, smeared the little baronet's hands and face—their delicacy was too conspicuous in the fresh light.

His sleep over, Brian Dering awakened; Neal felt him stir

"It's morning," said the child, endeavouring to sit up; "I want mother."

"Lie quiet," ordered Neal; "we are not come to mother yet—we have a long way to go. Be a good lad."

"I am so hungry!" sighed Brian, pushing a brown fist free of the shawl.

"You shall have a cake soon," growled his custodian, and added to himself, "Curse it, how am I to feed the brat!"

Neal's pace quickened—the spire and chimneys of a hamlet loomed in front. He stepped aside and deposited Sir Brian under a hedge.

"Stay where you are," he said; "I am going for your breakfast."

"I don't like my breakfast out here," demurred the child. Neal frowned.

"If you are not sensible you shan't have any," he intimated. Brian did not venture upon a reply—famine is a stern tutor.

Neal Garland hastened onward, purchased bread and biscuits at a village dealers, and revisited his charge. The boy ate the biscuits, though with a certain nervousness; Neal devoured the bread in silence.

"Shall we get to mother soon?" Brian paused to ask. "I do want to go home to mother."

Hazel Harlow's stage career will fascinate you.

"Oh shut up about your mother," snarled the elder; "you've got your breakfast; what more do you wish for."

"I love my mother," announced Brian; "and, please, I should like something to drink. Waters always used to bring me my milk when I woke."

"You can't have one just now," said Neal; "I'll buy you some milk at the railway station."

The child caught at the remark. "Are we going in a train?" he queried.

"We are," assented Neal Garland, irritably, and crumpling the biscuits and their tissue bag together, he bade Brian grasp them, and lifted the boy into his arms. The little baronet dosed, despite the awkwardness of the cradle.

Shortly before noon, after a second halt to consume a further portion of the biscuits, Neal stalked into the Midland depot at Derby. He procured a glass of milk from the refreshment room and brought it to his charge. Brian drank it thirstily. Satisfied, he glanced up to say, with a slow, soft, smile, "Thank you." Neal Garland shrank away, went to the buffet, ordered sixpennyworth of brandy and swallowed it, neat!

The express arriving, he bore the child into an empty compartment. Hardly had the train started than he thrust Brian from him, urging the boy to look out of a window.

During the journey Neal spoke but seldom and Brian Dering slept much—not in his custodian's arms, but on the seat of the carriage. At St. Pancras Neal resumed his burden, and hailing a hansom, had himself driven to Victoria. There he descended, reckoned with the cabman, and plunged into Pimlico.

Near the middle of a decayed and slatternly thoroughfare he mounted a flight of crumbling steps and knocked at the door.

CHAPTER XII.

"People are Saying a Horrible Thing."

"Is she not beautiful, Kraft? Can even your cold scientific intellect deny her worth the winning?"

The Golden Dwarf checked his mare—a spirited, finely-limbed Arab—and contemplated the picture to which he had called his companion's attention. A faint smile illuminated the pale orbs behind Joseph Kraft's gold-rimmed glasses as he regarded—from the saddle of a tall, weight-carrying bay—the sweet, unconscious figure of Esther Carew.

"You are scarcely the most unbiassed of critics, my dear friend," he said, "but you are right, nevertheless. That turn of the head, those blonde locks like spun sunshine, the delicate proportions, so just, so elastic, the piquant foot and ankle! Otto, she is, indeed, a type of loveliness too ethereal to deserve the term British."

Otto Hare frowned.

"You describe her," he retorted jealously, "as if you might be an artist instead of a sawbones."

The German did not answer; he was watching Esther Carew. She had paused in her walk by a low hawthorn hedge which bordered the small plot of ground about a tumble-down cottage on the way-side. From the garden a man pruned the thorn-bushes by means of a bill-hook. His one arm enabled Joseph Kraft to identify him—he was Nicholas Foley.

A moment more and the sailor had noticed Esther's presence. He stopped his work and pulled at a greasy forelock. Kraft strained his ears to catch across the green bend of the lane some scrap of their conversation.

"Arternoon, miss," Nicholas observed; "I'll lay you don't mind me, do you now?"

The girl made a shy motion of dissent.

"I wondered who could have rented the cottage," she faltered; "it has been empty since——"

"Since my old mother, rest her soul," cried the sailor, "died here five years agone. Don't you remember Nick Foley as used to cut faces on cherrystones for you, Miss Esther, Nick Foley as sailed ships for Connie Forester and you on the Black Pool, Nick Foley as was Connie's uncle. You've growed, miss, but I knew you by your curls and your eyes."

Esther grasped the brown hand extended to her.

"I—I am sorry you've had an accident," she said, glancing at the loose sleeve of the other's jacket.

Nicholas grinned. "A lost flipper don't amount to much," he assured her, "and I've had enough of the sea."

He hesitated, staring over her shoulder as if fascinated. Esther followed his glance, and perceived, at the curve of the leafy bypath, the two riders—Otto Hare and the German.

They lifted their hats, and the Golden Dwarf, with a full, vindictive look towards the sailor, raised himself in his stirrups and spoke to Kraft.

Nicholas Foley ducked behind the hedge. "Excuse me, miss," he said, "but I shouldn't wish the little beggar on the slim nag to spot me, though it's the Bank of England to a Mexican dollar he's done it already. Is he on your visiting-list, miss? I saw as how they dipped their ensigns to you."

"I know Mr. Hare slightly," admitted Esther, colouring, "it is Dr. Kraft who is with him."

The sailor popped up from the rear of the thorn-bushes. "'Ware Dutchy!" he whispered, "he's a wrong un, a dead wrong un. Prick him down on your chart, Miss Esther, shoal water, foul anchorage, cannibals. Luff and keep away."

And emphasising these hints by many distortions of his tanned visage, Nicholas Foley dodged athwart the garden plot, and vanished into his cottage. He was not a second too soon, Otto Hare had ridden forward, abandoning the German, who wheeled his bay and cantered back along the lane.

The swift Arab that bore the Golden Dwarf brought him into Esther's neighbourhood at a gallop. Otto Hare dragged the slender creature on its haunches and leapt off.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Miss Carew," she was told. The strange being at her side, a child in stature, a man in symmetry and feature, flung the reins over an arm and bowed. "I trust you are well," he added.

"Oh yes," answered Esther, experiencing the nervous tremor that invariably shook her at the advent of the Golden Dwarf.

"I think," pursued Otto Hare, "that you can do me a service, Miss Carew; the fellow to whom you were speaking an instant ago. May I ask his name—some ragamuffin parishioner, I suppose."

Esther trembled—so grim a scowl had darkened the Golden Dwarf's countenance. She remembered Nicholas Foley's trepidation.

"I am afraid you don't wish to do him any particular kindness, Mr. Hare," she ventured bravely.

Otto Hare tapped his switch against his riding-boots. "You have a gentle heart, Miss Carew," he said: "this blackguard, trespassing in my park, stabbed a favourite mastiff. It died. If I loved the brute for nothing else, I valued it for bringing me the priceless boon of your acquaintance."

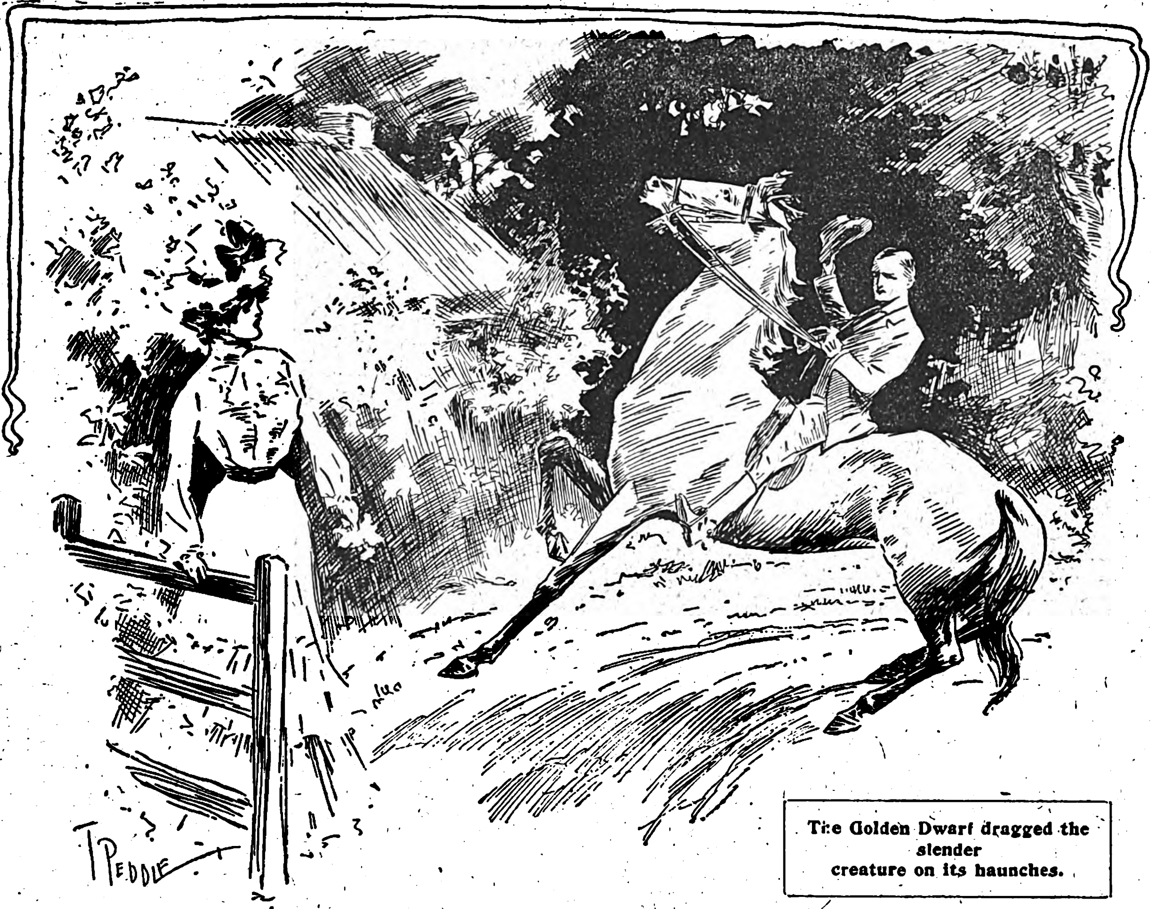
"That dog!" gasped Esther, and recoiled. The Golden Dwarf changed colour.

"You did not appreciate poor Cerberus's good qualities," he declared drily. "Perhaps you would be glad if I pardoned his slayer?"

"I should, indeed," cried the girl.

Nicholas Foley had once been a rare miracle worker to her and her playmate Connie Forester.

Stage Life Revelations. See page 96.



The Golden Dwarf dragged the slender creature on its haunches.

Otto Hare snapped his fingers.

"He is forgiven from this minute," she was informed.

Esther blushed. The situation had betrayed her into begging a favour from the Golden Dwarf.

To disguise her embarrassment she patted his mare.

"How very graceful your horse is," said Esther, "I did not think a horse's limbs could be so slender."

"A pure Arab is not a common piece of property," observed the Golden Dwarf. "Mine is as swift as she is gentle, as loyal as she is swift. Permit me to consecrate her to a fitting mistress—Miss Carew, I shall esteem myself honoured if you will accept the mare for your own."

Esther Carew started. "You overwhelm me, Mr. Hare," she stammered; "but really—"

Otto Hare bit his lip.

"No one," he said, "will ever possess anything after I have offered it to you and you have refused it. The filigree bracelet you would not have, I broke—this evening the mare dies."

Esther Carew quailed at the suppressed passion of the miniature man before her. A dangerous anger blazed in his small face and his nostrils twitched ominously.

"Please," begged Esther; "you couldn't be so cruel, Mr. Hare; you are just trying to alarm me."

Otto Hare considered her quietly, his cheeks were white and his mouth drawn. "The mare dies!" was all he would say.

"She shan't!" stormed Esther, at last, waxing desperate, "for I will have her. And I shall hate you, Mr. Hare, all my life."

The Golden Dwarf paid scant heed to the threat.

"That must be as it will," he vouchsafed, "Miss Carew, with your leave I shall ride the mare home. She shall reach the Rosery this afternoon."

He stepped closer and the unnatural pallor of his complexion was exchanged for a scarlet tinge.

"Miss Carew," he said, "hitherto, you have underestimated Otto Hare, an excusable error, in view of his physical deficiencies. Learn, henceforth, to regard me more justly. I have a presentiment that—for good or for evil—our fates are linked."

His words struck Esther numb—they had the ring of stern and unmistakable conviction. While she shuddered—averting her head, lest she should be fixed by his masterful gaze—the Golden Dwarf leapt to the saddle and spurred off at a gallop. Esther walked on, feeling as though she had dreamed it all.

The direction she had chosen led her past the gates of the avenue that debouched from Dering House. Here she was drawn out of her semi-stupefaction by a welcome encounter. She met Felix Dering.

He was pacing towards the High Street—pacing with an abstracted gait and a despondent mien. Esther hastened to overtake him; when, at her call, he halted and turned, she was shocked to see how ill he appeared.

(*To be continued next Tuesday.*)

You've spoken to your friends about "The Golden Dwarf," of course?

"THE CAPTAIN'S ROMANCE."

THE "tramp" *Caledonia* was a type of steamer now, happily, fast becoming extinct. Lloyds and the Board of Trade are so lynx-eyed in these latter days, so watchful of the interests of sea-going people, that it is practically impossible for such ill-built, ill-found craft as the *Caledonia* to navigate the high seas with impunity.

In this particular instance vessel and commander may safely be said to have been fairly on a par.

A good seaman, as average foremast hands go, presumably too, a man to be relied upon where brute courage, and dogged endurance were required, John McTaggart as a navigator had but little reputation, that little, indeed, being of a decidedly doubtful character.

Two ships in his time had he lost, on each occasion having had his certificate suspended; an official intimation of absolute cancelment being given should "misfortune" befall him a third time.

But this troubled honest John not a whit, for there are owners in plenty only too ready to employ masters with a damaged certificate at a small wage; the very fact of the skipper's shadiness giving them a possible opportunity of using him to advantage, so that, given an unscrupulous and greedy owner, John might always be sure of a ship—of a certain sort.

So much for the Captain; it being merely added that he was a hard-headed Scotchman of early middle age; keen on the dollars, and alert at all times and seasons, and in all places to make things work together for his own benefit first, and then, if there was anything left worth having, for the good of his employers.

The *Caledonia* was a worn out, patched-up specimen of its class, hailing from Dundee; its crew being made up of contributions from well-nigh every nationality under the sun. With the exception of the mate and the engineer, and, of course, the skipper, there was not an English-speaking tongue on board. As with every community of "all sorts and conditions," there was good and bad, the latter decidedly predominating.

One Ah-Lu, a villainous-looking Chinaman from Singapore, and an insidious breeder of mischief, was an easy first in an estimate of forecastle wickedness. More than once had he been caught by Harris, the mate, in some flagrant act contrary to rule, discipline, and even the elementary principles of common honesty. But Ah-Lu was a true Celestial, and took everything, warning and threat alike with imperturbable good-humour. That he did not forget will be seen later on, when opportunity came for a full revenge without let or hindrance.

The *Caledonia*, according to the nautical habit of "tramps" in general, pursued her wandering, vagabond course from month to month, and from year to year.

At the time of this writing she was cruising, apparently idly, but with her eyes very wide open, in that Pacific region which borders closely upon the famous Barrier Reef and New Guinea.

That she was on the look out for a paying cargo was evident, she being light in ballast, and with an unpleasantly suggestive wealth of freeboard.

Chief Officer Harris had vainly tried to worm the ship's destination out of the "old man," but with proverbial caution the canny Scot declined to bite.

In the neighbourhood of New Guinea, there are islands innumerable; some absolutely unknown to the ordinary navigator. It is from the natives of these islands that a large percentage of the so-called "hired labour" for the Australian continent is recruited. That it is a thinly veiled system of slavery goes without saying, and is hardly denied. Harris knew all this well, and was shrewdly suspicious as to the description of cargo contemplated by Skipper McTaggart. Undue scrupulousness was not the mate's strong point, but on this subject he had opinions; opinions that were not shared by his superior officer.

It had always been a matter of surprise to him that Ah-Lu the Chinaman and Captain McTaggart were, to say the least, on better terms, than would be ordinarily warranted by their respective positions; but when, as quite recently, he had seen them in earnest confab during his own watch below, and when he was supposed to be out of harm's way, he began to think thoughts, not altogether favourable to Captain McTaggart's personal straightforwardness, and immaculate respectability.

About the third day after this incident, and when they were threading their way through an archepelago of small islets, each beautiful, each romantic enough for place in fairy story, the skipper so far communicated his plan to the mate, as to assure that officer that his suspicions as to legalised kidnapping were unfounded.

"Alter the course three points to the Westward," he said at the close of the second dog watch. "If you make land before 'eight bells,' rouse me and muster all hands. I'm going to turn in now."

The Captain's cabin was a deck house, just abaft the bridge and Harris could easily see from over the weather-cloth right into the place, as long as its occupant kept a light burning.

Shortly after two bells, he saw Ah-Lu, who belonged to the "starboard," or second mate's watch, creep round from the waist, and quietly opening the door of the Captain's room, slip silently inside. It may be interesting to describe in brief what took place.

"All right!" said McTaggart in a low voice, "stand over by the door," he himself was lying in his bunk; "Now, you're sure about this woman: that she has the gold and other things you say; and that it will be an easy matter to get her on board, and afterwards bring off the treasure?

"You're sure, eh? For if you're making a fool of me I'll wring your yellow neck as I would a rat's."

"Allee same good, allee same light," replied Ah-Lu, "me makee showee you; you givee me plenty dolla; allee same velly much glad."

"Well I hope so," said the skipper again, "for if not, you know what's in store for you. You've got everything ready for'ad as we agreed?"

"Eblyting."

"Good! then go below again, and keep awake till you hear that land's made, and then come aft to me, sabe?"

"Me sabe," and the Chinaman disappeared as silently as he had come.

The mate could not well notice this contravention of discipline, the wandering about the deck during watch below, seeing that the Captain himself was implicated,

"The Adventures of an Actress" are coming. See Editor's Page.

but he had seen enough to tell him that something unusually underhanded was afoot, and that he would probably be called upon before long to declare for or against Ceasar.

At seven bells the look-out forward announced "land" in sight, and, agreeably with his instructions, Harris roused McTaggart who, in less than five minutes, was on the bridge beside him.

In less than half-an-hour the *Caledonia* steamed at half-speed through a narrow inlet, wooded on either hand down to the water's edge, into a land-locked little harbour, and immediately dropped anchor.

The mate watched with astonishment the Chinaman, Ah-Lu, with three Malays, go, as by preconcerted arrangement, to the starboard quarter boat, and casting loose its lashings, rapidly lower it. Into it they descended and rowed away quickly for the shore.

They had scarcely made half the passage, when Harris hurriedly addressed McTaggart.

"There's a boat putting off, sir. I can't see very clearly, but it seems to me that there's only one person in it."

The Captain appeared a bit disconcerted, but said nothing, although evidently irresolute in the face of an unexpected difficulty.

The shore-going boat held on its way, only stopping a moment that Ah-Lu might see if there was any signal of recall from the *Caledonia's* bridge.

Meanwhile, the long, narrow canoe, impelled by sweeping steady strokes of the paddle, drew near the ship.

In anticipation of a visitor the mate cast over the side a rope ladder, the captain looking on and still saying nothing.

A grating noise along the vessel's side, and before either of the two men could prepare themselves for whatever might eventuate, a girl, tall, dark, lissom as a panther, and clothed in nothing save a brown cotton robe, wound round her in oriental fashion, and leaving her arms free, lightly ascended the side. Her hair, very plentiful, was worn in a large knot at the back of her shapely head. Both Harris and McTaggart stood for a moment puzzled beyond expression.

She did not look to be exactly native to the locality. There was something about her features and general appearance that suggested Western birth and blood. But then that idea was absurd! It couldn't be! This notion might have strengthened had not the first salutation of the fair visitor dissipated it once and for ever.

"What ship's this?" she said, in the purest "north of the Tweed" vernacular, which the reader is spared out of sheer merciful consideration for him or her.

"I beg pardon!" stammered McTaggart, "do they raise Scotch lassies in these parts?"

"Sometimes," she laughed, showing a set of white teeth that a society beauty might envy. "What is your boat gone ashore for?" she continued, with a contraction of her brows.

"Just to see after water and fresh provisions," replied the other, a trifle unhesitatingly.

"What? In the night? I'm afraid I must beg leave to question the wisdom if nothing else of that explanation, Captain——"

"McTaggart, ma'am."

"Captain McTaggart; and to set your mind at ease with regard to your men's safety, and so on. I would say that by this time they have been received, and well looked after by my servants."

"Oh!" that was all McTaggart could say.

"Should you really desire the things you mention," said the lady. "perhaps you will be good enough to send your chief officer (this gentleman, I presume, indicating Harris graciously) on shore at daylight."

"At once ma'am, at once," replied McTaggart hastily, over whom a curious feeling of admiration for his visitor was creeping almost unconsciously.

"As you please," she replied.

"Mr Harris, you hear! take Chips and bring back what's necessary. Steward!" a white clad Malay appeared at the call. "Make tea and set it in the saloon."

The lady did not seem in the least afraid at the prospect of a *tête à tête* with Captain McTaggart, but appeared highly amused.

During the meal, she told him that many years before, her father, Captain Hector Johnstone had been taken ill while anchored in this spot. That she, who always sailed with him, had accompanied him on shore, nursed him for a month; and when, at the end of that time he died, she, (the ship, the *Rothsay Castle* of Glasgow, having sailed under the command of the mate) was left alone with the natives who had been more than kind to her, and with whom she had remained ever since. Into further particulars or details she did not enter, although her companion was eager to know everything to the fullest extent.

His attempt to ingratiate himself with Miss Johnstone met with little encouragement, for once in his life, at any rate, he had met with his match. She read him like a book, the more extraordinary, seeing the lonely life she had led for so long, and the small opportunity she had had for the study of nature, human and otherwise.

Anyway McTaggart's love making was a miserable failure, and when, in the course of a couple of hours, Harris returned with a tale, not altogether unexpected by one of his listeners, of attempted robbery and murder, he felt that the romance he had chalked out for himself had vanished as completely as his own good name in British seafaring circles.

It seems that on landing Harris had found that Ah-Lu and his satellites had overpowered their guard, who had had them in custody since arrival, and that but for his intervention and prompt use of a certain weapon of precision, the conspirators would have been enabled to work their will.

"I had turned," said the mate, "after disposing of the three Malays, to settle matters with that Chinese devil, when he anticipated me by nearly burying his knife in my back. It's a nasty smack, but might have been worse; so I'll be content and thankful. Captain McTaggart, you'll have to take four names off your ship's books, for Ah-Lu has gone to join his three mates in the 'happy hunting grounds,' and needs but an undertaker now to make things all square and comfortable."

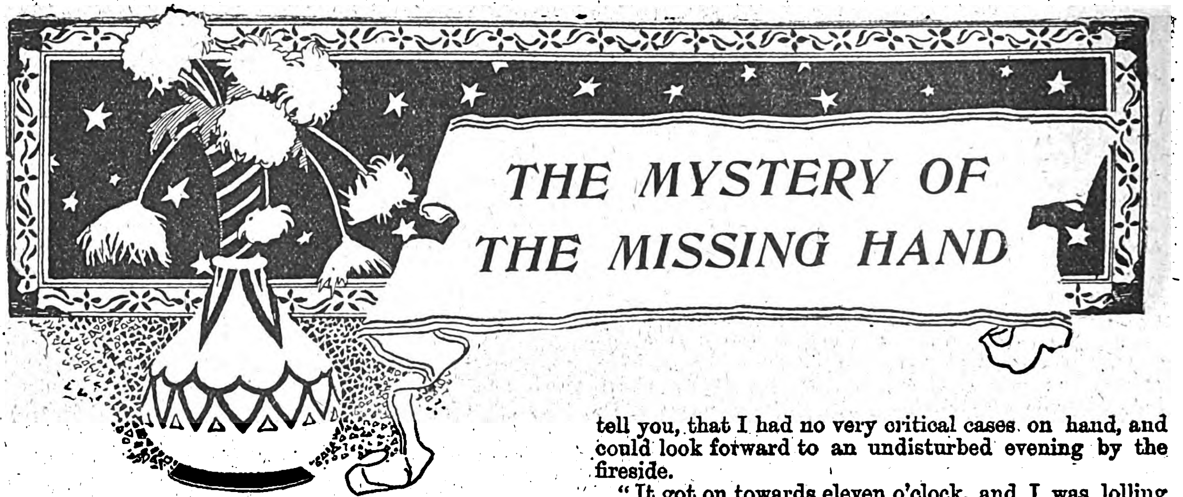
* * * * *

With the morning light the *Caledonia* up-anchored and got under weigh, leaving behind her Chief Officer Harris, whose wound promised a good two month's cessation from active life.

The fairy princess, Helen Johnstone, was a more than efficient nurse, and should you be in that part of the world, and seek hospitality at the hands of Mrs. Harris, *née* Johnstone, you will find as devoted a couple and as happy a home as is to be found in the whole wide world.

RALPH ENDERBY.

Hazel Harlow's stage career will fascinate you.



THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING HAND

Maxwell Travers, a young surgeon from Guy's Hospital, whom I happened to know very well, was acting as *locum tenens* for a Dr. Hayward in some out-of-the-way corner of Norfolk; and, feeling rather cut off from the world I suppose, asked me to run down and spend a few days with him.

As I had nothing particular on hand at the moment, I packed up my traps at once and started for Norfolk. I did not anticipate anything in the way of excitement or adventure; indeed, I was inclined to imagine that I would find the life down there as humdrum and monotonous as it usually is in one of these sleepy little country towns.

But I was mistaken. On the first evening of my arrival a very tragic and sensational affair was brought under my notice, which presented all the elements of a deep and baffling mystery.

Travers, I discovered, was buried away in a little place called Frinton, a good five or six miles from the nearest railway station.

It was situated on the shores of the Wash, just where the south-west corner of it eats into the land between Norfolk and Lincoln.

We were seated before the fire after dinner, the pair of us, making ourselves comfortable over whiskey and cigars, when Travers suddenly looked up as if he had some interesting communication to make.

"By the way," he said, "I had rather a curious adventure last night, which you might like to hear about."

"What was that?" I asked, pricking up my ears at once.

"A very singular and mysterious affair, indeed," he returned, with a puzzled expression upon his face. "I can't for the life of me imagine what was at the bottom of it."

"Out with it, then," I urged. "Let's hear all about it."

"Well," he said, turning to me, "I don't know what sort of weather you had in town last night, but here it was raining cats and dogs, and blowing half a gale at the very least. The Wash was roaring and tumbling about in a boisterous manner, and the rain drove hard against the windows. I was thankful enough, I can tell you, that I had no very critical cases on hand, and could look forward to an undisturbed evening by the fireside.

"It got on towards eleven o'clock, and I was lolling in the armchair here, half-lulled to sleep by the raging of the storm outside, when a thundering knock at the hall door made me jump as if a pistol had been discharged close to my ear.

"I shuffled out into the hall in my slippers, wondering if some accident had occurred, or what could be the meaning of this hasty and imperative summons.

"The moment I opened the door my eyes fell upon the tall, dark figure of a man, standing there in the darkness and wet. He was so muffled up that I could scarcely distinguish his features; but yet there was a certain nameless air about him, that told me I had no ordinary person to deal with.

"Before I could open my lips, he hurriedly inquired if I was the young surgeon who had come down to take Dr. Hayward's duty. I assured him that I was, and asked what I could do for him.

"In a quick, abrupt, and somewhat agitated manner, he jerked out that a friend of his had met with a serious accident, and urged me to accompany him without an instant's delay. I verily believe he would have dragged me off just as I was, so great was his impatience.

"I tried to get in a question regarding the injury, but he cut me short by saying that there was not a moment to be lost. I gathered from him, however, that it was something in the nature of a severe wound, which had occasioned considerable hemorrhage, so much so, indeed, that the patient's life was in imminent danger. With this scanty information I had to be content.

"I begged him to step inside until I was ready, but he preferred to remain where he was. When I joined him again in a minute or two, he strode off at once through the darkness, and I had to step out pretty briskly in order to keep pace with him.

"We had not gone far when, greatly to my surprise, my companion turned aside abruptly and made straight for the beach. I stumbled along, half-blinded by the rain, and wondering where on earth the stranger was leading me to. As we neared the water's edge I made out the outline of a boat, hauled up on the strand, with two dark figures in oilskins standing beside it. Towards this spot we directed our steps.

"Before I had time to put a question the stranger hurried me on board, and took his place beside me in the stern. The next second the men shoved off; the

Stage Life Revelations. See page 96.

boat was headed in an oblique line across the corner of the Wash, and we made for a point on the Lincoln shore with all possible speed.

"On the way across my unknown friend never opened his lips. Once or twice I thought of questioning him, but a glance at his dark, silent, brooding figure chilled me and threw me back upon myself.

"I was not sorry when we got to land, for it was not at all the sort of night one would choose for an excursion on the water. As I jumped out on to the strand and looked around me, I caught the glimmer of a lantern twinkling through the wet on the road above us. A trap was waiting there under the dripping trees. I was bundled into it with scant ceremony; the tall stranger swung himself up beside, seized the reins, and off we drove.

"The blackness of the night and the driving rain prevented me from noting what direction we took, especially as the trap was without lamps. I am inclined to think, however, that we did not proceed far inland, for I could hear the roar of the Wash distinctly the whole time.

"In about half-an-hour we swung round into a bye-road, through a regular tunnel of trees, where it was so dark that you couldn't see your hand before you, and finally came to what looked like a huge iron gateway. The groom sprang down from behind, threw open the gates, and we dashed up a fairly long avenue. The next minute we alighted before a large, solid-looking country mansion.

"I had not the faintest idea where I was, or what was the name of this house. Nor was I given much time to look around me.

"The stranger hurried me through the hall, and led the way to a great, gloomy dining-room, furnished in the cumbersome, old-fashioned style.

"At one end of the room I noticed a sort of alcove across which heavy curtains were stretched, and tightly drawn together.

"My companion placed a chair before this screened opening, settled a soft cushion upon it, brought the lamp across, and stood it on a small table close at hand.

"'Will you be good enough to remain just here?' he said, indicating the chair, when he had completed his preparations.

"Without another word, without the slightest attempt at an explanation, he hurried away and left me to my own thoughts.

"Up to this moment I had been given little time for reflection, for it was more or less of a rush from start to finish.

"But now, as I stood there alone in the silence of this great, dimly-lighted room, one or two very singular circumstances forced themselves upon my attention.

"In the first place, why had I been brought here from such a distance? Surely, in a case which appeared to be so urgent, these people could have obtained the services of a medical man nearer home. But instead of that, they had gone to the trouble of fetching me all the way from the other side of the Wash.

"I was turning this over in my mind, and seeking in vain for a satisfactory explanation, when my attention was attracted by a sound in the adjoining room. At first there was a confused shuffling of feet, a murmur of voices, amongst which I detected the deep tones of my late companion, and then a long-drawn, shuddering moan. After that it seemed as if a couch or something was wheeled into the alcove, and I could hear the laboured, painful breathing of the patient within a few feet of me.

"As I stood there, wondering what would come next, I noticed a slight movement in the centre of the curtains. The next moment they were drawn aside an inch or two; a long, slender arm was protruded through the opening, and laid gently upon the cushioned chair. The lower extremity of the arm was swathed in blood-stained bandages; but there was something about the shape, from the wrist downwards, which struck me as being remarkably odd.

"It was in a very perplexed and disturbed state of mind that I set about removing the bandages; and then—good Heavens!—I got such a shock that I almost collapsed on the spot. The hand was gone! It had been severed from the wrist by a clean, sweeping cut, and there was nothing before me but the jagged, unsightly-looking stump.

"Upon making this startling discovery, it was some little time before I could brace myself to proceed with my duties. I found that the wound had been attended to with considerable surgical skill, otherwise the patient would undoubtedly have bled to death.

"It took me a good long time to tie the severed arteries and do all that was necessary. Beyond a low moan or a stifled gasp occasionally, the patient—I could not tell from the appearance of the arm whether it was a man or a woman—never uttered a sound throughout the whole operation.

"When I had replaced the bandages again, the arm was withdrawn behind the curtain, and I turned to find the tall stranger standing silently behind me.

"I saw by the look on his face that it would be perfectly useless to address a single question to him, and so contented myself with giving a few general directions. He thanked me very courteously, expressed his regret at having been compelled to call me out on such a night; and, more to the purpose, laid five guineas upon the table.

"He said nothing, however, about me repeating my visit, but conducted me to the door and there took leave of me.

"I was driven back to the spot where we had landed, stepped into the boat again, and reached home about two o'clock in the morning, drenched to the skin, and pretty well done up into the bargain.

"That was my adventure," he added, after a pause. "And I think you will admit it was a singular one."

Without a doubt it was; one of the most singular which had come under my notice for a long time. I felt convinced that there was something very queer at the bottom it all.

One fact, the significance of which had probably escaped Travers, struck me forcibly. It was clear to me that the stranger's object in fetching a medical man from such a distance was to avoid giving rise to talk in the immediate neighbourhood. Taken in conjunction with all the other circumstances, it showed that these people, whoever they were, had something to conceal. What it was exactly, I would have given a good deal to find out.

"Did you form any opinion as to how the accident occurred?" I asked. "That is, if it really was an accident."

"No," replied Travers. "I can't say that I did."

You've spoken to your friends about "The Golden Dwarf," of course?

"And you saw nothing of the person behind the curtains?"

"Nothing, except the arm."

"Which arm was it?"

"The right."

I was silent for some little time, pondering deeply over this extraordinary and inexplicable affair. Then I looked up at Travers again.

"I suppose you have a general idea as to the situation of that house?" I said.

He saw what was in my mind, and refused to be drawn.

"It won't do, old boy," he said, shaking his head. "You mustn't go prying into these people's secret. It would be distinctly dangerous. I can assure you, from what I saw of him, my friend of last night was not at all the kind of man to be trifled with."

Nevertheless, in the course of the next day or two, I managed to pump him very effectually by displaying a well-feigned interest in the topography of the country adjoining the Wash. When I considered that I had enough information to go upon, I slipped away quietly one afternoon while he was out of the way, leaving word that I might not be back until late that night.

I hired a small boat and pulled across to the point where I reckoned Travers and the stranger must have landed.

On reaching it I dragged the boat well above high water mark, hid the oars among some bushes, and took to the road.

It was a long and weary hunt, and more than once I felt half inclined to abandon the thing altogether. But at last, by dint of much questioning at wayside cottages, I reached the tunnel of trees described by Travers, and a minute or two later stood before the massive iron gates that gave access to the grounds.

It was quite dark by this time, which suited my purpose admirably, for I had no wish to be seen prowling about the place.

The gates were locked, but I managed to clamber over the wall a little lower down and approached the house in a very wary and circumspect manner.

It seemed, at first sight, to be almost deserted, so silent and gloomy did it appear. There was scarcely a light to be seen anywhere.

As I stood behind a tree a little way off, and gazed up at the darkened building, I could not help wondering what secret was hidden behind those four walls.

Gradually, by slipping along from tree to tree, I worked my way round to the back. Here there was a long, narrow strip of sward, something like a bowling alley, bordered on either side by a thick hedge and tall elm trees. At the further extremity, about fifty yards from the house, was an ivied ruin, which must have been the former residence of the family.

I was peeping over the hedge, and looking cautiously around, when I saw a dark figure gliding along at the opposite side of the alley. The man, whoever he was, made straight for the ruin, stood for a moment or two under the ivy-clad wall; and then—vanished! He disappeared as suddenly and completely as if the ground had opened and swallowed him up!

This was getting interesting. I felt I was upon the track of the mystery now, and that if it could be brought to light it would prove something of a very startling nature.

I was debating as to my next move, and wholly absorbed in watching the ruins meanwhile, when I was considerably startled by hearing a footstep close behind me. The next second a cautious voice whispered in my ear:

"Seen anything?"

I whisked round at once; and, to my utter amazement, found myself face to face with a police-inspector.

I really think that, for the first second or so, he was almost as much taken aback as I was myself. He had evidently men on the watch, and had mistaken me for one of them.

But he quickly recovered from his surprise.

"What are you doing here?" he asked in gruff and suspicious tones.

The situation was decidedly an awkward one, to say the least of it, and I thought it better to be perfectly candid with him. I told him my story in a plain, straightforward manner, winding up by relating the curious incident I had just witnessed. That appeared to impress him rather in my favour, but still he displayed an unmistakable desire to keep me under his wing until he had more convincing proof as to the honesty of my intentions.

"We'll sift this yarn of yours later on," he said, in a non-committal sort of way. "Meanwhile, you had better stick close to me; and let me warn you that if you try to give me the slip you will get yourself into trouble."

He moved back a little, got behind a tree, and flashed his lantern cautiously. In less than a minute we were joined by about six or eight constables in plain clothes, who looked at me very curiously as they came up.

A whispered conference followed; and then the inspector moved away towards the ruins, motioning me to follow. At his request I pointed out the spot where I had seen the man disappear, but at first we could not discover an opening of any sort.

I was groping about amongst the ivy when my hand suddenly encountered an iron knob. I drew the inspector's attention to it at once. Upon investigation it proved to be the handle of a small door, which was completely hidden by the thick tangle of ivy that hung loosely down in front.

The inspector got the door open, lifted the matting of creeper, and stepped inside. I followed closely at his heels. Three of the constables accompanied us; the rest were left on guard outside the ruins.

We groped our way along a musty passage until we were brought up by a second door. Passing through this we descended a flight of stone steps, where we had to tread with the utmost caution, and found ourselves in a dark underground cellar, as damp and chilly as a vault.

We moved across to a door in the opposite wall, which gave access to an adjoining cellar; upon entering which we saw at once that our quest had well-nigh come to an end, and that we were close upon a discovery.

Straight opposite us was another door, the upper portion of which had been perforated with a number of round holes, as if to admit the air. A strong light streamed from all of them,

The inspector tiptoed across, and soon had his eye glued to one of the holes. I followed his example. As I gazed through that tiny aperture the sight I beheld was so astonishing, so extraordinary, that it was with difficulty I repressed a gasp of amazement.

The "Adventures of an Actress" are coming. See Editor's Page.

Before me was a long, underground chamber, lighted by lamps suspended from the ceiling and shaded so as to throw the glare downwards. Along each of the side walls ran something that looked like a workman's bench, upon which were ranged a number of tools, copper plates, and jars which seemed to contain chemicals.

A rough deal table occupied the centre, and upon it stood a couple of curious-looking machines, some smooth, polished stones, and other remarkable paraphernalia, of which I could not even guess the use.

If you add to all this the fact that four or five men were busily at work there in their shirt-sleeves some at the benches, some at the table, you will scarcely wonder that I was both bewildered and mystified. I could think of no other explanation than that we had stumbled across a secret lithographic establishment or something of the kind.

And then, like a flash, the truth dawned upon me. Forgers! Forgers of bank notes!

Scarcely had I made this startling discovery than the inspector pushed me aside, threw open the door, and dashed into the room with his men at his heels.

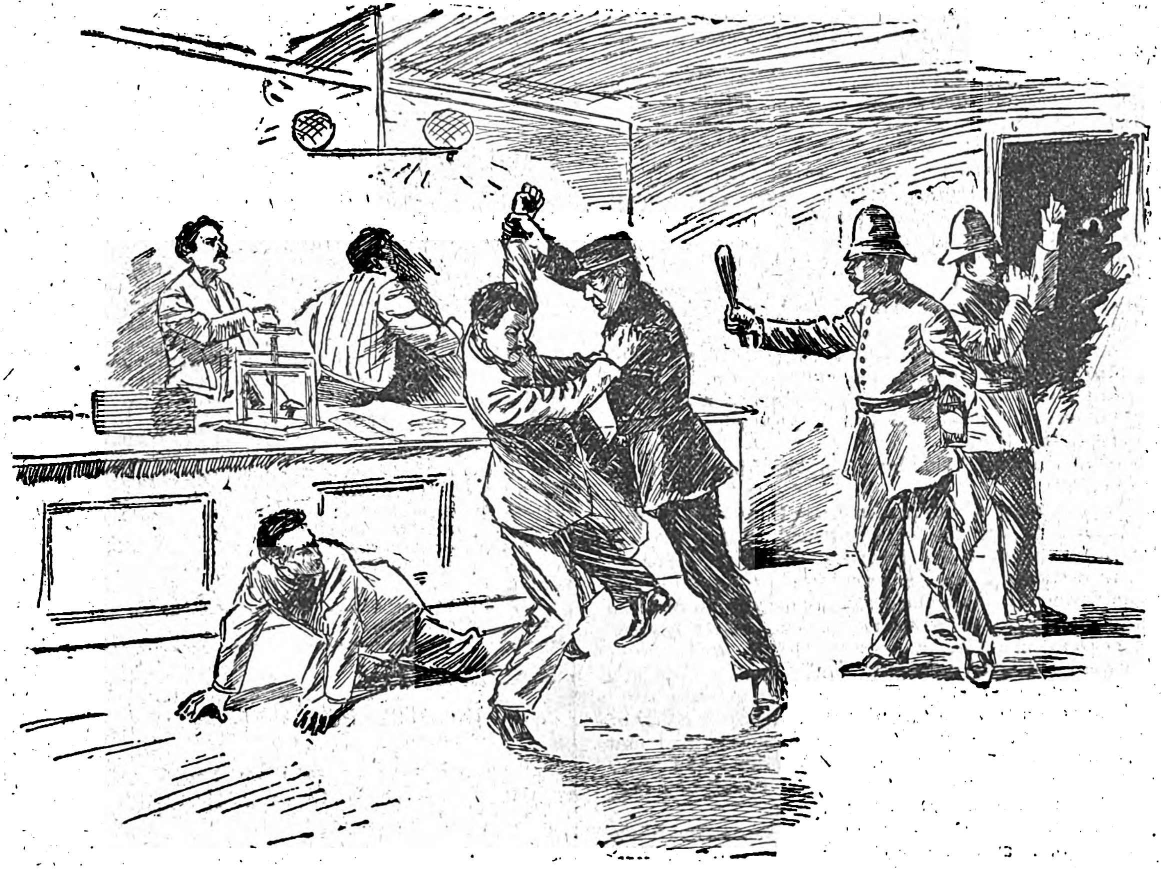
Taken so completely by surprise, the astonished forgers offered a feeble resistance. One or two of them showed fight though, and for the next five minutes or so there was a lively time in that cellar. A tall man, whose appearance differed very materially from the rest, and whom I took for the leader of the gang, had contrived to dart out through a side door, but the police did not take the trouble to follow him, knowing that he would fall into the hands of their comrades outside.

I took no part in the fray, of course, merely standing at the door and looking on. But through it all I was conscious of a most unearthly clamour behind a closed door at the other end of the cellar. And now, when the scuffling was over, the attention of the others was attracted by the extraordinary racket.

"Hi, there! What the dickens is up? Let me out, will you?" bellowed a voice from behind the door.

The inspector looked around the place, took down a key from the wall, and opened the door. Out stepped a very reckless-looking, dissipated character, of the sporting type, blinking his eyes as he came forth into the strong light.

"Who on earth have we got here?" said the inspector, looking at him with the utmost curiosity.



The Inspector threw open the door and dashed into the room with his men at his heels.

Hazel Harlow's stage career will fascinate you.

"Bill Benton, if you want to know," was the cool reply. "The Johnny who chopped off the fellow's hand."

The inspector glanced across at me, and I was glad to find he had so soon received confirmation of my story.

"That's the reason they clapped me into that confounded hole." Mr. Bill Benton went on, "and would have kept me there, I suppose, until they were ready to clear out. But where's that rascal Seaton?" he added, evidently missing the leader of the gang. "Thunder! You haven't let him slip through your fingers, have you? He's at the head and tail of all this. To think of his having a nest of this kind here, where he hatched these bad eggs," and he pointed to a number of forged notes on the table.

At the inspector's request Benton and I accompanied him to the house, the constables being left in charge of the prisoners. We had some difficulty in gaining admittance; but when we got in at last, and proceeded to make a search, we found the injured man lying in one of the rooms upstairs. He was a slight, good-looking young fellow, almost effeminate in appearance. I noticed that his remaining hand was as slender and delicately-shaped as a woman's. He was, in fact, a skilled engraver, a regular artist in that respect, and the most useful man in the whole gang.

When we went downstairs again Benton told us his story, and I also learned some interesting facts from the inspector. From the two combined I gathered that the ringleader of the band, Hartley Seaton—who, by the way, was the individual who had routed out Travers on that stormy night—was a man of good birth, but one who had gone utterly so the bad. He had got into touch with this gang in London.

Some months ago they disappeared from their old haunts, and were lost to sight for the time being, though it was known that they were still conducting operations in some part of this country.

It appears that Seaton, who knew Norfolk well, had rented this house from the owner, and established himself there with the whole gang. One or two of them passed as his guests, the rest as his servants.

Having fixed upon the cellars in the old ruin as the best place for their work, it became necessary to scare away any chance intruder, for there were a number of people about, labourers and others, who might wander in there at any time.

They accomplished this by a simple trick—and a pot of red paint.

Seaton sent one of the gardeners in there at nightfall, and the fellow was almost frightened to death by the appearance of a hand dripping with blood, which protruded from the wall right before his eyes. That was quite enough. The place got the reputation of being haunted, and not a soul would venture into the ruins even in broad daylight.

All went well until the worthy Bill Benton appeared upon the scene.

He happened to be in the neighbourhood for a day or two, dropped across Seaton by accident—he had met him frequently in sporting circles in London—and coolly invited himself to the house. Seaton could not very well refuse for fear of exciting suspicion.

In the course of the evening some reference was made to the ruins; and the host, wishing to keep this troublesome guest from prying about there, related the incident of the bloody hand.

Benton said nothing at the time, though he immediately suspected some trickery. Later in the evening, while Seaton's back was turned, he armed himself with a cutlass which he found in the hall, procured a lantern, and slipped out to explore the ruins.

He prowled about the rooms on the ground floor, and then made his way down to the cellars. As he was moving along the passage below, the bloody hand appeared out of the wall straight before him.

On the spur of the moment he made a desperate slash at it with his cutlass, and severed it from the wrist.

The appalling yell which rang out on the other side of the wall so startled him that he remained standing there in a sort of bewildered stupor.

He was soon surrounded by the forgers, who dragged him away and confined him in the cellar from which we had just released him.

Meanwhile the police had been put on the track of the gang by a former associate of theirs. They planned this raid, at which, by the merest chance, I happened to be present.

The curious part of it was, though the place was surrounded by police at the time, Seaton contrived to make good his escape. It was generally supposed that there was another secret passage leading to the cellars, besides the one by which we had effected an entrance which was known only to himself.

He had probably reserved it for his own special use in such an eventuality as this, and had made tracks the moment he saw the game was up.

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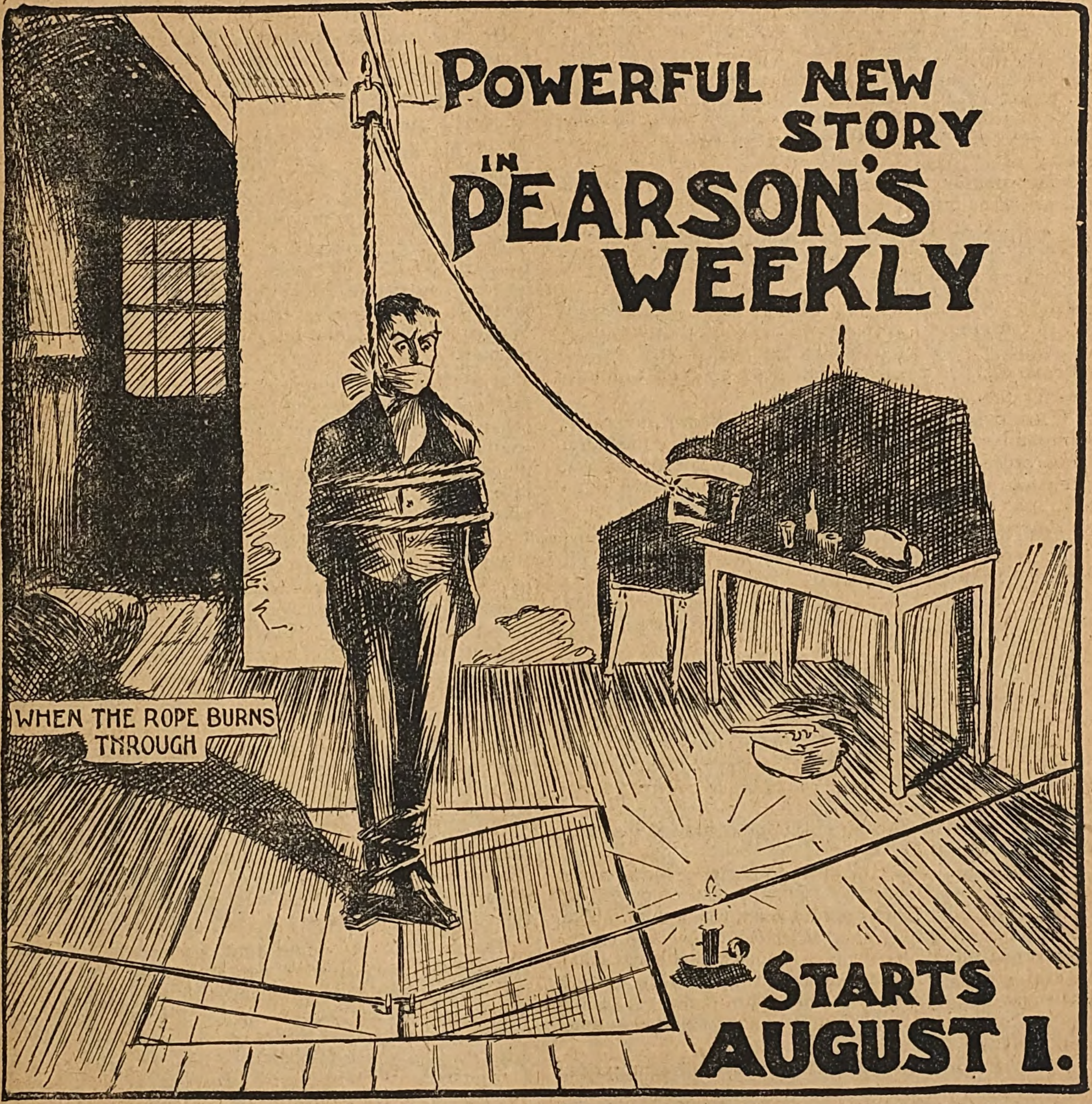
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It is probably the number of tars on board which makes a vessel pitch.

Customer (entering poultry shop): "I should like to see a nice, fat goose." Small Boy: "Yes, sir, father will be down presently."

Winks: "Folks say you always leave immediately after the sermon, so as to escape the contribution box." Jinks (hotly): "It's a base slander! The only reason I start so early is simply to get first pick of the umbrellas."

"Where is Tommy?" asked Mrs. Brown, uneasily, one night last winter. "Well," answered her husband, as he proceeded to fill his pipe, "I won't say for certain. If the ice is as strong as he thinks it is, he's gone skatin', an' if it ain't, he's gone for a swim!"

First Burglar (bursting into bedroom): "Where do you keep your money? Come now, tell us, or I'll put a bullet through your head." Smith: "Oh—er—it's in the pocket of my wife's—er—dress." Second Burglar: "Come on, Bill, we ain't no explorin' expedition, I tell you."

Timid Lady (about to buy a ticket for America) "And is the boat that sails on Saturday perfectly safe?" Agent (gravely): "Madam, I can assure you that in all the time this ship has been in service, and that is now a number of years, not once has she gone to the bottom." Timid Lady (reassured): "Oh, then it must be all right."

The other day a Gordon Highlander invited his wife to visit him at the barracks in Scotland. She did so, taking with her their six-year-old girl. When they arrived, as it happened, the husband was engaged on sentry duty, and so they could not approach him. The child eyed her daddy with a rather sorrowful expression as he passed up and down the square, shouldering his rifle and wearing a kilt. "Mamma," she said in a voice that betrayed a trace of childish covetousness, "if daddy finds the man what stole 'ees trousers, will he gimme dat lickle frock?"

In one of the schools in the East-end where children of all nationalities sit beside each other on the forms, three small boys—one of Irish, another of German, and another of Jewish parentage—all passing as "first-class" in their exams., received from their parents each a silver spoon with a superscription thereon. The day after receiving them they came together and began boasting of their gifts. "On my spoon it says 'A good boy,'" said the little Irish fellow, proudly. "Ya, and on my spoon it says 'A nice boy,'" chirped in the young German. But the youthful Israelite looked contemptuous. "Ach," he said, "on my spoon it says 'Hotel Cecil.'"

Advice to any dramatic author who has written a lengthy piece: "Cut and run."

The man who made "a clean sweep" had a lot of washing to do.

He (impatiently): "You bet if I were a woman I'd make up my mind pretty quick." She: "Then you wouldn't be a woman."

Doctor (to Irish patient): "Do you sleep with your mouth open?" Irish Patient: "Sure, Oi don't know, doctor. Oi've never seen myself whin Oi've been aslape, but Oi'll have a look to-night!"

"Why will you persist in drinking tea and coffee?" asked the doctor. "A milk diet is the healthiest; it contains all the elements of the human blood." "Very true," replied Fogg, swallowing a third cup of tea, "but then, you know, I'm not bloodthirsty."

Waggs: "I see there is a good deal of talk about London having a horseless fire-engine. But that is nothing; horseless fire-engines were in common use a hundred years ago." Jaggs: "You are mistaken." Waggs: "No, I am not; they were hauled by the firemen."

Mrs. Tropford is not as young as she was, but is fairly well preserved, and keeps her age a secret. The other day she was showing a lady friend an old photograph. "Yes," she remarked, "that is a portrait of me when I was five years old." Whereupon Tropford interjected, "Now, my dear, you see I was right after all when I maintained that photography was invented not less than fifty years ago."

Mistress of the House (widow): "Well, Johnson, of course, I'm very sorry to lose you. At the same time I must congratulate you on your good fortune in having this money left you." (Pleasantly) "I suppose you'll be looking out for a wife now." Johnson: "Well, mum, beggin' your pardon, and I'm sure I feel greatly honoured at what you propose, but—er—I'm engaged to a young woman already."

The City Council of Auckland placed a price on the head of every rat in the city, and a grocer's boy became a perfect Nimrod and slew about thirty. At the risk of contracting the plague, he carted his dead along, obtained his scalp-money, and came back jubilant to his master, and told him how much he had made. The master cast upon him an eye of Aberdeen grey, and then remarked quietly: "Weel, weel, ye'll just pay the money to oor cashier, for ye ken the rats is mine, not yours!"

*A rough racecourse tout was hauled before a magistrate charged with assaulting his wife and the police-constable who apprehended him. Asked by his worship what he had to say for himself, he replied: "Well, yer see, it was this way. I comes 'ome, and my missus she jaws me for being boozed, so I gives her one for herself. D'ye brown?" Magistrate: "I scarcely understand what is meant by 'brown.'" The Clerk: "It means 'Do you understand?'" Magistrate: "Oh, yes, I brown. Go on." Defendant: "Then this 'ere copper comes along and begins interferin' wi' us; so I gives 'im a prop for hisself. Do you tumble?" Magistrate: "Do I what?" The Clerk: "Another eccentric word for 'understand,' sir." Magistrate: "Oh, yes, my friend; I tumble. Now, for the assault upon your wife you will go to hard labour for six months. Do you brown? And for interfering with and assaulting the police you will go to gaol for another six months. Do you tumble?"

THE DEAF AT THE TIME OF MOSES.

It is a confirmed fact that fourteen centuries before the beginning of the Christian Era, probably at the time Moses was guiding the exodus of his people towards the Promised Land, learned men were already intent on discovering a remedy for deafness. In the course of translating an ancient Egyptian Papyrus, the origin of which appears to date back to the reign of Rameses II., and which is preserved in the Berlin Museum, there were found two prescriptions for ear complaints, which were then classified under two headings: Heaviness of hearing (deafness) and leprosy of the ears (suppuration).

After these primitive exertions of the contemporaries of the Great Jewish Legislator, more than thirty centuries were to elapse before any important progress was made in the study of aural diseases, and it is scarcely twelve years ago that the remedial treatment for these diseases was discovered by a French doctor, named Drouet.

After a series of unsuccessful experiments, based on the same lines as those of his colleagues, who insisted on treating affections of the ear internally, or through the Eustachian Tubes and the Auditory Canal, Drouet one day reflected that since the diseased conditions of the auditory membranes proceeded from the same causes as those of all other organs, they ought consequently to yield to the same therapeutic remedies. So it was that he conceived his external treatment, based upon the absorptive properties of the skin, which, as is known, are utilised whenever it is impossible to act upon any part of the body by natural means of egress.

The Drouet system consists of a regular application of plasters, which exercise conjointly a revulsive and soothing action. Cut in the form of a crescent they fit exactly behind the ear, upon the Mastoid Process, and while their active properties penetrate the tissues, the healing effects begin to show; the unhealthy secretions and the suppuration diminish, the buzzing noises grow weaker, while the deafness decreases. Gradually the ear recovers its normal condition; all the symptoms have disappeared, and the deaf man now hears

It is right to add that simultaneously with these applications, which are used during the night, an adjuvant medication is usually prescribed to assist the external treatment. In this manner rapid cures are effected. For readers who are interested in this subject let us quote a few extracts from letters which are received daily from patients by the Drouet Institute.

Mr. Edward P., a gardener, twenty-six years old, of Penrith, had suffered with deafness and a discharge from the ears since childhood. "I remember," says Mr. E. P., "having a very bad attack about ten years ago, with both ears. From that time they have grown worse. The doctor says the drums are perforated."

At the time of submitting his case to the Institute, the discharge was still running, and gave out an offensive smell. Deafness was very great. The only treatment that had been tried was syringing of the ears to keep them clean as far as possible. The following letters, written by Mr. E. P. whilst under the Drouet treatment, will show the successive phases of his cure:

May 10th, 1901.

I now write you, as requested, a report with regard to the treatment. I am glad and thankful I am on the way, I hope to a complete cure. I have got perfect relief with the right ear, and can hear with it as well as anyone, the left ear is also improving very rapidly. I can hear splendidly after only one week's treatment. I am also improving in other ways, the nervous and giddy, or unsteady, feeling has left me, so that I cannot complain in any way on any point, as I feel like a new creature altogether. I will write you later.

(Signed) E. P.

Penrith, May 22nd, 1901.

I now write to inform you that after only a fortnight of your valuable treatment, I have now gained a complete and genuine cure. My friends are quite surprised at such a great change in so short a time. Thanks to Providence that I was led to consult you. I shall recommend you to everyone whom I may meet with similarly afflicted. My left ear is now perfectly cured, along with the right one. I can hear splendidly. I caught cold a few days ago, but it did not have the least effect upon my ears as formerly.

Hoping you may be as successful in future cases,

I remain, &c. (Signed) E. P.

Note.—The Drouet Institute have been authorised to give the full name and address privately to any applicant.

While ear diseases are so successfully dealt with at the Drouet Institute, affections of the nose and throat, which are closely connected with the former, are also the subject of special treatment. Here is a case in point:

Miss V. A., of Hove, as the consequence of an ordinary cold in the head, became affected, eighteen months ago, with throat disease. There was constant inclination to clear the throat, the tonsils swell sometimes, and when swallowing there seemed to be a lump in the throat; the voice lost its tone and grew weak, and at times the deafness was very great.

Twice Miss V. A. was treated for "Throat deafness and Catarrh," by means of inhalations and the use of tonics; but, deriving no lasting benefit, this young lady applied to the Drouet Institute for advice. Following the Institute's prescriptions, she soon found great relief, and ultimately a complete cure was obtained, as may be seen from the following letter:

Hove, May 21st, 1901.

I have much pleasure in informing you that your treatment has been quite successful. I have discontinued the medicines for nearly a fortnight (during which I have used my voice a great deal), without any sign of the throat trouble reappearing. So think I may safely say the cure is complete. With thanks, etc.,

(Signed) V. A.

The original letter, with all the others of which extracts have been given above, may be seen in the Autograph Room of the Drouet Institute, where hundreds of letters emanating from grateful patients are kept. The Autograph Room is open to the public every day, except Sunday, from ten a.m. to six p.m.

Let us state again, that a copy of the "Journal for the Deaf" will be forwarded gratis to any applicant. All persons affected with a disease of the Ear, Nose, or Throat should read it, and also ask for the Report Form, which will allow them to submit their case to the Drouet Institute. This form is sent free of charge, and the advice given is always gratuitous. For all additional information write to the Secretary of the Drouet Institute, 72 Regent's Park Road, London, N.W.

Personal consultations are held daily, except Sundays, from two to four p.m. In this case a fee is charged for examination. Special consultations may also be had at any time by making an appointment with the consulting physician.

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

ANOTHER treat coming! I am pleased to be able to announce that I have secured the absolutely exclusive right to publish a new series of long complete stories, entitled :

"THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS."

The stories are written by that well-known author, Mr. Donovan Mart, and deal with the career of Hazel Harlow, a young and beautiful actress. In these stories will be vividly told how Hazel Harlow, daughter of a country farmer, came to London; how she joined a touring theatrical company and moved about from town to town; and how she met with countless temptations and trials, and emerged spotless through them all. They will reveal little known sides of stage life; will shed a lurid light upon its dark corners; will tell of its infinite difficulties to a pure and innocent girl, of its petty jealousies and its violent hates; and, in short, will lay bare the naked truth regarding the stage and its votaries in a way never before attempted. The series will begin in the August Bank Holiday number.

* * *

I WOULD suggest, in view of the large demand which is sure to exist, that you fill in the form below and hand it to your newsagent.

PLEASE reserve for me a copy of *Short Stories* dated August 10th.

NAME..............................

ADDRESS...........................

....

Apropos of a subject I referred to last week, the following is interesting:

Some time ago a notice appeared in the Chicago newspapers which dazed some people and shocked others. It was printed in heavy block type, and was as follows :

"DEAD!

"THE FOLLOWING CABLEGRAM EXPLAINS ITSELF. READ IT.

"Nice, March 21.—M. ——, Chicago; I have the misfortune to announce to you that Mr. Blank, after much suffering, died to-day at 2 p.m. MRS. BLANK.

"In consequence of the sad news of the death abroad of a member of our firm, our store will remain closed to-day, Friday, March 22. Not only a dissolution sale, but the immense stock will be sold at your own price to settle the estate. We must expedite matters.

"Three hundred thousand dollars' worth of ready-made clothing at 27½ cents on the dollar of the original wholesale price. Here is your chance! Avail yourself of it! Our unfortunate necessity is your opportunity, etc., etc."

Though people thought the taste of the surviving partners was execrable, the sale was a success. Then it came out that there was no such person as Mr. Blank, and that no member of the firm had died. The whole thing was an advertisement.

* * *

"INVESTIGATOR."—"You are a daisy" is used by Dickens in "David Copperfield" in the sense of calling a person a daisy in the way to express admiration and at the same time to laugh at one's credulity. Steerforth says to young Copperfield: "David, my daisy, you are so innocent of the world. Let me call you my daisy, as it is so refreshing to find one in these corrupt days so innocent and unsophisticated. My dear Copperfield, the daisies of the field are not fresher than you."

"Dun" is a word, the meaning of which is known to everyone who understands the English language. About the beginning of the century a constable named John Dun became celebrated as a first-class collector of bad accounts. When others would fail to collect a bad debt, Dun would be sure to get it out of the debtor. It soon passed into a current phrase that when a person owed money, and did not pay when asked, he would have to be "dunned." Hence it soon became common in such cases to say: "You will have to dun So-and-So if you wish to collect your money."

* * *

HERE is a little history help that should be cut out by young people and pasted on the fly-leaf of their English history. By referring to it as they study they will soon learn it, and carry it always :

First William the Norman, then William his son,
Henry, Stephen, and Henry, then Richard and John;
After Henry the Third, Edwards one, two and three,
After Richard the Second, three Henrys we see.
Fourth Edward precedes the Third Richard, then press
Two Henrys, Sixth Edward, Queen Mary, Queen Bess,
Next Jamie from Scotland, and Charles must be reckoned,
By Cromwell succeeded, and then Charles the Second.
After him we had James, who relinquished the throne
To William and Mary, then William alone.
Till Anne, the four Georges, Fourth William all passed—
Victoria then reigned, Seventh Edward is last.

* * *

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I AM open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 87 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 28lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Comston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

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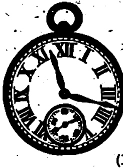

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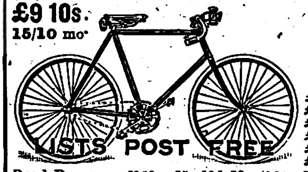

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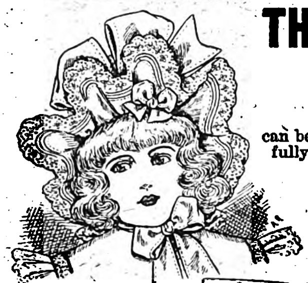

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No. 656 For Week Ending July 27th 1901. (One Penny.

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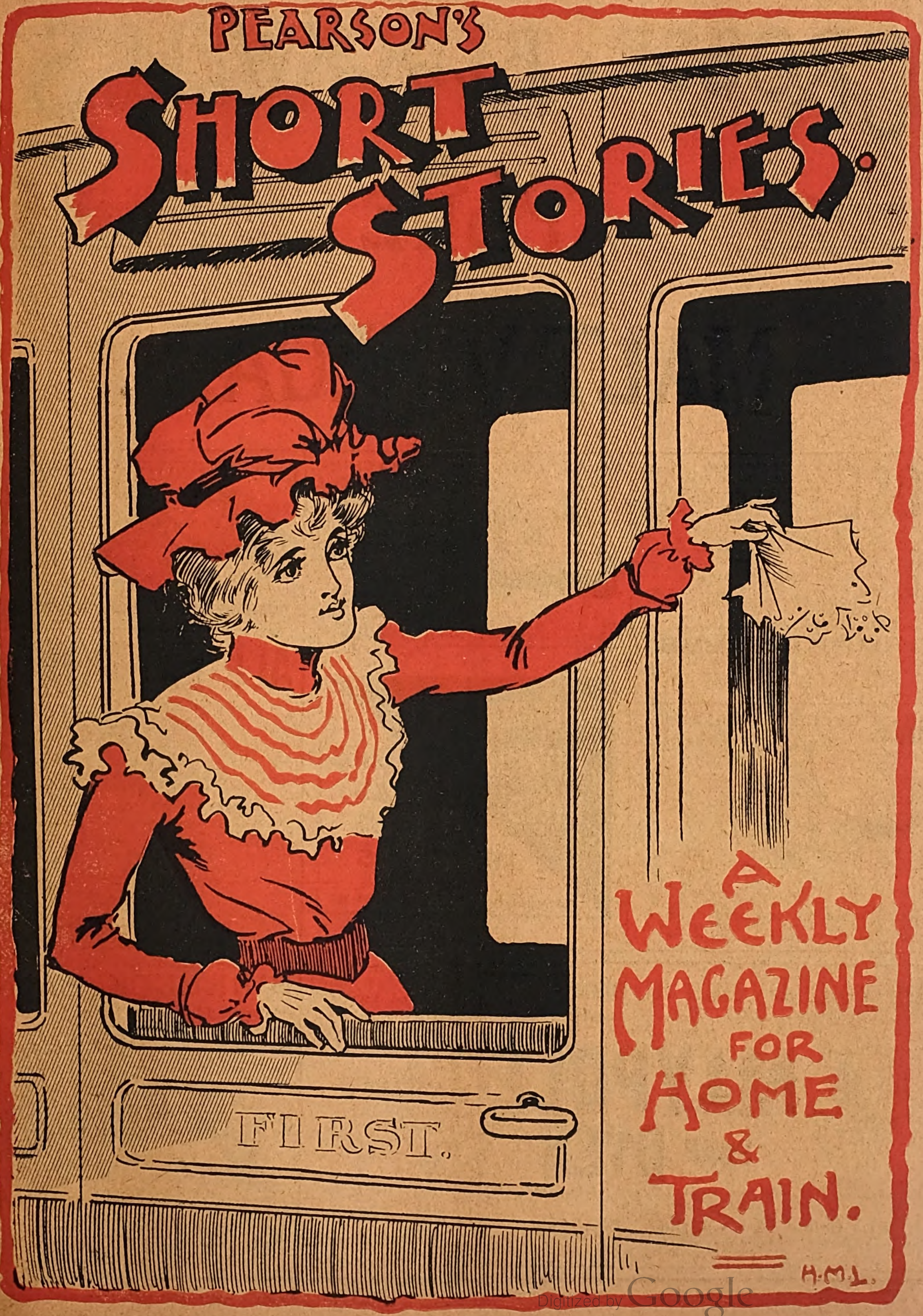

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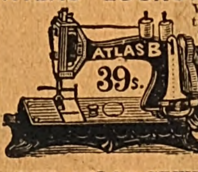

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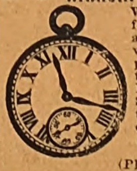

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SHORT STORIES

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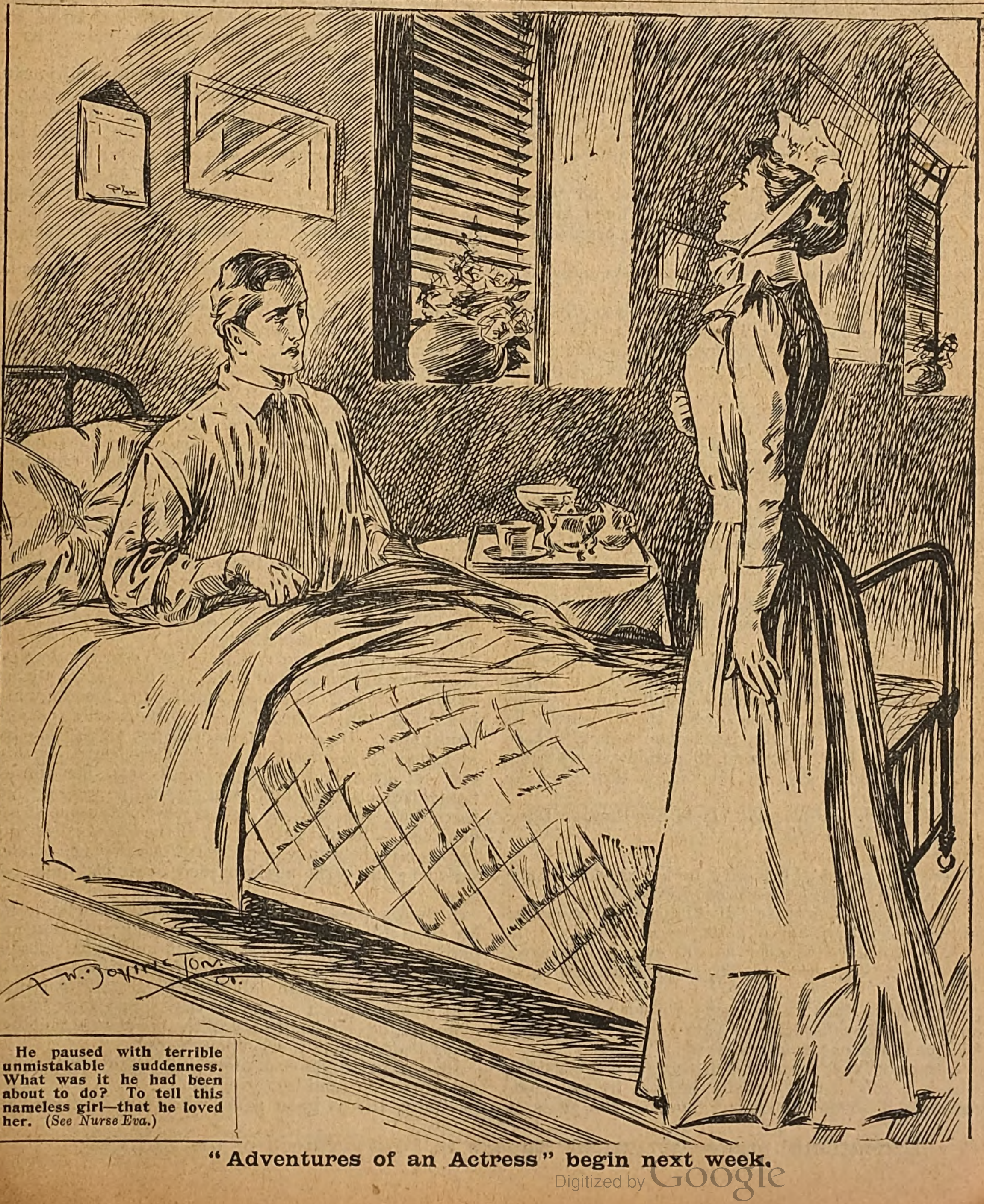


He paused with terrible unmistakable suddenness. What was it he had been about to do? To tell this nameless girl—that he loved her. (*See Nurse Eva.*)

"Adventures of an Actress" begin next week.

NURSE EVA.

BIBLIOTHECA·BODLEIANA

A Complete Story.

By Mrs. Hungerford.

A WARM, bright day in golden June, a crowded Park, a rushing of dainty wind, soft and pure, such as one seldom feels in this smoky London of ours; and over all a brilliant sun, grown drowsy now, as it seeks its rest, and sinks languorously into the fond arms of the evening.

The stream of carriages are growing thinner. One young man riding a handsome chestnut in a somewhat careless fashion, as though his thoughts were elsewhere, quits the Row, and turns towards the ugliest thing in creation.

Having reached the Albert Memorial he passes through the gate a little further on, and finds himself presently in the midst of a hopeless jangle, composed of cabs, hansoms, drags, and so forth.

Something in the jangle disagrees with the chestnut's temper.

She starts, throws up her sleek head into the very midst of her master's day-dreams, makes a false step, and comes heavily to the ground, flinging her rider, with a horrible crash, right under the wheels of a passing carriage.

It is all done in a moment. There is a cry from the bystanders, a vain attempt to make a clear space, and then a senseless form, soiled and disfigured with dust and blood, is raised by half a dozen rough if kindly hands, and conveyed to the nearest hospital. They pull the bell, and the door being opened, they enter with their ghastly burden, and lay it down within the hall. It is all that remains of the careless gay young man, so full of happy life, who had left the Park only a short time ago.

The house surgeon, passing through the hall at this moment, casts a sharp glance at the unsightly object on the bench.

"What is this?" asks he, and coming nearer, bends over it. His face changes. "Good heavens, it is Sir Rawdon Dare!" he exclaims, in a horrified tone. "Send the matron here at once—see what has happened," he says presently as a tall, handsome woman comes hurriedly up to him. His tone, though low, is agitated.

"An accident?" says she, stooping in turn, over the prostrate Baronet.

"And a very serious one. It is Sir Rawdon Dare. Is there a special ward?"

"One empty."

There is a touch of curiosity in her glance as she examines the death-like features beneath her.

"Let him be taken there. It is impossible he can be conveyed to his own house in his present state."

"It is a chance whether he will ever be conveyed there—alive," says the matron, turning away to give her orders.

"There is another thing," says the surgeon, detaining her. "He must have a careful nurse. You can recommend me one from the wards?"

"Certainly," says the matron, pausing as if to consider. There is a good deal of kindly interest in her compassionate, if somewhat austere, face, as she gazes at the poor crushed figure; just as kindly, however, would she have looked at him had he been the veriest beggar that crawls our streets. "There is Nurse Eva," she says hastily; "she can undertake the case. She is both careful and sympathetic."

And now the wounded man, mercifully oblivious to his pain, is carried by experienced tender hands to a small private ward, and laid upon a bed. The doctors cluster round him. A young woman in hospital cap and apron comes quietly into the room, and stands beside the bed. She glances earnestly at her patient.

Surely that poor blood-bestained creature can have no life in him? There is a long pause; then one of the doctors, who has been stooping over the senseless figure, lifts his head.

"He is not dead—yet," he says. There is little or no hope in his tone.

After a long sleep, as it seemed to him, the sick man woke. He lay silently gazing at the four white walls of the small room in which that strange sleep had taken place, but without wondering why he was there. Thinking, as yet, was too great a task; and so he put it from him. The window was open, and beyond, in the outside distance, there was a waving of green branches, and from still farther on there came to him the subdued roar of unsubdued populace. Inside there was some very curious furniture—or, at least, so he thought it, as his languid glance travelled over it—a huge branch of crimson roses on a small table, a wicker chair, and a girl.

The girl's head was turned from him towards the window. Her body also slightly bent in its direction. It occurred to him that she must be lost in thought. The idle way in which her hands lay upon her lap helped him, too, to this conclusion.

As he watched her, a little sooty sparrow perched upon the window-sill, and looked at her knowingly out of his small eye. She rose, found some bread-crumbs in a funny little cupboard, and returned with them to the window. Of course, when she got there the bird was gone. She seemed in nowise disconcerted by this, but sat down and fell back again into her former thoughtful attitude, and then presently not one but three little sparrows came and carried away some of her donation. She had not glanced at the bed when getting her crumbs, believing her patient to be dozing; but he, watching her with newly-opened eyes, had seen her face.

It was a revelation. It was beauty perfected. He lay quite still after he had seen it, dwelling with a drowsy pleasure on the remembrance of it until some minutes had gone by, and then a growing desire to see it again took possession of him. He felt still so weak and tired that he shrank from giving his voice sound, so, to attract attention, he clutched feebly at the bed clothes, and then made a sorry effort to tap upon the quilt.

In a moment she was alert and eager. She came quickly to him, and bent over him.

"Why, this is good news," she said, in a low, ex-

Sensational stage revelations appear in "Adventures of an Actress."

quisitely soft voice, and with a smile, "you are beginning to be yourself again, are you not? No, do not answer; I know what you would say; I understand you quite."

She laid her hand with a soothing touch upon his forehead; she settled his pillows, and then, going to the door, pressed her fingers on a knob in the wall outside. This brought the house-surgeon to her in a few minutes.

"Come," said he cheerily, nodding to the patient, "this is well; you are to be congratulated, nurse. Our patient is getting on, eh?—eh?"

He said "eh?" a good many times in a pondering fashion, and then took the nurse aside and whispered to her in quite a confidential manner. As he did so, it occurred to Sir Rawdon, in quite a feeble inconsequent way not to be accounted for, that he hated the house-surgeon. Nurse, he had called her. With that face—a nurse. Of course she wasn't a lady, poor thing; but with those little white slender hands to be—a nurse. And with that charming figure and that high-bred—— "No, no thanks, old man, nothing more. See you by-and-by at Lady Stanhope's. Look out, Alys; those bull-terriers are often treacherous——" And so on, again falling into the old delirious state, and babbling over this Alys, whose name had been so frequently on his lips all through his illness.

The nurse was at his side again directly.

"You must expect these little relapses for a while," said the surgeon with encouragement, patting her kindly on the shoulder.

Then came a week when he felt much stronger and could lie contentedly gazing at his nurse with certain recognition in his eyes and no fear of its slipping away from him.

"When may I go?" he asked her suddenly one morning when she was giving him his breakfast.

His question was somewhat ungraciously put. He was, indeed, a little querulous at times; but she, accustomed to the vagaries of sick people, didn't appear to mind it.

"Not for a short while yet," she said. She spoke to him with the intonation one might use to a fractious child, and with a lenient smile. "Are you tired of us already?"

"Not tired of you—no."

"But you want to get back to the other life? Of course, it is only natural." Did a faint, faint sigh escape her here? "Your friends want to get you back there, too."

"It is hardly that," said he quickly. "It is more—that I want to feel myself—*myself* again. A *man!*—I am sick of coddling, and physic, and so forth."

This, too, was ungracious, and he knew it when the words had passed his lips. He glanced at her furtively, to see if he had offended her; and though he would have been miserable had he succeeded in paining her, he was still angrily disconcerted at finding she had taken no heed whatsoever of his petulance.

"It is a matter of indifference to her whether I am pleasant or the reverse," he said to himself, with a frown.

"I am afraid you must be content with us for a week or two longer," she said brightly. "But that should not be so great a hardship to you. In your present state, how could you be better off *there* than *here?*"

She was looking frankly into his eyes, and the beauty of her expression killed his small touch of rancour.

"I would be worse off," he said, flushing warmly; "I should be without my nurse."

"No; we supply nurses to private cases. You would probably have had one in your own home as good as I am," returned she calmly.

"Still, it wouldn't be you," said he. Then, "Do you like the life here?"

"Yes."

There was as much No as Yes in this answer, and it puzzled him.

"It is a hard life," he said.

"Most lives are hard," returned she sententiously.

This checked him for a time, but the demon of curiosity having made him his prey, he was compelled to go on again.

"What is your name?"

"Nurse Eva."

"I know that. I shall never"—gratefully—"forget that. But your other name, I mean."

It had tormented him inconceivably in his sick moments to think it might be Smith or Jones.

There was a short, but eloquent pause. When it had gone by she turned and looked him fairly in the face.

"I have no other name," she said icily.

She got up from the seat, and moved towards the window.

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," exclaimed he, horror stricken with shame at his mistake. "I assure you I didn't mean it—I—"

"If you excite yourself you will have a relapse, and not be able to leave us as soon as I have said," interrupted she, with increasing coldness. "Think of the misery of that, and compose yourself."

A suspicion of scorn in her manner checked further speech on his part. He turned on his side and feigned slumber. But he could not get her face out of his thoughts. That last little touch of hauteur had become her. Strange to say—for one in her class—it had suited her, and had seemed to belong to her of right. What a brute he was to ask her such a question. Surely she had a right to her own secrets; and yet—yet he wished now her name had been honest Jones or Smith, and that she had been able to say so.

But he had angered her, and could not sleep without her forgiveness. He was still so weak that sleep at all times was essential to him.

"Nurse," he said presently, in a tone that reminded him of the days when he was a schoolboy and in disgrace.

"Well," said she.

"I—am very sorry I said that," mumbled Sir Rawdon from beneath the bedclothes, "it was abominable of me."

He had now evidently come to the point when a good sound caning was reasonably to be expected.

"You want me to say I forgive you," said Nurse Eva softly, coming up to him again and looking down upon him. "Very good—I say it. Now go to sleep."

"You don't look as if you forgave," protested he anxiously. "If you could only know what I feel about it. You must think me so contemptible—and you so kind to me—and——"

"If that is all, be comforted. I do not think you contemptible," returned she; and even as she spoke a sweet soft smile overspread her lovely face, falling like a healing sunbeam on the repentant invalid.

With a sigh of relief he closed his eyes, and sank into a refreshing slumber.

Then came a day when his nurse entered his room with a very jubilant air. Perhaps it was rather too jubilant an air.

"Rise, prisoner," she said; "the hour of your release has arrived."

He answered her with a reproachful glance, but no word.

She laid the little breakfast tray upon the table near, and began to busy herself with its contents.

"It seems a shame to give you any trouble, now I am so strong again," he said. "And yet—I like to see you doing that."

"You like to see me getting your breakfast ready? A very sensible fancy."

"You misunderstand me," he said hastily, and then stopped abruptly. It was difficult to go on with those large, clear eyes fixed coldly upon him. And, after all, what was it he wanted to say? Yet the very repellency of those eyes only made some vague, unanalysed feeling within his breast the more unendurable.

"Eva," he said suddenly, with a vehemence that suggested hidden passion.

She laid her tiny teapot down slowly, without a suspicion of agitation, and turned her eyes fully upon his.

"*Nurse* Eva!" she said, with indescribable dignity.

She then gave him his tea, and arranged the tray as carefully as ever before him. If her hand trembled a little, she took very great care it should not be seen.

As for him, he seemed dissatisfied with all she gave him, and toyed discontentedly with his food, and finally told her, almost rudely, to take it away from him.

"This is foolish," she said gravely. "You will want strength for your removal. Try to eat something."

"The very thought of my removal takes away my appetite," retorted he sullenly, rejecting with angry persistence the little dainty trifle she sought to press upon him.

Then the surgeon came in again, and felt his pulse, and asked a question or two, and went through the usual formula.

"All going on as well as we could wish," he said at last. "You have, indeed, made a wonderful recovery my dear Sir Rawdon. Give you my word, there was a time—eh?—eh? Well, and so the carriage is to be here for you at twelve? Hah! glad to run away from us, eh?—eh?"

"Is it safe for me to move to-day?" asked Sir Rawdon languidly. There was no languor, however, in the deep anxiety of his eyes. "I don't think I feel so well as I did yesterday."

"Eh? what? Pouf! nonsense, my dear sir!" said the surgeon gaily. "Invalid's tremors, nothing more. I tell you, you are getting out of our hands more hopefully every moment. We shall be ashamed to prescribe for you soon."

"Perhaps if my going were to be postponed until——"

"Not at all—nothing of the kind. The very change will do you good," said the surgeon cheerily. "Come, come now—speak to him, nurse."

"But supposing I should have a relapse—that would be unpleasant," said this remarkably careful young man.

"Eh? How is this, nurse?" said the surgeon, somewhat perplexed by his patient's pertinacity.

As he appealed to her, Sir Rawdon raised himself slightly on his elbow, and appealed to her too—with his dark eyes. Her glance, passing from the surgeon's face to his, rested there for a moment.

There was entreaty, longing, hope, and something far more than all those in his gaze. She turned away from it slowly, but resolutely.

"There will be no fear of a relapse," she said to the surgeon, in cold measured tones, her eyes bent upon the ground. "It is better, far better he should go to-day as arranged."

A swift change altered the expression of Sir Rawdon's face. Whereas before it was almost imploring it was now proud and stern.

"To-day, then, be it, by all means," he said, in a decided tone. "The sooner the better;" after which he sank back with an angry jerk upon his pillow.

The surgeon laughed a little, and presently went away.

The nurse busied herself in tidying the already scrupulously tidy room.

"In what mad haste you are to get rid of me," said Rawdon at last, finding the silence unbearable.

How cold, how calm, how unfeeling she appeared with that beautiful unreadable face of hers.

"You see I have your interests at heart," she said.

"Mine?"

"Yes. Do you forget how you were pining for your freedom only a short two weeks ago? Now it lies before you."

"You are ungenerous," he said. Then more slowly, "A fortnight is a long time. One may learn many things in it."

"True, you have learned to get well," said she quietly.

"More than that." He flushed a dark red, and held out his hand to her. "I have learned besides to——"

He paused with terrible, unmistakable suddenness. The colour died from his face, and a quick pallor succeeded it. His very lips grew white because of the severity of his mental struggle.

What was it he had been about to do? To tell this nameless girl—this worse than nameless girl, who was ashamed to declare aloud her honest appellation—that he loved her? To ask her to be his wife? He, a Dare, and the head of his house!

His hand sank once more to his side, he breathed heavily, and at length, without looking at her, turned his face from her to the wall. Here a bitter strife took place between his heart and him, but when it was ended his heart remained the victor, and he roused himself and looked round for her.

Of her, however, he found the room empty. During that short but violent battle with prudence and affection, in which prudence had been slain, she had left him—had vanished, as it were. In her chair sat a probationer, a young woman with pale eyes and a snub nose, and a generally afflicted air. He had seen this probationer before. She spoke with a little snuffle in her throat, and was otherwise in many ways most hateful to him.

Now, the knowledge that Nurse Eva was never absent from him for longer than thirty minutes at a time became an intense consolation to him. She would soon be here, and that odious young woman would vacate her chair, in which it seemed a positive sacrilege that she should be allowed to sit. But the minutes crept on, and the half-hour grew into an hour, and the hour into two, and still the probationer sat on, and Nurse Eva made no sign.

"Adventures of an Actress" begin next week.

The dragging hours were at first a bore to him, and at length became intolerable. And when the probationer rose, and declared it was time for him to rise, as the carriage would soon be here, and when a nurse from another ward came to assist her, he was almost rude to them both.

But time was inexorable and wore away, and at last the carriage was announced, and two or three of his friends and relations came in to congratulate him and help him down to it. The house-surgeon was present also, looking really pleased at his recovery. To him Sir Rawdon turned with a somewhat hurried air, and an amount of passionate anxiety he vainly tried to conceal.

"Where is Nurse Eva?" he said, his voice trembling slightly; "I cannot go until I bid her good-bye, and thank her—thank her for——"

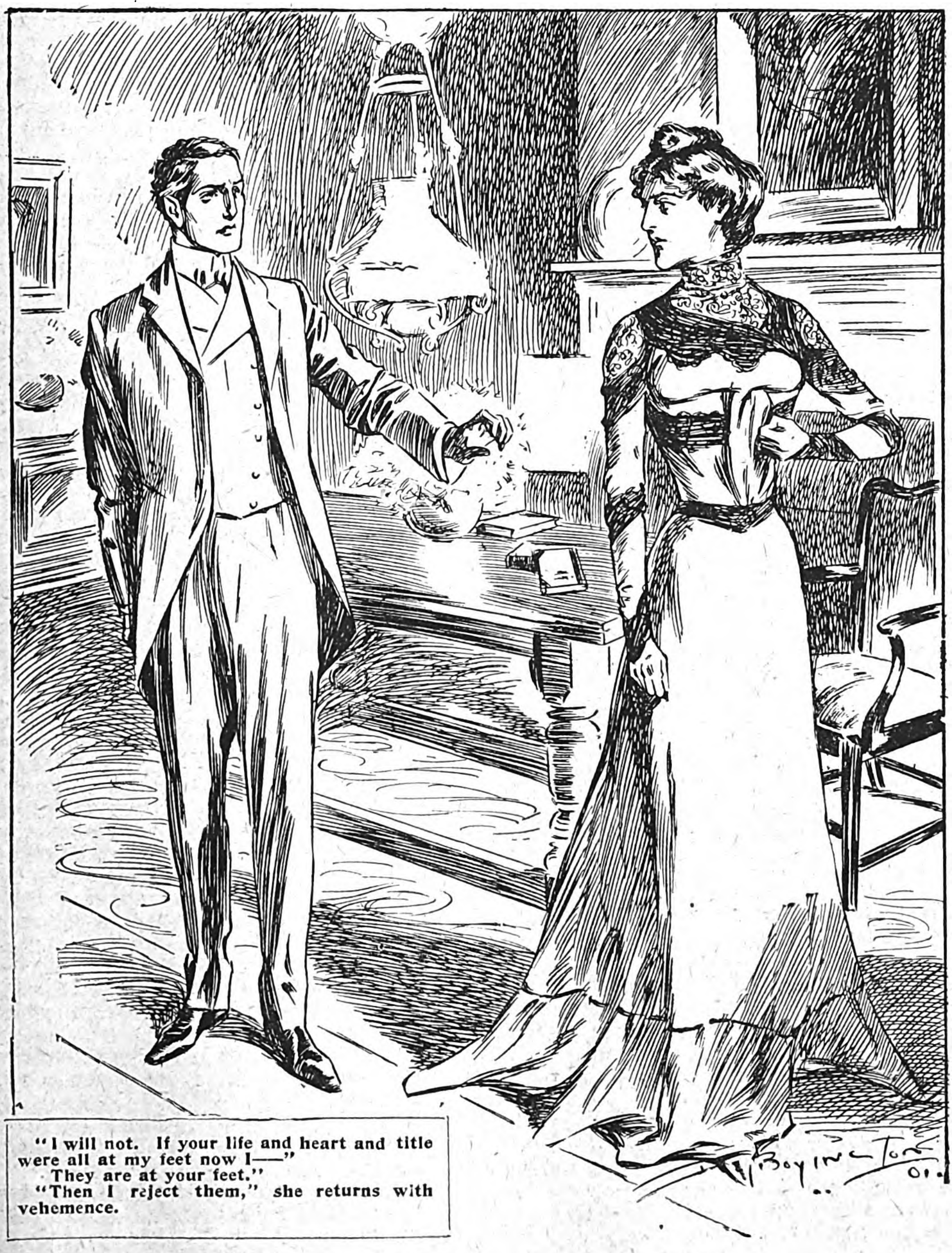
He stopped, and cleared his throat huskily.

"I'm afraid you can't see her to-day," said the surgeon, cheerfully. "She has been somewhat over-worked of late, you see; so when she asked the matron, a couple of hours ago, to give her a holiday to take a run down to Putney, or somewhere, you may be sure she got no refusal. The matron—indeed we *all* think a good deal of her, and she did seem pale and fatigued, poor girl, when she came down from your room about ten o'clock. I'm glad the day is so fine, both for your sake and hers. She said, by the bye, that you were so thoroughly convalescent that you would require her services no longer. She seemed to me in bad spirits—a little over-done, no doubt."

"No doubt," said Dare.

He said even this with difficulty. Of course he understood it all! That brutal hesitation of his! What woman but would have taken fire beneath such an insult.

His manner in itself was unbearable, presupposing as it did that if he uttered his proposal it would of a surety be accepted. With what sweet dignity she had behaved! She had uttered no taunt, had looked no scorn. She had only withdrawn herself, and taken measures to insure herself against


BOYINGTON 01.

"I will not. If your life and heart and title were all at my feet now I——"
"They are at your feet."
"Then I reject them," she returns with vehemence.

Sensational stage revelations appear in "Adventures of an Actress."

the annoyance of ever being face to face with him again.

But it should not end here. Of that he was determined. He would at least see her once more and compel her to believe that when his craven wavering had drawn to a close he knew himself to be hers, body and soul.

He got down to the carriage some way, and was driven home.

But he was a good deal knocked up by the exertion of removing and suffered a slight relapse that kept him to his bed for a week or so. The old familiar scenes were now, too, changed to him, and touched him as being barren and wanting in many ways.

When he rallied a bit, and found himself in possession of a little of his former strength, the first use he made of it was to drive to the hospital. He was shown into the matron's room, where he thanked her cautiously, if a little absently, for the care conferred upon him whilst under her roof. After that he said casually that he thought he should like to thank his nurse also.

It was with a paling cheek he said this, and with eyes downcast.

"Nurse Eva?" said the matron. "Oh, she left us a fortnight ago. We were all so sorry to lose her, she was such an excellent nurse. I am sure you too. Sir Rawdon"—with a smile—"will have a good word for her on that score."

"Left!" It was all Sir Rawdon could say.

"Yes, almost the day after you did."

"You know her address perhaps?"

When he asked this, he felt like a drowning man grasping at a straw, and he knew the straw would fail him.

"No," said the matron regretfully. She thought him a very kind young man. Gratitude, as a rule, is not an overpowering passion with the many. "But do not fret about that," she said. "I am sure she understood that you would wish to thank her. Yes, she was an excellent nurse—so sympathetic; we were sorry to lose her."

Sir Rawdon rose to bid her good-bye.

"I suppose Dr. Bland would not know her address?" he said.

"No I am sure of that. She went away very suddenly—for family reasons, as she told me—and left no word with any one as to where she was going. Good-bye, Sir Rawdon; so glad to see you thoroughly restored," &c.

Sir Rawdon, returning her farewell, told himself he was not so fully restored as she kindly imagined, and that his strength was by no means what it used to be.

* * * * *

It is a year and a half later, and Christmas Eve. There is no suspicion of invalidism about the handsome young man who, sitting in a first-class carriage with a rather bored expression on his face, is being whirled swiftly northwards.

He had checked his journey by spending one day in Edinburgh, and he felt it dull in the extreme. Even now, when he is hastening on to Aberdeen, the stupidity of his lonely stay there has not worn off.

But he is always dull now, he tells himself, with a disdainful shrug of his broad shoulders, and grows moodier and moodier, until, his journey coming to an end, he finds himself on the chilly platform, with two gleaming carriage lamps awaiting him.

The drive is a long one, and bitterly cold. The change from it to the soft brilliant warmth of a huge hall, hung with many skins and bristling with antlers, is almost more than he can endure with fortitude. As in a dream, he follows the servant across the hall—rose-lit from the two large shaded lamps upon the dark oak staircase beyond—and valiantly suppresses a desire to stay beside the huge log fire for ever.

But the servant mercilessly marches him onwards, and presently he finds himself in a long, low, many cornered room full of people, all more or less in the reposeful attitudes that border upon sleep.

There is a soft sweet subdued hum of slumberous voices, a tender tinkling of delicate china, the music of many spoons.

There are no rose-lamps in this room; nothing but the leaping light of a glorious fire that renders all things clear as day. The divan-looking lounges are covered with tartan, so are a good many of the men, and only a few of them have their nether limbs covered.

Sir Rawdon, still unthawed, stares idly round him. There is a pretty girl in a voluminous arm chair, who nods brightly to him—Miss Adair; and another crouched picturesquely upon the bearskin rug before the fire, who stops her chatter for an instant to gaze at him curiously, and ——

Good heavens! who is that? Who is that sitting over there, with *her* face, *her* figure, the very hands of *her*.

A slender creature, reclining in a low chair, and clad in an exquisite tea-gown—all satin and old lace. She is smiling. One arm, half naked, but mittened to the elbow, is lying gracefully across the arm of her lounge as she leans towards her neighbour; the other is trifling idly with a huge white fan.

Even as Dare gazes at her, spellbound, she laughs, softly, merrily, at some remark made to her by her companion—a red-headed young Scotchman. The laugh somewhat restores Sir Rawdon to his senses. Alas! *she* had never laughed; her lovely face had always been tinged with a deep melancholy. What madness possessed him to make him think he saw again before him the one woman he had ever loved—the only one he ever should love? And to dream of meeting her here, of all places! A hospital nurse as a guest at The Towers, in that gown, that——

"Dear Sir Rawdon, so glad!" says his hostess—a tall handsome woman—at this moment, coming languidly forward with a smile and a graceful gesture. "So nice to see you again."

Sir Rawdon murmurs something to the effect that he is positively overpowered with joy at the idea of seeing *her* again; but his words sound vague and unmeaning—to himself, at least—and his eyes are not his own to deal with; they wander incessantly to the low chair and its lovely occupant, and will not be controlled. Who *is* the owner of that tea-gown?

"I think you know everybody," says Lady Dalruth, at the end of a long sentence, not one word of which he heard.

"Not quite all. I have not the happiness of knowing your pretty friend on the hearthrug, or—or the lady in the low chair over there."

"No? Well, time will cure that. The latter is my cousin, Miss Monteith. You would like to be introduced to her? Come then."

"Evelyn, dear, let me introduce to you Sir Rawdon Dare," she says a moment later.

Miss Monteith, turning slowly, lifts her eyes fully to

Sir Rawdon's, and, after a calm comprehensive glance, makes him the faintest salutation.

If he had ever seen this girl before, it is certain that she showed no recognition of ever having seen him. There is no surprised start, no faintest blush, no betraying pallor. Her little bow is cold in the extreme, but, nevertheless, civil. She answers his rather agitated remark with the utmost composure, it is some ordinary thing about the beauty of the scenery round, and hardly requires any acknowledgment save a bare "yes," to which she confines herself. If, indeed, some wild freak of Fate has suddenly changed the Nurse Eva—for whom he has been so persistently searching during all these past interminable months—into this stately, repellent girl before him, she is so clad in an inpenetrable armour of reserve that he cannot pierce it.

And, after all, is it she? Could even Fate play such a trick? Is not all this some cruelty of his imagination, born of his long dwelling on one engrossing desire?

Once or twice during the evening he tried to speak to her, but though she always answered him very gently, still her manner was so cold as to check on every occasion further conversation.

Dropping into the background after a last defeat, he finds himself close to an old beau, a certain Sir Harry Loune, who is well-known to everybody, and to whom everybody is known.

"Wouldn't look at you, eh?" says this old gentleman, with a chuckle. "Don't take that to heart, more than you have got the same tale to tell. She won't look at anyone, not even at the best *partis*. Pretty, isn't she? Good form, eh? Thing of the season next year, I shouldn't wonder. Lady Dalruth wanted right or wrong, to introduce her this year, but she wouldn't hear of it. Seems to shrink from publicity. No wonder too; beauty has made itself so dooced vulgar of late," says the old gentleman, with a shrug of disgust.

"Yes?" says Dare calmly, but his look is in itself a question.

"She's charmin'—charmin'," goes on Sir Harry, when he has refreshed himself with a pinch of snuff, "and mysterious as she is lovely."

"Mysterious?"

"Rather, my dear boy! Mustn't say a word about it, you understand; but when she was about eighteen, her father, Sir Pagan Monteith, you know—eh—what? Don't want to know? Ha, ha! Very good indeed! Well, he wished at that time to force her into a marriage with a most dilapidated person—an earl, notwithstanding—quite old enough to be his father. Girl wouldn't hear of this sacrifice at any price, and when pressed to it by angry parent, bolted—no one knows where, unless Lady Dalruth may. For three long years she remained incognita. Odd affair, isn't it? Nobody can explain it."

Dare thinks he could. Again the belief that Miss Monteith and his sweet nurse are one is full upon him; but he refrains from making his thoughts known to this old gossip.

"Why can't she say where she was, eh?" says Sir Harry, in a distinctly aggrieved tone; "this deadly silence is very injurious to her, eh?"

"Why should it be injurious to her?" asks Sir Rawdon fiercely.

He turns upon the old baronet with open wrath in his dark eyes. It is insufferable to hear her name bandied thus from lip to lip. And yet— Her name? Whose name? If he lets this madness overpower him, what will the end be? What has that haughty beauty over there to do with his gentle nurse?

Seeing Sir Harry's look of amazement, he hastens to change his tone.

"She looks too proud to be a subject for calumny," he says confusedly, almost apologetically.

But the old scandal-monger has found him slow, and in nowise a kindred spirit; so he hobbles away from him to where Lady Dalruth is standing. Dare, too wearily disturbed in mind to find amusement in his present surroundings, follows his movements with idle uninterested eyes, but presently is attracted by something he hears him saying to his hostess.

"Left him at the point of death," said Sir Harry unctuously, "as he thought; but it was nothing of the kind. Gordon recovered almost immediately. One of the Gordons of Clayne, you know. Fellow who upset him was a cousin, and thought to come in for the property, d'ye see."

"One of the Gordons of Clayne" is a bosom friend of Sir Rawdon's, so naturally he pricks up his ears.

"What did happen to him?" asks Lady Dalruth, looking interested.

"Oh, mere trifle! Nothing vital, at all events. One fellow told me it was a broken clavicle; another, a fractured humerus; but I haven't the faintest idea what either means."

Sound Advice.

If you want to enjoy your Summer Holidays you would be wise to take with you the following sixpenny novels. You cannot have any idea how much pleasure you will derive from reading them, when you are sitting on the beach, or under a shady tree in the country:

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"Adventures of an Actress" begin next week.

"You should ask Evelyn for a translation," says Lady Dalruth, with a merry laugh.

Miss Monteith, who had been listening silently to the conversation, turns her eyes upon her. Is there entreaty or simple indifference in her glance? If entreaty, it comes too late; Lady Dalruth does not even see it.

"Miss Monteith?" asks Sir Harry.

"Yes. Didn't you know she has studied medicine, surgery, and all the rest of it?"

"You terrify me," says Sir Harry, with mock horror.

"That is quite a correct feeling for the occasion. She is terribly learned. Aren't you, Evelyn?"

She smiles at the girl, as though in pleasant appreciation of a jest that is known to them alone. But Miss Monteith's return smile is forced and very faint.

"Learned? no. But I really have some taste for that sort of thing," she says quietly, and then turns away, as if anxious to terminate the conversation. In so doing, her eyes meet Dare's.

There is a pause, in which each regards the other with strange anxiety. Then the blood slowly mounts to Miss Monteith's brow, until all her lovely face is dyed a warm crimson. Her breath comes quickly, she wavers, then, with a last defiant, contemptuous glance, she moves away and sinks into a chair at the opposite end of the room.

But to Dare there is no longer even a chance of doubt. Just so has she looked at him when, in a moment of passion, he had called her "Eva" in the hospital, and she had coldly corrected him, just so, no doubt, her large, scornful eyes had rested upon him during that last fateful hour, when he had half declared his love, and had hesitated—and been lost.

With a terrible sinking of the heart he tells himself that he has sinned past forgiveness in her eyes.

The next morning all the world is clad with snow. The soft white fleecy carpet is covering the land far as the eye can see, and is lying heavily on branch and bough.

The Christmas bells are chiming merrily. A soft grey mist is trembling between earth and sky, Over all, the merry sun is shining gaily. It is indeed an ideal Christmas morn.

Luncheon has come and gone, and they are all standing before the glowing fire in the billiard-room discussing the costumes to be worn at a fancy-dress ball, to be given in the neighbourhood some time in the ensuing month.

"One gets so tired of the art rags and the past centuries' gowns," says Lady Dalruth dejectly. "Oh, for something new, something *bizarre*, out of the common!

"I'm sure I don't know what is to be done about Evelyn. She and I are quite worn out trying to imagine a costume that all the world hasn't seen a hundred times before. The anxiety has robbed me of honest sleep for a fortnight past, I have so set my heart on making a success. But each of my ideas only seems more crude than the last. Dear Sir Rawdon, do suggest something."

An uncontrollable impulse takes hold of Dare. He glances at Miss Monteith, to find she is looking full at him that dreamy touch of scorn that had offended him last night now wide awake within her large eyes. It spurs him to his half-determined purpose.

"Why not try the dress of a hospital nurse?" he says to Lady Dalruth, pale but smiling. "I don't recollect having ever seen it at a ball before, and I think the pretty little cap and apron would suit Miss Monteith admirably."

"Sir Rawdon! What can you know about hospital nurses?" says a pretty girl from the opposite side of the hearth-rug, with an amused laugh.

"Didn't you know I was in hospital for many weeks—summer before last—when I smashed myself up?" returns Sir Rawdon distinctly. "I don't think I shall ever forget the kindness I received there; and at all events I know I shall never, under any circumstances, forget—my nurse."

"Ah, gratitude is a charming virtue!" says the pretty girl, with a second laugh. "Was it her cap and apron you were thinking of just now?"

"Yes. They are indelibly imprinted upon my brain." Again he glances at Miss Monteith. If she has grown a little whiter it is at least only perceptible to a lover's eyes.

"Do you know, the costume sounds well," she says quite calmly. "Let us think of it, Mirabel," turning to Lady Dalruth. "It is the one thing you desire—out of the common."

Lady Dalruth's answer is a little confused.

Miss Monteith looks full at Sir Rawdon, her eyes dilate, and

> "Oh, what a deal of scorn looks beautiful
> In the contempt and anger of her lip!"

With a little passionate movement of the hand, unseen by all but him, she crosses the room with slow graceful step, and disappears through the doorway.

It takes Sir Rawdon but a moment to invent some idle speech, that leaves him, too, free to quit the apartment without arousing suspicion of the real motive of his departure.

Finding himself in the hall, he comes to a standstill, and asks himself what is it he means to do. He cannot forget that last glance of hers, or the passionate anger contained in it.

He feels he would give half his possessions to be able honestly to hate her, and yet knows, by the sheer impossibility of his being able to do this, that he loves her.

As he stands irresolute, one of the footmen passes through the hall. Then and there a sudden resolution comes to Sir Rawdon.

He will go to her, tell her all—lay bare his heart to her, and if it must be, hear from her own lips the "No," that will blast his life for ever. Anything will be better than this crushing suspense.

"Where is Miss Monteith?" he asks the man as he goes by.

"In the library, sir. Saw her go in just now."

Opening the library door he enters the room, and finds himself alone with her.

She is standing at the far window, and with a little start acknowledges his entrance. He would have gone to her, but with a certain impulsive eagerness she too moves and meets him half way. That her late anger is still warm within her eyes is known to him at the first glance.

"So—now you know me," she says defiantly, "are you satisfied? Is your curiosity satiated?"

"I knew that from the first moment. Was I likely to forget?"

Sensational stage revelations appear in "Adventures of an Actress."

"That is the bitterness of it," she says. "Are those three sad years of my life never to be obliterated?"

"From my mind, never! The few weeks I claim out of them were the happiest of my life."

"What brings you to me now?" she demands suddenly "Is there more you would still learn as to the why and wherefore of my going into hospital as a nurse? I warn you I shall give no explanation."

"I do not desire one," says Dare humbly; "I know all about it. Your father's tyranny; your escape from a marriage with that vile old man; your life in hospital —everything. Do you hate me the more because I know all this?"

"Hate you—no!"

There is studied contempt in the curl of her lip.

"Hatred is a strong sentiment; what I feel for you is only indifference."

She goes back to her former position in the window. as though to terminate the interview. But he, having "cast his all upon the die," makes one more effort for dear life. He follows her there.

"Even the worst criminals get a fair hearing," he says. "Let me plead my cause."

"No. It would be waste of time."

"At least, tell me of what I stand accused."

"Listen, then!" exclaims she, turning to him with flashing eyes. "When unkind Fate sent you to that hospital a year and a half ago, and you saw me there day after day, a mere nurse, and—as you believed— unknown and obscure, you deigned to fancy yourself in love with me. Your momentary infatuation went even so far, that as the hour approached that was to put an end for ever to our intercourse with each other, driven by some puerile impulse, you deemed it even possible to declare your love, and offer me your name. But when it came to the point, you quailed; you drew back your half-uttered words; you shrank from allying yourself with one beneath you. My feelings were as nothing to you. Knowing myself scorned, rejected, without being afforded so much as the poor gratification of being able to refuse you, I left the room hoping, praying I might never see your face again. Do you think," with a painful sob, "I shall ever forgive all that?"

"Hear me."

"I will not. If your life, and heart, and title were all at my feet now, I——"

"They are at your feet."

"Then I reject them," returns she with vehemence.

"As you will. But at least you shall listen to what I have to say in my defence," says Dare with dignity. "That morning of which you speak—my last in the hospital—I truly meant, as you say, to tell you of my love."

"Meant! And then—you hesitated."

"I did," said Dare simply. "My name and the honour of my house is dear to me. Is it a crime beyond forgiveness that I should have paused before offering that name and honour to a woman who, though the most beautiful and lovable in the world, was still— unknown?"

"Why should you seek to excuse yourself?" interrupts Miss Monteith haughtily, "I know all that."

"There is, however, one thing that you do not know. You saw that I did battle with myself that morning, but you did not wait the termination of it. Love and duty fought a hard fight, but when it was over, you— that is Love—had won the victory; I raised my head again to tell you all—to beseech you to be my wife, but you were gone. Later on I searched for you everywhere; I advertised, all to no purpose. For eighteen months I sought for you—in vain."

Her face is turned away from him now, but a faint sound, that is either a sigh or a protest, escapes her.

"About all this you must believe me or not, as you will," says Dare quietly. "I have only my simple word to give you, but it is at least a word that has never yet been dishonoured. Will you not say something to me?"

"All I have to say has been said long ago. I cannot forgive you," says Miss Monteith, but as she says it she bursts into tears.

"I will not accept such words from your lips," exclaims Dare, with deep agitation.

And then all in a moment his arms are round her and his cheek pressed to hers.

"Beloved," he says, "have pity on me! Just think of it! You who have a name as old as mine, can you not understand the struggle I endured?"

"I can," murmurs she sadly; "and—yes, I honour you for it. But——"

Here her voice fails.

"Oh, if you could only know what I suffered!" she says, sobbing bitterly.

"I do know it. It was just half what I suffered," returns he, gravely. "Oh, darling, put an end to my misery now—here! Of the two I am the more to be pitied, because if you still prove unkind my unhappiness will last for ever. Eva, speak to me."

"Evelyn," corrects she softly.

"Ah, of course. But you must remember how long you have been 'Eva' to me. What an eternity lies in that year and a half! The very length of my wretchedness should buy my pardon."

"You are a special pleader," whispers she; and then she makes him a present of an arch little smile, and a glance from under her drenched lashes.

"Tell me you love me," persists he.

"I cannot yet. There is first something——"

"Nothing that shall separate us," declares he stoutly.

"There may be. Who—who was that 'Alys' you were always raving about during that dreadful time when you were ill?"

"Alys! My sister of course," says he triumphantly. "Had a letter from her only yesterday, She has been in India with her husband for the past four years, or probably you would have seen her at the hospital during that lucky time when I was ill. Now, what have you got to say?"

He is fast waxing into the wildest spirits.

"Nothing," returns she demurely; "so now let us go back to the others."

She makes a movement as though to go to the door, but he seizes her.

"Oh, yes, there is something!" he says, "and you shan't go without confessing it. Now then—you will marry me?"

"Yes."

"Soon?"

"Ye-es."

"And you are sure you love me?"

"As sure as sure can be!" says Miss Monteith solemnly, with a shameless disregard of maidenly reserve.

"Adventures of an Actress" begin next week.

THE FOOL.

A Romance of Provincial France.

The fete of the little Brittany ville of Chateaulin was in full swing. From miles around had come the vendors of those things that are necessary to the fullest enjoyment of the day with their wares, and in their scores had flocked holiday makers from neighbouring villages; all merry, all happy, dressed in their Sunday best.

It was in the market place that the crowd was thickest, for here congregated the merchants, and of them all, none had claimed, perhaps, more attention than he who came not as a vendor, but to buy.

An envious, feminine crowd surged before his booth—women, old and young, middle aged, of the working class, and mostly peasants; and they jostled each other with the usual humour of holiday folk in their endeavour to approach nearer to those good lengths of muslins and calicoes, those fascinating bonnets, those handkerchiefs of silk of many colours and all brilliant, which constituted the purchasing powers of the many who had come to buy.

"Sell your hair, ladies, sell your hair," he invited, and he held those brightest flowered foulards right where the sunlight fell, and swayed them gently to and fro; now took a bonnet and placed it mincingly upon his black head; now displayed more of these rolls of cloths and calicoes and muslins that the country-woman might handle them the better.

And the women folk gazed at the bizarre finery, especially the younger ones; lingering over this or that article fondly; and from fingering the goods a hand here and there crept towards the head and entwined itself in the hair bunched thereon.

"Sell your hair, ladies, sell your hair."

The *coupeur* ran his business eye—an eye that was pleasant and invited confidence—over the crowd of faces that looked alternately at him and at the merchandise he so ostentatiously made show of.

"We take it short or long, black or white, grey or chestnut. Sell your hair, ladies, for a fine bonnet or a length of good calico, or what you will that I have."

"Ah, my dear," sighed one old dame who had tramped a dozen kilometres from her village, "that I had hair like yours."

She addressed her remark to a girl of eighteen summers whose face was crowned with a wealth of auburn hair that her *coiffe blanche* could not hide.

"I should buy that beautiful length of calico there; how I should like it."

But her hair was thin and short now, and of no decided colour; too thin, too short, and too mixed for the hair merchant to take at any price. It had bought many a bonnet and many a length of calico ere the grey streaked the black, for she was now well on in years.

"It grows again quickly, my dear," she went on, as though begging the loan of a few locks. "Oh, that I was young again!" and she felt beneath her bonnet with her skinny fingers and heaved a sigh.

"Sell your hair, ladies, sell your—Ah! that bonnet for you *ma chère?*" One girl had lifted her white cap from her head, and taking out the hair pins, her coiffure fell to pieces on her shoulders. The hair merchant felt her locks and eyed them critically. "Well, I don't know if it's worth it," he said, the artful rogue, knowing full well its real value was forty francs, and the bonnet cost not more than two, "but just to start business."

The girl stood on one side. She was soon joined by others, and together they laughed and joked.

"Ah! if I was only *La Petite Blanche*," said one. "She carries a fortune on her head."

"I have heard," said another, "that *le tondeur* offered her a hundred francs for her hair last *jour de pardon*."

"But she's proud, she won't sell it," said another.

"Proud, and a lot she had to be proud of. They are as poor as——"

"But," interposed another, "why should she sell if she doesn't want to? And I don't think they are so poor. *Mère* Durant has Jules in Paris. He's doing well there, too, I hear. Another year, and perhaps he and Suzanne are to be married."

Soon a dozen *chevelures* were waiting the pleasure of the *coupeur's* shears—a dozen heads of hair that would soon each find itself part and parcel of some grand lady's coiffure in Paris or elsewhere.

It was not long ere the women had passed in the chair under the *coupeur's* scissors and were shorn of their crowning glory, each rising to feel the happier in her possession of a much coveted silk neckkerchief, worth at the outside a franc, or a bonnet of little higher value, or a metre or so of calico or cloth.

When there was no further business to be done the buyer of hair packed up his booth, placed his newly-acquired spoils carefully away, hitched his horse to the trap and left. He was off to the town not far distant where there was a depôt of his patron to whom he sold the hair for hard cash or exchanged it for further merchandise.

He wondered he had not seen *La Petite Blanche* at the fair. He had ever an eye for her wonderful head of hair, and every time his gaze rested upon it he was tempted to turn thief and acquire by violence what he could not come by honestly.

His very heart ached at the thought of the hundreds of francs he would make was that hair but his. For had he not a purchaser ready waiting for it, the rich wife of Pelloux, the Parisian banker, who told him she would pay three thousand francs for such and such a coil of natural hair?

That was two years ago, but she still waited, for none of the many hair merchants who travelled the country had been able to satisfy her requirements. The *coupeur* knew that bit by bit, Raoul the great *posticher* of Paris, was getting a coil together; a thread or so now and then from Normandy, from Vendee, from Brittany, and he sighed as he thought he might lose the profit.

The hair was of the sort the most rare in the world—pure white and waving down a length of nearly thirty inches. Suzanne had not been blessed with it at birth. It was the result of a great fright she underwent when five years old. And with the change in the colour of

Sensational stage revelations appear in "Adventures of an Actress."

her hair she passed from being Suzanne into *La Petite Blanche*.

Now she was nineteen and lived with *Mère* Durant at Poyran, had lived there ever since her own mother had followed her good man to the grave, lived there and played, and grown up with Jules, the fatherless son of Madame Durant. And Jules was now in Paris—had been there two years and was getting on well in life. At Saint Jean he was coming home for his holidays, and his mother talked and thought of nothing else. And in his weekly letter he spoke of hopes of marriage and a home with his old mother in the capital.

And Suzanne sighed and was happy, till came one Monday which brought no letter from him; miserable when came another and still no letter, and the *coupeur*, stopping on the way past their little cottage—he had purposely made a détour to see if time had changed the mind of *La Petite Blanche*—found her and her foster-mother plunged in misery; so miserable that much as he thought of those lovely francs he had no heart to try to persuade the girl to sell hair. He never even mentioned the subject, but learning the cause of their sorrow, laughed and tried to raise them from it.

"Here, *ma petite*," he said, pulling from his strap a bundle of folded newspapers, "read these and be happy. The course of true love never runs smooth. And, mother," to the old dame, "the lad's all right I'll wager; working hard as he's coming home soon. I'll wager, too, he has written, perhaps his letters have got lost. Anyway I shall be in Paris next week, and I'll look him up and scold him. There's a lovely new romance just commenced in the Journal, *ma chère*," to Suzanne, "read it and the time will pass the quicker."

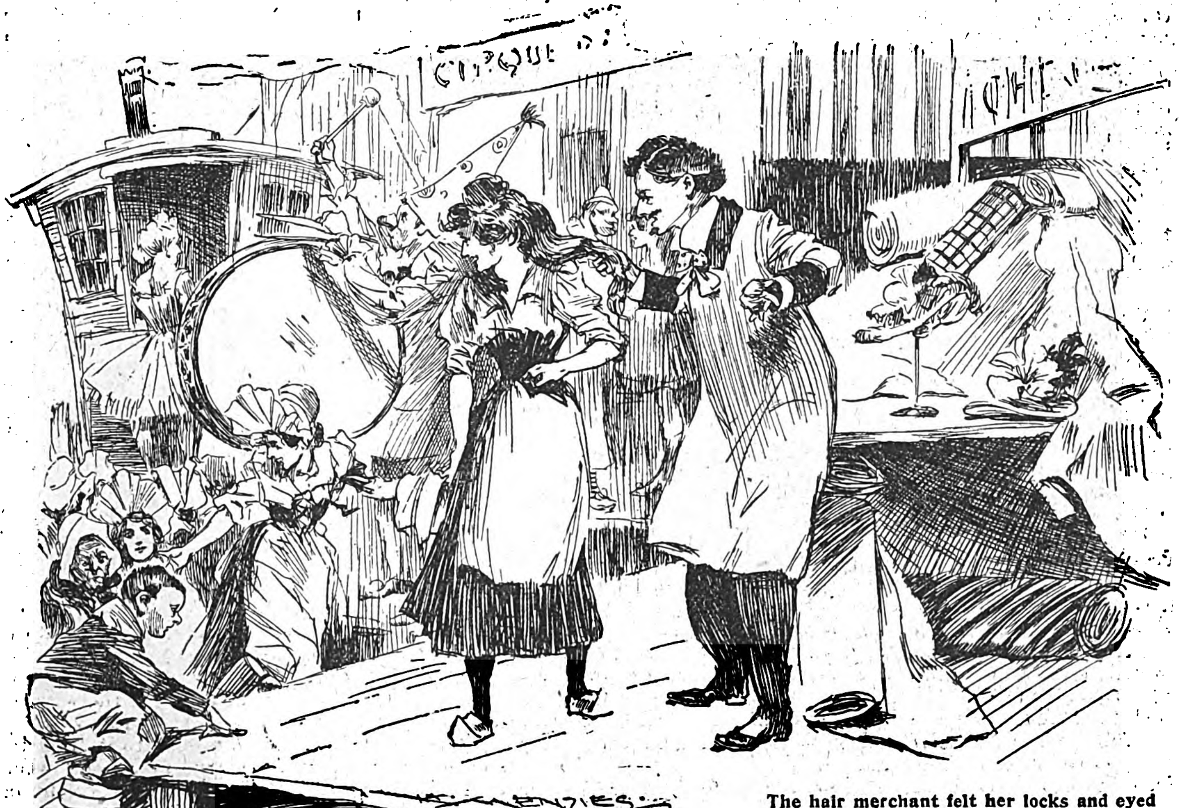
The girl in no mood for reading, took the papers, thanking him, threw them on one side.

"I suppose you are going to the *Pardon* at Carhaix to-morrow," she hazarded.

"No, I am resting. Just going to Aune to arrange my business. Now, cheer up," and with a *bon jour* he was gone.

To drive her thoughts from their sombre course, Suzanne presently turned to the numbers of *Le Petit Journal* which the hair-buyer had left, and perused therein the new feuilleton. She could read and write, and was proud of the fact, though of many words she didn't know the meaning, while her writing and spelling were no evidences of high scholarship. But then, in the village no one could read better, and no one could write better, and seldom did either, for not all of them had sons in Paris sending them money, but had to slave from dawn to dark for their poor living; and he would be rich, indeed, who could have afforded the luxury of candle light to read by.

She finished the story so far as it went and wondered how the heroine could escape from the villainous hands of her husband, who was slowly poisoning her with arsenic that he might marry a certain little dressmaker whom he knew was heir to millions and who loved him dearly, unawares that he was married. And wondering she turned to the news, reading the suicides and



The hair merchant felt her locks and eyed them critically.

murders, and love affairs, and thefts. Suddenly she seemed petrified where she sat, her eyes glazed, the type danced before them. Her Jules a thief and in prison! It could not be. And yet here it was in plain type. He had robbed his master of a thousand francs! It was impossible!

She turned to the date of the paper. It was two weeks old. And he had not written for over two weeks. He was to be brought up for trial three days from now. There could be no mistake.

She looked across at his old mother nodding peacefully in her chair, dreaming perhaps of her boy in Paris, a great man, earning lots of money; and Suzanne fell to the floor in a faint.

When she came to, her head reeled. The old woman still slept. It was growing dark. She sat up and again read the terrible news contained in a paragraph of four short lines. It was true. If his old mother knew. It would kill her.

She must be spared the knowledge. Luckily she could not read, and if she had been able to, her eyesight was now too bad; luckily too, no one in the village had read.

If they had known that piece of information she would have heard it ere this.

She tore the paragraph from the paper and held it in the flame of a match.

That night she slept not. She sat through the dark hours on the edge of her tiny bed and rocked too and fro in tears.

To save him, her Jules; that was her one thought. A thousand francs! What a fortune! How could she help to gain it?

It was beyond her. Both her hands flew to her head. There was the price of his liberty. Her hair flowed down on her shoulders. She looked in the tiny mirror on the wall.

She loved her hair, because Jules loved it; how often he told her the fright she would be without it. But what mattered it now? He was in danger, in prison, and might be kept there years.

The buyer of hair would be at Aune on the morrow he had said. He was there now. When it was daylight she would go to him.

He had offered her twelve hundred francs once for her hair. That had been his last offer. Then she was seized with a horrible fear. Why had he not spoken on the subject yesterday? Perhaps he no longer wished to buy her hair. She felt sick at the thought, and she shivered.

When the light came she would make to Aune. She would run all the way. She must see the hair-buyer ere he started off again. With the first streak of dawn she was away, waking the *mère* to tell her she was going. The old woman dully wondered why, but she never asked; Suzanne often made these excursions.

She returned in the afternoon, but not through the village street. She came to the cottage by way of the fields, for she wished to avoid everyone, but some children playing there saw her, and running home to their mothers told them that *La Petite Blanche* had lost her hair.

Mère Durant was astonished and angry, and the more because Suzanne placed two hundred francs in her hand and said she had given the rest to the Monastery.

"I confessed to a great sin to the priest," she said. "This is my repentance. And then we have no food, and Jules has never written and sent you money. That two hundred francs will last, no doubt, till we hear from him."

In her anger the old woman threw the notes at her, and she went upstairs and cried, and cried, and cried.

The hair-buyer set out for Paris with his much prized coil of hair. An intimation of his business soon gained him admittance to the presence of Madame Pelloux, and three thousand francs and the hair changed owners, the latter being at once dispatched to the cleaners.

"And now I've a favour to ask of you, madame," said the hair merchant, the business completed.

She signified her willingness to listen to him, and in his plain matter-of-fact way he stated his case.

"Your husband has in his employ a clerk named Durant," he said.

"He had," she interrupted, "he is now in prison; a thief."

"I know," he replied. "The girl from whom I bought this hair is his sweetheart. She lives with his old mother down in Brittany. I could never persuade her to part with her hair. But she came to me two days ago and asked her price for it. She confessed to me her lover was in prison. He had stolen a thousand francs of his employer's money. She was coming to Paris to plead with the employer herself and pay him back the money. She sold her hair, not knowing for whom, for of course I never said, and I told her I was going to Paris and would see the banker for her. She waits now in an agony of fear to hear from me. Will you, madame, can I pray of you to intercede with your husband to set this young man free. Here is the money he stole;" and he put forward the notes for a thousand francs.

The woman had a woman's heart, and there were tears in her eyes when the man had finished. She had a son and daughter of her own.

"It shall be done," she said.

"And she doesn't wish the young man to know anything about this."

"He shall not."

Jules was with his mother and sweetheart in four days' time.

His employer had forgiven him his crime, talked to him of the sin of gambling, given him a thousand francs and told him to go away and be a better man.

He told himself going home he now could marry Suzanne—*La Petite Blanche*—and live happily ever afterwards. But when he saw her shorn of her beautiful hair, his soul revolted in horror. And she had done this for charity!

He called her a fool, and it angered her.

"A fool for your sake," she said.

He coloured and shivered. Could she know he had been in prison? It was impossible.

"Where is your beauty now?" he asked.

"In your pocket," she said.

A fear gripped his heart. He understood now, she knew. He knew, now, the sacrifice she had made, and would have drawn her to his breast, but she repulsed him.

"She doesn't know?" he asked, pointing to his mother.

"No; she, too, thinks I'm a fool."

"No, no, forgive me, Suzanne," he cried.

And she forgave him.

"Adventures of an Actress" begin next week.

"A" or "B"? *A Story of Diplomacy.*

The ambassador looked at me and I looked at the ambassador. It was not by any means the first pause in an exceedingly awkward conversation.

"You see," he remarked suavely, "you also are concerned in this affair. I am glad to observe that you contrive to retain your cheerfulness, but I am bound to point out the fact that—diplomatically, at any rate—you are in a parlous state."

I assumed as lugubrious an expression as possible and ventured to contest his point of view.

"I don't exactly see——" I began, but he stopped me.

"Perhaps not. I will explain. If I am—what shall we say?—removed, my first secretary will certainly go with me. He is supposed to be equally to blame when anything goes wrong; he shares the reward when a small triumph is gained. Now, you are my first secretary, Hamblin, and we are in the devil of a mess; in your own interests I should recommend you to bestir yourself."

I drew a little breath. If I had not been in a way attached to my chief, I should certainly have used it for a different purpose.

As Sir George had remarked we were certainly in a devil of a mess, but it was he himself and alone who had landed us there.

"If you could suggest any way, sir, in which I could be of the slightest use," I remarked deprecatingly, "nothing would give me more pleasure. Unfortunately, we seem to be sitting down before a great wall; it's too high to climb, and there's no way round."

"A very charming simile," Sir George said dryly. "Nevertheless, if you don't get over yourself, or help me to, you won't marry my daughter."

I came to the conclusion promptly that Sir George was an unreasonable and disagreeable old man, but I kept my convictions to myself.

"I hope you will reconsider that, sir," I said most respectfully. "I am very fond of Clara, and I think she cares a little for me."

"Work for her, then," was the prompt answer. "Here's your chance. Get us out of this wretched muddle, and you shall have her—as soon as she likes!"

I pondered. I was very fond of Clara. I began to wish that the situation were not so hopeless. Sir George took up his penholder and marked time with it.

"The affair," he said, "lies in a nutshell; it is as simple as A B C."

"Oh, it's simple enough," I assented—"painfully simple!"

"England," the ambassador continued, ignoring my interruption, "is at war with the Transvaal Republic. Last week there appeared in an issue of a foreign newspaper what purports to be an interview between the monarch of this country and the European representative of the Transvaal Republic. The interview—or, let us say, purported interview—you have read yourself. It is sufficient to remark that, if it was authentic, it was tantamount to a declaration of war against England. Now, you know what an artful old beggar Highbury is! He sends me across by Queen's messenger two sealed dispatches for the Emperor, addressed to him privately. One is marked 'A,' the other 'B.' Now, if the interview had been genuine, I was to have dealt the first blow by presenting 'B,' which is tantamount to an ultimatum, couched in most formal and war-like language. If, on the other hand, its authenticity is denied, I present 'A,' which is a friendly little note, assuring his Majesty that no notice was taken in England of what was obviously a ridiculous canard. You know, of course, what has happened."

"The Emperor has denied the whole story contemptuously from beginning to end," I remarked. "The Transvaal representative was never even accorded an interview."

Sir George flourished the penholder with new vigour.

"Precisely. I accordingly left at the Palace the letter marked 'A,' and, returning here, proceeded to open and destroy letter 'B.' I read it first, and to my horror found that its contents were as per specification of letter 'A,' and that, consequently, the lettering must have been wrong, and the ultimatum left at the Palace."

"I don't quite see where we are to blame, you know," I interposed.

"Perhaps not," my chief remarked dryly. "You see, you are very young. But there is an axiom in diplomacy which you will do well to lay at heart. If anything goes wrong at your charge, no matter who is to blame, you are responsible. Those letters have been changed by spies, most likely, and I think I know who is at the bottom of it. It was probably done while they were in the possession of the Queen's messenger—he admits that he took no extra precautions. That is of no consequence. It is upon us that the blame will fall. There awaits the Emperor a letter which will either plunge us into a ruinous, unnecessary and unpopular war, or else will mean Highbury's resignation, our retirement to a colony, and a most awful climb-down."

"The Emperor," I remarked, "is still at Meritzburg."

"Manoeuvring?"

"Yes he returns to-morrow. To-morrow night that letter will be handed to him."

"You're sure it hasn't been sent on to him?"

"Certain. I happen to know that his commands were most absolute. Nothing was to be forwarded. Von Butz has the letter, and knows its contents."

"Sure of that?" I ventured.

Sir George tossed an evening paper over to me.

"You see what the beast is doing," he said. "Strange rumours at the barracks, all-night work at the arsenals, mysterious notices to the railway companies. It all means one thing—mobilization."

"Von Butz has read the letter by fair means or foul. The Emperor will receive it in person to-morrow night. The letter awaits him at Von Butz's house," I remarked, thoughtfully.

"Marvellous!" Sir George remarked with sarcasm. "You have the insight of a Mazarin."

One must put up with sarcasm from one's prospective father-in-law, especially when he is in a tight place, as Sir George undoubtedly was. I had sufficient magnanimity to ignore it.

"Have you made any effort to regain possession of the letter?" I asked.

Sir George shook his head.

"I might as well try to fly," he said, "as attempt to regain possession of it by fair means. Von Butz is our enemy and the enemy of our country. All the ill-feeling and friction of the last few years has been his making, and his alone. This letter is the summit of his desires. In the light of the Emperor's frank and downright statement, it is nothing more or less than a brutal insult. I cannot imagine any apologies which could possibly be offered sufficient to atone for it. It will mean war for England, and the colonies for us."

"If the Emperor reads it," I remarked softly.

"If the Emperor reads it," Sir George repeated, looking over at me.

I buried my face in my hands and tried to think. There came a knock at the door, and a telegraphic dispatch. Sir George fetched out the code book with shaking fingers. He groaned as he read it out.

> Understand mobilization secretly commenced. Panic on Stock Exchange, owing to rumours from Merlin. Presume you only delivered letter "A." What does it mean? Have you blundered? Reply. HIGHBURY.

"We haven't much time, have we?" I remarked. "Let us make the most of it."

"How?"

I took up my pen and code book, and wrote a telegram.

> To Highbury, Downing Street, London.
> Discredit all rumours. Mobilization ridiculous. All quiet here. Duly delivered letter 'A.' Probably stock exchange rig. Will request audience to-morrow.

"We'll start boldly, at any rate," I said, rising. "Send this and I will be back in an hour."

"Where are you going?" Sir George asked.

"To call on Fräulein von Butz," I answered.

Youth is dauntless and excitement is sweet. So I walked through the broad, sunlit streets of Merlin with a smiling face, a cigarette of delicate flavour between my lips, and tried to persuade myself that it was not a forlorn hope upon which I had embarked. In my pocket was letter "A," which should have been marked letter "B," in my right hand a fragrant bunch of Neapolitan violets, whose faint, sweet perfume had stolen out to me from a florist's shop in the avenue. As I passed up the broad steps of the mansion where Von Butz lived, the Fates did me a good turn. The door before me opened and Fräulein von Butz came out, dressed for driving.

I bowed low and held out the flowers.

"A farewell gift, Fraulein," I said sadly. "You will deign to accept them, I hope!"

She held out her hands, and her bright smile of welcome changed to a look of interrogation.

"I will accept them," she said, "with very much pleasure, and I thank you indeed for thinking of me. But why a farewell gift, Mr. Hamblin? Are you going away on leave again?"

I shook my head sorrowfully.

"It is no matter of leave, dear Fräulein," I said. "I am quitting the service. I should have left to-day, but I wanted to say good-bye to you."

She turned back into the hall.

"Come inside," she said, "I do not understand."

I heard her instruct the hall porter to send back the carriage. She led me into her own tiny sitting-room, as neat and dainty as herself, and motioned me to an easy chair. She sat down close to me, and loosened the furs from her neck.

"You are giving up the service," she said, "you are leaving Merlin? Is it not very sudden, Mr. Hamblin?"

"It has come upon me," I said gloomily, "like a thunder-clap."

"You shall tell me," she insisted, raising her bright eyes to mine, "all about it. Have you come into the title, is your health bad, or are you promoted?"

I was silent for a moment. It was my silence which told. Then I shook my head.

"Fräulein," I said, "when I have gone you will hear from others what I would rather tell you myself. I have longed for this opportunity, yet now it has come—it is not easy."

Her piquant little face was full of sympathy. By accident my hand fell upon the arm of her chair and touched her fingers. She drew them away—slowly.

"Fräulein," I said, "there is one profession in the world in which a single mistake is fatal. That profession unfortunately is, or was, mine—and that mistake—I have made."

"Oh!" she cried.

It was enough. My humiliation now required no pretence. It came natural to me. I felt that I was a cad.

"Won't you tell me a little more?" she begged. "I am so sorry for you—and sorry that you are going away."

Her hand once more fell upon the arm of her chair, Never were fingers more soft and velvety to the touch.

"Fräulein," I said, "if I may tell you, I will. I should like you to know the truth. It is this. Two letters were intrusted to me, one of which was to be delivered to the Emperor, the other destroyed! I delivered—to your father as it happens—the wrong one."

She was perplexed.

"Is that all?" she asked.

I nodded.

"The action," I said, "is a small one—but the result is terrible."

"Terrible?"

"It is too weak a word," I assented. "Do you know what war means, Fräulein?"

She shuddered.

"Do not speak of it!" she begged.

"You will hear it spoken of before long, Fräulein," I said; "and, alas! I shall be the unhappy cause. War between your country and mine! It is fearful!"

I am afraid my fingers tightened upon hers. I am sure that the pressure was returned.

"The letter you spoke of," she asked—"has the Emperor received it yet?"

"Not yet," I answered; "your father has it. The Emperor returns to-morrow night."

She leaned forward suddenly, pale.

"He returns to-night!" she exclaimed. "Only an hour ago my father had a telegram from him."

"To-night or to-morrow night," I muttered—"what matters. The letter is gone from my hands beyond recovery. He opens it, reads, and war is as certain as to-morrow's sun. Oh, it is enough to make a man mad to think of it! War between the two nations who have

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brought the science of killing to perfection! It will be the greatest massacre the world has ever known, and the everlasting shame of it will be upon my head."

"Don't!" she cried—"please don't!"

I drew myself up.

"At least, Fräulein," I said gently, and with real tenderness, "I have no right to come here and make you miserable. Only I could not go away without seeing you and asking you to sometimes remember—a most unfortunate man!"

I stretched out my hand for my hat. She stopped me.

"No, no!" she cried, "sit still! Let me think."

I watched the colour come and go from her cheeks. She pushed back the pretty fringe from her forehead. Ah! Gertrud von Butz, you wrote the memory of your dainty little self into my heart for ever in those few minutes!

She turned toward me.

"What if the letter were destroyed?" she asked slowly.

"It is impossible!" I answered, with thumping heart.

"But if it were!"

"There would be no war," I said, "there would be no disgrace for me; I should remain in Merlin. But it is impossible."

"Should you know it if you saw it?" she asked.

"Of course."

She rose up.

"Come with me," she said. "Do not speak. If we meet my father it would be a convent for me. You must do what seems best to you."

She was as pale as a sheet, but she walked firmly and without hesitation.

As we crossed the hall where several servants were standing she turned to me.

"Your own conservatories," she said, "are so much more beautiful. But there, you shall judge."

We turned off down a long passage. At the end was a conservatory, but she paused and listened at the last door on the right. It was empty; she turned the handle.

We passed inside; she took a bunch of keys from her pocket and unlocked a cabinet which stood in the middle of the room. A pile of letters were there. My head swam with joy.

"Quick," she whispered. "Ah! We are lost. It is my father."

I dashed at the letters, seized a handful, but dropped them again as the lid of the cabinet fell upon my wrist. She whirled me across the room, behind a curtain into a long annexe into the conservatory. I could have cried with the disappointment. But for her sake, I would have rushed out and torn the letter to pieces before Von Butz's eyes. Gertrud came close to me. I passed my arm round her waist; she was trembling violently.

Voices approached, and footsteps. The door of the room opened. Through the crack in the curtain I saw Von Butz enter, and my heart stood still. For behind him came a tall, familiar figure in a brilliant uniform, partially covered by a long military cloak.

"And now, Von Butz, the letter at once," he exclaimed brusquely.

"Your majesty shall have it," was the quiet answer, as Von Butz produced his keys.

"When you read it you will say that I have done well in starting the great engine which your Majesty has constructed with such marvellous and wonderful forethought."

There was a moment's pause. Then I saw the letter pass into the Emperor's hands.

"You yourself, Von Butz," I heard him say, "are well acquainted with the contents?"

"My secret agents," Von Butz answered, "ever keen in the service of the Fatherland, borrowed it from the King's messenger, and brought me a copy. We have saved hours which are worth millions."

The Emperor broke the seal. He stood up and a fierce light burned in his eyes.

"Von Butz," he said, "you will be my witness that these things which are to come are of God's ordination, not mine. With the finest army in the world, trained and brought to perfection under my own care and governance, I, the certain master of this great continent from the firing of the first guns of battle, have ever refrained from violence or provocation. With the warlike spirit of my grandfather in my veins, I have yet held out to all nations the olive branch instead of the iron grip. History must acknowledge this. When I am all conquering and almighty, I have yet been slow to strike. You will remember this, Von Butz."

"Always, your majesty."

The Emperor tore open the letter and bent over it with serene forehead and expectant eyes. He read, frowned, re-read, and flung it passionately upon the table. He turned upon Von Butz with a fury that was paralysing.

"Dolt! Fool!" he cried. "You have been tricked! You have made me a laughing-stock! You have betrayed the nation!"

"Your Majesty," Von Butz faltered, "the copy I sent you was a faithful one. My agent copied it himself in the express."

"Listen then," cried the Emperor.

He read out letter "A."

* * * * *

I walked home, my nerves tingling with excitement, relieved, but very puzzled. Sir George called me into the study immediately I arrived.

"Hamlin," he said in an airy manner, "I'm afraid you have been disturbing yourself about a mare's nest!"

"Oh, indeed!" I found breath to say.

Sir George nodded and tapped an open letter with his finger.

"It seems," he continued, "that Bucknell, the messenger, is rather a smart fellow. He found out that his dispatches had been tampered with, so wired Highbury for instructions. Immediately he received them he destroyed letter 'B' and duplicated 'A.' The duplication was to catch the thief, if possible, and I should imagine that it did."

"I should think so, too," I answered, smiling.

"One word more," Sir George said, coughing, and assuming his most dignified deportment. "With regard to Clara, I have talked to her seriously, and found her, as I expected, amenable to reason. You are both too young to think of marriage, and an engagement does not seem to us desirable. In short, we have other views for Clara."

I drew a long breath—not of despair, but of resignation. That night, at the Russian embassy, I sat out four dances with Gertrud von Butz.

Sensational stage revelations appear in "Adventures of an Actress."

The GOLDEN DWARF

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"IT is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Otto Hare would like to suggest that he did—Esther's mercenary mother accepts his hints. She wants the Golden Dwarf for a son-in-law.

Felix is secretly loved by Judith Garland, a striking brunette, Lady Dering's companion. She has a wastrel brother, Neal, who is unaccountably in Wyresdale, and who is demanding money. This, by an affectation of sisterly solicitude, Judith obtains, as a cheque, from Felix Dering. The cheque is payable to bearer.

Otto Hare has an ally, a strange German physician, Joseph Kraft, who lives with him at Wyresdale Park, the Golden Dwarf's residence. He is an object of much curiosity to Archibald Geddes, a clever assistant at the Wyresdale Pharmacy, which is kept by a drunken old chemist, Caleb Forester.

Caleb has a charming daughter, Connie, whom Geddes is making bashful love to. She is Esther's friend, and quarrels with Geddes for crediting the rumour that Felix killed his uncle.

A one-armed sailor has suddenly appeared in Wyresdale. At the chemist's shop he encounters Kraft, whom he follows, and on the strength of some past episode attempts to blackmail. Kraft repulses him, but is dexterously tracked by the sailor to a curious fort-like structure in Wyresdale Park.

While spying on this the sailor is attacked by a huge dog, which he stabs. He is seen by Kraft and the Golden Dwarf.

Esther tells Felix of her mother's plan to marry her to Otto Hare. They swear constancy in an old and picturesque oath. Felix returns to Dering House, to be asked by the child Brian if it is true Felix has taken his father away.

Judith Garland shows Felix several links of a chain he has been in the habit of wearing. They are bloodstained. She adds that they were found near the cross roads, where Sir Christopher's body was discovered, and that, moreover, Felix was seen near the place at ten o'clock on the night when he was supposed to be in Duchester. She assures him she will keep his secret.

Felix in vain protests his innocence. At this moment an inspector of the local police is announced.

Felix Dering staggers—is he dreaming, the prey of some hideous nightmare?

A caution sounds in his ears; Judith Garland is speaking to him. "Don't look like that," she whispers, "pull yourself together."

Notwithstanding their alarm, the police-officer—one Inspector Brasher—has merely called to arrest, on suspicion of being concerned in Sir Christopher's death, a certain Edward Spencer, a young Irish groom whom the baronet, shortly before his death, had given notice to leave. Protesting his innocence, Spencer is taken away. While on the route to the little country police-station, he was seen by Foley, with whom Dr. Kraft has been holding a mysterious consultation. Almost immediately afterwards, Foley, by chance, makes the acquaintance of Neal Garland. "Here, my hearty," asks the sailor in his maritime lingo, "what was it you picked up yonder and gave to the taut little craft you had with you?" He is referring to the meeting of Judith and Neal at the stile.

The scene changes. During a walk in the meadows on a pleasant Sabbath morning, Felix tells Esther that he was indeed in Wyresdale that fatal evening, and explains his return. A new sensation interrupts their conversation, Felix is called to the small local police-station. It has a single cell, and in this Ted Spencer had been confined over an adjourned inquest. This cell is now empty, Spencer has vanished. The barred window has been broken through—from the outside!

With the help of Neal, Esther kidnaps little Brian Dering, to further her ends with Felix.

The Golden Dwarf pesters Esther with his attentions. She meets Felix one day, and from his manner guesses there is something amiss.

CHAPTER XII. (*continued.*)

"FELIX," she faltered; "something dreadful must have happened."

Her lover assented, yet by a gesture rather than speech. Esther experienced an indescribable terror.

"Tell me quickly," she murmured; "I—I can't wait; you frighten me."

Felix studied her frank countenance and anxious blue orbs; he seemed reluctant to begin.

"Brian," he said at length; "our little Brian, Esther ——"

Esther Carew trembled. "Not—not dead?" she whispered. Felix Dering's reply was a hopeless movement.

"We cannot be sure," he confessed; "the child has disappeared; there is no trace to enlighten our darkness. All is blank ignorance."

He sat down abruptly on the bank of turf at the roadside and hid his face.

"I—I loved the boy," he muttered, "and people are saying a horrible thing."

Esther breathed heavily—his emotion appalled her.

"What can they be saying," she urged, "that need distress you so?"

A voice responded to her query—a voice which was not Felix's.

"They are saying," it answered; "that Mr. Felix Dering murdered his uncle, and has broken down the last barrier between himself and a snug fortune by doing away with his baby cousin."

Esther looked round in astonishment, and Felix, startled out of his despair, glanced up. Before them stood Inspector Brasher.

CHAPTER XIII.

"SHE SHALL BE YOURS, OTTO."

"IT is the same, Kraft, beyond a doubt; I remember his figure distinctly—short, athletic, and the left arm missing."

Otto Hare flung the end of his cigarette across the room on to the marble hearth. Joseph Kraft shrugged a couple of large shoulders and pursued a rather delicate task. Bent over the wooden stand which supported the cage of tropical birds, he was engaged in capturing a brown morsel of existence, red-beaked and black-eyed.

The Professor's soft fingers imprisoned it at length. Then, by means of a small pair of surgical nippers, he trimmed its unwieldy claws. The contrast between the elephantine German and the frail creature in his grasp was extravagant. Yet he manipulated it with a singular gentleness.

"Why should this fellow, whoever he is," continued the Golden Dwarf, "want to come prying about Wyresdale Park?"

Kraft smiled as he released his feathered patient.

"You must not forget, my dear friend," he said, "that you are a local mystery, and sailors are inquisitive folk."

He opened the cage and allowed the flock of birds to flutter round him. When he had poured a tiny mound of rape-seed upon his palm they hurried down to devour it. The German's hand was hidden by the restless bodies and half-expanded wings of his pets.

Otto Hare had risen from the leather-covered lounge which fronted the window of the Professor's apartment. An impetuous stride brought him close to Joseph Kraft.

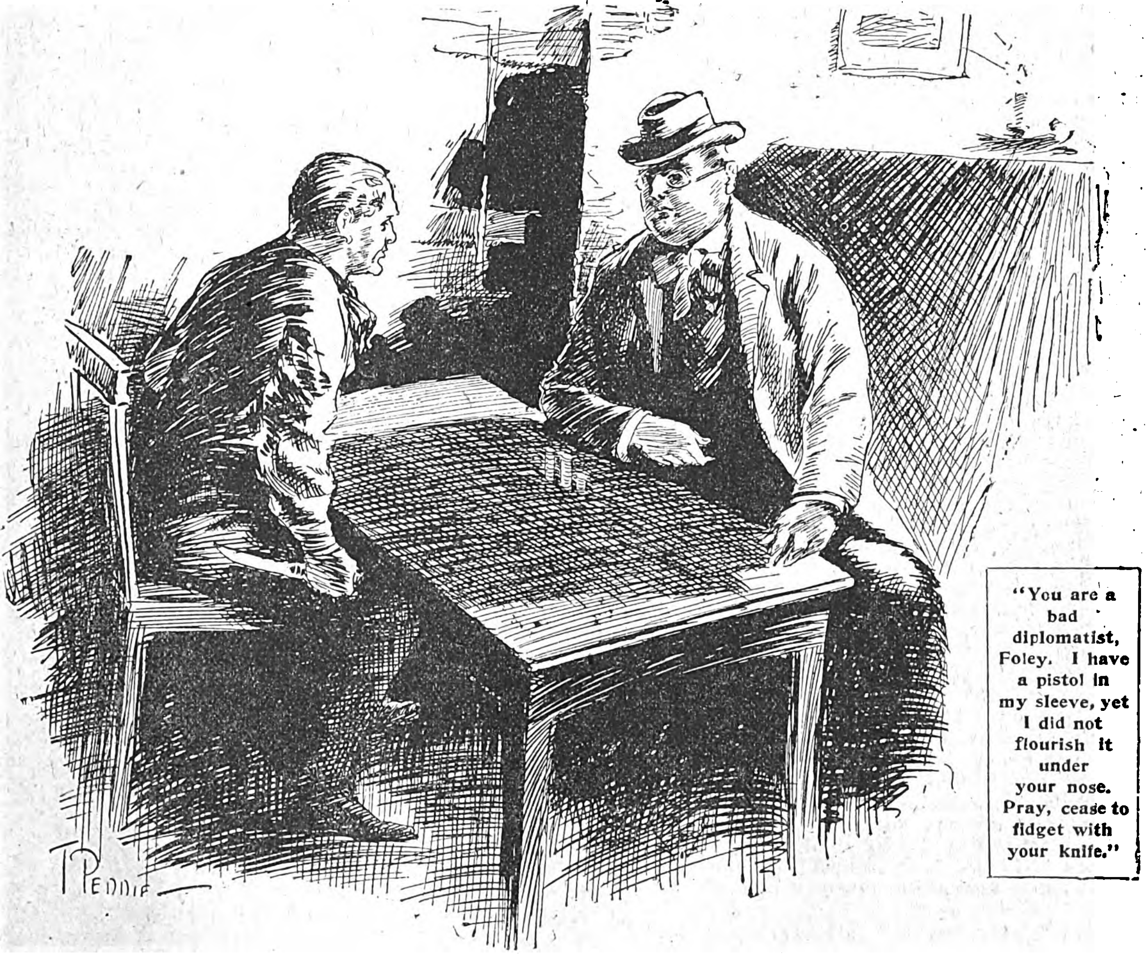
"How did you know," queried the Golden Dwarf, staring at Kraft's bland features, "that he was a sailor?"

The German's pale blue orbs flashed behind their thick lenses, but the amused expression did not quit his countenance.

"By a certain roll in the rascal's gait," he answered smoothly, "which, to a habitual observer such as I am, denotes the sea-goer. Also, by a tattoo-mark on the fist that held the knife with which our lamented Cerberus was stabbed."

Otto Hare sneered.

"You perceived the last detail no little distance away," commented the Golden Dwarf, "though man and dog were on the ground, and yet, a few days back, you assured me that he had both his arms, while I myself could tell that he



"You are a bad diplomatist, Foley. I have a pistol in my sleeve, yet I did not flourish it under your nose. Pray, cease to fidget with your knife."

"Adventures of an Actress" begin next week.

had only one. Kraft, for some reason or other, you are hoodwinking me."

Joseph Kraft collected his favourites and prevailed upon them to re-enter their cage.

"We live too much alone, my poor Hare," he opined; "this morbid imaginativeness proves it. Since, however, you are interested by the assassin of your biggest—and worst—mongrel, I will learn what there is to be learned about him and report to you."

The German rinsed his finger-tips in a bowl of water that was surrounded by the scientific litter of his work-bench, took a straw hat off his desk, a key from his pocket, and turned to Otto Hare.

"I have the best temper possible," he announced casually, "but I am not a child or a fool, Otto. You permitted yourself, Otto, to suggest that I was hoodwinking you. In my excess of good-nature I almost omitted to say that I ought not to tolerate such liberties. I mention it now."

The Golden Dwarf spun on his heel, his diminutive frame quivering with resentment. Kraft moved towards the door of the bright, strange chamber. There he paused and scrutinised the proud visage of Otto Hare.

"Otto, my friend," he murmured, "do not neglect your new character of Romeo to call names at your stage-manager. You want Esther Carew for your Juliet. You should not offend the only person who can mould her to your will. She loves Felix Dering, and he is five feet eleven in his riding-boots. You are forty-seven inches and she dreads you."

Joseph Kraft doffed his spectacles, polished them, and chuckled. The Golden Dwarf muttered an oath. Kraft mounted the glasses again and beamed on him.

"But she shall be yours, Otto," cried the German; "I promise you—I, Joseph Kraft."

He put his key in the lock and waited for Otto Hare to pass out of the room. The Golden Dwarf did so, the lines of anger puckering his low brow and compressing his cruel mouth. Kraft secured the door and marched downstairs, his adieu a wave of his plump hand.

As he threaded the lush alleys of Wyresdale Park, to gain its ring-fence of brick and the iron wicket, he grumbled to himself.

"Otto is restless," he said under his breath; "these midgets they are all nerves. If I had left it in his power he would bite me. As it is he would but break his teeth. Yet I shall not let him try—he must be soothed and kept quiet, soothed and kept quiet."

Mumbling to himself, he reached the private exit, unfastened it, stepped through, and strolled along the high road. A few moments later he was rapping at the tarred portal of a cottage on the grassy margin of a narrow lane. In the brief period that elapsed before the summons provoked a response he had transferred something from his coat-tail to his starched cuff.

A cropped and bullet-shaped cranium thrust itself out suddenly. The visitor identified, its owner retreated.

"What cheer, Dutchy?" he exclaimed. "Warp your fat hull in—blowed if you haven't as much beam as a collier! You're overdue, Dutchy; I was to have had the dollars days ago."

He dropped the latch and followed the German within, pulling his clasp-knife free of his pocket and fixing on Kraft a glance of profound distrust.

The Professor sat down unconcernedly, dragged his chair to the table, and revealing a linen bag of the type used by bankers, drew the tape, and tilted the article bottom up. At this point he halted and desired the sailor to close the shutters. Nicholas Foley grinned but complied, lighting a candle, which, stuck by its base to the painted shelf, ornamented the chimney-piece. In the artificial dusk thus created Kraft counted out a rouleau of sovereigns.

"Twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six," he finished, and stacked the coins in a double pile. Foley gazed, but made no criticism, saved that he clutched the haft of the weapon which nestled in the unbuttoned pocket on his hip. Kraft rose and indicated the money.

"You are a bad diplomatist, Foley," he said, secreting the linen bag about him. "I have a pistol in my sleeve, yet I did not flourish it under your nose. Pray cease to fidget with your knife; you bored me by the trick when we had a previous consultation."

Crestfallen the sailor obeyed, and his redoubtable antagonist proceeded.

"This," explained Dr. Kraft, "is a first quarterly payment of twenty-six pounds—two sovereigns a week. That amount shall be yours so long as you devote your attention to—to your garden. The slightest symptom of curiosity on your part will lose you an income of a hundred a year. You comprehend?"

Nicholas nodded and gathered up the instalment of his annuity. Kraft motioned him aside, walked to the exit of the cottage, and stood thoughtful.

"Put the cash out of sight," he ordered, "and undo the shutters."

Sulkily and in silence Foley performed the command. Joseph Kraft lifted the latch and peered forth.

"By the bye," he said, lingering, "no more poaching at Wyresdale Park. You were poaching, you recollect, the morning on which you killed Mr. Hare's mastiff. You were simply in search of a rabbit to flavour your modest lunch; no other motive, eh, my friend?"

"I reckon that was about it," growled the sailor, extinguishing the candle.

"You are an apt pupil," declared the Professor, and slid a nickel-plated revolver from his sleeve to the breast of his frock-coat. The door creaked and he was gone.

Nicholas Foley stalked to the casement and for several seconds studied the retreating German. Then, without uttering a single syllable, he approached a corner cupboard, reached down a whiskey-bottle almost drained, shook the last of the fluid into his hallowed palm, and gulped it from that primitive bowl.

"Took me flat aback," he owned confidentially; "ran into wind'ard of me slick with his dashed popgun. What's the odds? I've got the specie. Nick, you're a made man and you'll splice the mainbrace at the Wheatsheaf arter sprinkling them sallids."

He clapped on his slouched felt, caught up a metal pot, rolled into his garden, and filled the utensil at a rain-butt under the eaves. As he sprayed the contents upon a plot of cress a cool inquiry sounded behind him.

"Evening," it said, "and how is the malaria?"

Nicholas Foley set his can down.

"Why," he ejaculated, "if it isn't the first mate from the physic-shop! Thankee, malary's not obstropolus for the moment."

The chemist's assistant leaned on the gate.

"I'm glad of that," he rejoined, and added: "Oh, I notice you've struck up an acquaintance with Professor Kraft—saw him come out. Tell me, why were you so startled when you met him in our place a week past?"

Nicholas hauled up a clay pipe and began to stuff into the bowl some of his choice red Virginian.

"Ask me anything else, messmate," he protested, "and I'll show my papers frank and fair. As to Dutchy and me, mum's the word."

CHAPTER XIV.

"ARE YOU MAD, MISS GARLAND?"

"WHY do you tell me this. Mr. Brasher; am I to be publicly accused of the crimes in question?"

Felix Dering had started up, and, with Esther clinging

Sensational stage revelations appear in "Adventures of an Actress."

to his arm, put these stern queries to the passive Inspector. Brasher regarded the lovers for a moment. A glimmer of emotion crossed his sedate visage and he lowered his glance; Esther Carew's piteous gaze was more than he could sustain. He rubbed his hands together and shifted his service boots upon the dusty kerb.

"No," admitted Michael Brasher, "not yet; there isn't any evidence worth a name. But what is the use of pretending to ignore the rumour when Wyresdale discusses nought else. So, as I happened to catch a few words of your talk, sir, I thrust in, and hope Miss Carew and yourself will pardon the liberty."

The Inspector scrutinised, while he spoke, the expression of Felix Dering's countenance and the attitude of his stalwart figure. They did not seem to enlighten the astute police officer. He wrinkled a pair of prominent brows and changed his harsh manner for a less repellent air.

"It's hardly a nice position, sir," he continued, "from your point of view, is it? You might think, now, of taking some legal course to vindicate yourself, say a libel suit against one of the parties who may have helped to spread the allegations."

Felix grew pale; he knew that Inspector Brasher, firm, polite, deliberate, was feeling his mental pulse. Esther fathomed the Inspector's purpose, her fingers trembled convulsively on Felix's sleeve.

"I will not stoop," declared Felix Dering, "to notice or dispute such infamous suggestions. I would not have harmed a hair of my uncle's head or a curl of little Brian's. It is not my fault if the murder of Sir Christopher and the disappearance of his infant son redound to my advantage. After what has occurred, I would not permit myself to profit by either. Should it be possible, I will find the child Brian; whether or no, I will never accept a penny of the Dering fortune or an inch of the Dering lands."

Michael Brasher pulled at his stiff beard.

"Such a sacrifice would," he hinted, "be looked on as purely politic."

"By fools," burst forth Felix, "who can suppose that I should surrender that which I had committed crimes to obtain. You, Mr. Brasher, when you unearth a clue to associate me with the death of my uncle or the spiriting away of his child, will do your duty as if I were the meanest labourer in Wyresdale."

The Inspector saluted, bowed to Esther, and passed by. Once he slackened his speed and turned, as if puzzled. But his tall frame steadied itself, he shook his loose limbs, increased his stride, and faded from their sight.

Felix breathed heavily.

"Fate is cruel, my darling," he said. "There goes an honest fellow, and he, too, shares the suspicion that has fallen on me like a curse."

Esther pondered the difficulty, the glow of a woman's splendid confidence in her blue orbs.

"Why will not people understand you?" she asked. "I know you could not even dream of doing the terrible things they charge you with."

A sad smile flickered over Felix Dering's features.

"You love me, darling," he said, "and yet—you might be mistaken in me. Hundreds of tender hearts such as yours have trusted as you trust, and have been deceived. Alas, guilt and innocence are matters of proof. If I had only not come back that night! The realisation of what it may involve chills me like the shadow of the scaffold."

Esther hid her face and a sob broke from her.

"It was my fault," she wept. "But for me you and Sir Christopher would not have quarrelled, or, if you had done, you would have stayed in Duchester, where you are believed to have been."

Felix sighed.

"Do not reproach yourself, dearest," he answered. "It was inevitable that Brian's disappearance, with which you have nothing to do, should cast a slur on me, who am next in the succession, and was, for the moment, his male guardian. I must begin my vindication by tracing him, a task that might appal the united forces of Scotland Yard. The search may carry me far afield, and we shall not be able to snatch those delicious interviews. The egregious Mr. Hare will lay uninterrupted siege to your affections."

Esther coloured.

"You—you are not jealous?" she stammered.

"If jealousy necessitates distrust, no," said her lover, "but if it signifies envy, yes. He will feast his odious eyes on your sweet countenance, as I shall pine to do; he will whisper into your pink ears those romantic vows that I would fain be privileged to utter. I could not doubt you, my own, but I could wring, with a vast amount of comfort, the millionaire neck of the Golden Dwarf."

"He will do neither of the things you fear," objected Esther, "for my prettiness will be spoiled by crying, and he could not talk as you talk if he had ten millions instead of two. And now I must go, my poor Felix; I slipped out for a scamper, and couldn't resist the chance of peeping at the gates of Dering House since I am not allowed to pay it a visit. I shall run home across the meadows and steal in at the kitchen door. Don't bother to see me back."

She sought to render her tone coquettish, but the tears choked it. Felix drew the grief-stricken girl into the shelter of the hawthorn hedge and kissed her. A moment later she was flying athwart the pastures that lay between her and the Rosery.

Felix re-entered the avenue and threaded it towards the quaint gables and ivied turrets of Dering House. A hot August noon brooded over the park but a faint breeze stirred the great boughs around him and ruffled the grass to right and left.

A species of contemptuous pride froze Felix Dering into an unnatural calm. For a week blow after blow had descended on him; the advent of an extraordinary rival to his love, the rumour of his probable connection with the fate of Sir Christopher, the insinuation that he had removed the child Brian to clear his own path to rank and prosperity —the accumulation had been too much. He could endure, he could not rebel.

At the end of the sunlit terrace he paused and threw himself down, the velvet turf which formed the slope supporting him—a perfect couch. The dizziness of his brain forbade meditation, he trifled with a string of creeper that hung from an antique stone vase.

While he lounged there, a very wretched and bewildered young Englishman, a rustle of skirts surprised him, and he leapt to his feet. Judith Garland had glided past the principal gable of Dering House, her filmy mourning-gown sweeping at her French heels, the white interior of her parasol fanning her piquant face, smart toque, and dark tresses. A damask rosebud at her throat lent a note of warmth to her sombre but graceful costume.

"Ah, Mr. Dering," she said, "this is unexpected. I fancied you absorbed by the search for our lost treasure, and I find you tired already."

Felix groaned.

"I cannot bring myself," he told her, "to challenge any further the sneers which greet my inquiries. Since seven o'clock this morning, when the nurse discovered Brian's cot to be empty, I have covered thirty miles and wearied two horses. I have telegraphed east, west, north, and south, visited the local stations on both systems, and, finally, arranged for a set of drags and a punt to be expressed from Derby. The Black Pool will be searched as soon as they arrive."

Judith Garland stepped to the plaster seat on the upper level of the terrace, her dark cheeks a fraction less brunette, her bosom heaving.

"I can bear no more," pursued Felix; "the ghastly scandal which associates with my uncle's murder flourishes everywhere. I am gaped at as though I were in the dock, and Brian's disappearance is attributed to my machinations. Oh, it is horrible, horrible!"

His companion laughed shrilly.

"Well acted!" she cried. "I am almost inclined to demand an encore."

Felix Dering contemplated her in amazement.

"Are you mad, Miss Garland?" he ejaculated.

The occupant of the stone bench leaned on a sculptured extremity.

"Do not try to cheat me also," she adjured him. "Remember I have the blood-stained links."

The other shuddered. There returned to him the memory of an evening, in the old mansion behind them, whereon he had seen, in Judith Garland's small palm, the fatal portion of chain which might be made to demonstrate his presence at Wyresdale the night of Sir Christopher's murder.

"You should have allowed me to explain," he said nervously, "how I parted with those links of my watch-guard. I should have done so but you have evaded me for the last few days, yet you assured me quite recently that you were my friend."

Judith Garland experienced a throb of triumph. His words gave her the opening for which she had awaited.

"Mr. Dering," she replied, "I have showed myself to be far from an enemy. Had I wished you evil I had but to deliver these links to the police."

"True," assented Felix perplexed; "though you would have been wrong, Miss Garland, for I am not guilty, in spite of them. I caught my chain vaulting the stile near the cross-roads, and, at the same time, tore my hand. Before actually dropping the shattered links I must have touched and marked them with my own blood."

Judith affected to consider this scrap of narrative.

"The chain was whole when you parted from Dering House for Duchester after Sir Christopher and you had quarrelled," she informed him. "The following morning it was broken; I observed it as you sat on your horse during our conversation at the cross-roads. If I am to be satisfied of your innocence I must learn at what hour the accident occurred."

Felix hesitated. Judith Garland had never won his confidence; but he was anxious to rid her mind of its frightful persuasion.

"I—I did return to Wyresdale from Duchester that night," he confessed, taking a share of the stone bench. "I was foolishly restless, and—and wanted to be near somebody whom I might not see often in the future. Mounting the stile I spoke of I broke my chain as I have described."

A peculiar gleam sprang to Judith's dark pupils. Her mouth twitched. She bent over to him, extending, it might have been involuntarily, her slender arms.

"Felix," she murmured, "how I have misjudged you! I also was miserable that evening; Sir Christopher had told us you were determined to leave Wyresdale. But I did not dream you—you cared—at least for me! So I have nursed the idea of avenging myself on you. Can you ever forgive me? It was because I loved you and was desperate."

She slid along the bench, her wild passion for him breaking through her mock misunderstanding of his reference to Esther. Judith Garland was beautiful, beautiful with a sullen beauty curiously Oriental. Her eyes shone, her scarlet lips pouted, her stooping form had about it something lithe and sinuous.

Felix Dering felt as if he were being tempted by the fabled creature which was half-woman, half-reptile. Her phrase "revenging myself on you" echoed in his ear. Judith seemed to be offering him a choice between death and disloyalty, death on the gallows or disloyalty to Esther.

A fortunate occurrence saved him the task of a hasty decision. A footman had come out on to the terrace.

"If you please, miss," he said, saluting, a stolid automaton, "there's a queer person wishes to speak to you in the hall. He says his name is Foley, but you won't know him—a common sort of fellow, miss, and mentioning a Mr. Neal."

Judith sprang up instantly.

"I will see him at once," she replied, and hurried after the servant. Pausing, she plucked the rosebud from her throat, kissed it, and flung it covertly backwards. It fell on the bench in front of Felix.

Stepping across the threshold of Dering House, Judith Garland encountered a short, stout mortal with a closely-cropped cranium. At sight of her he jerked his forelock, and his bearing became less impudently familiar. He slouched into one of the bay windows and lowered his voice.

"How goes it, my lass," he queried. "Will Dering plank down the ready?"

Judith gasped; the sailor's confident demeanour was plainly not assumed. He had greeted her as an intimate and an ally, and she did not dare to repel him.

"I reckon Neal logged me all right, eh?" went on Nicholas. "I arranged with him to stand in. Savvy? You had a plan to bring Dering into the shiners, and I calculate this missing kid's the idea. You are a clipper, my lass—a clipper!"

Judith Garland had strong nerves, but they quailed before the problem presented by this self-declared conspirator. She evaded the difficulty.

"No, no news yet," she stammered. "Thank you for calling."

Nicholas twisted his hat, embarrassed.

"Well," he added, "I only boarded you to report myself, that's all. I guess your brother told you my moorings—first cottage past the gate, steering for the cross-roads. So long, miss; I'll hail you again one of these days."

He pulled a fragment of his greasy thatch, shuffled through the hall, and let himself out. Judith put her hand to her heart; it was beating violently.

CHAPTER XV.

"Alive, the Child May Still Baulk Us."

"Your name's Jack, you little fool, and if you don't want to be beaten you will not forget it."

The maker of the announcement put her hands on her hips and frowned. She was an immensely stout person, with reddish hair, flattened to her skull in greased bandeaux. Her plump fingers bore a load of vulgar rings, massive pendants decorated her ears, and a giant brooch fastened a soiled lace fichu to the bosom of her dingy purple gown.

"I am not Jack," came the nervous answer, "but Brian Dering—Sir Brian Dering now my father is killed."

A blow on the side of the delicate head sent the child staggering across the room.

"Take that, you obstinate limb!" said his corrector irritably. "The next time I hear those words from your mouth I'll strip and flog you till the blood runs."

The baby baronet shrank before the virago into a corner of the apartment. It was a large chamber on an upper floor, crowded with out-of-date furniture, begrimed and unclean. A tortoiseshell kitten dozed on the skin hearthrug, and the yellow London sunshine lent a broad shaft of light for the motes of the place to dance in.

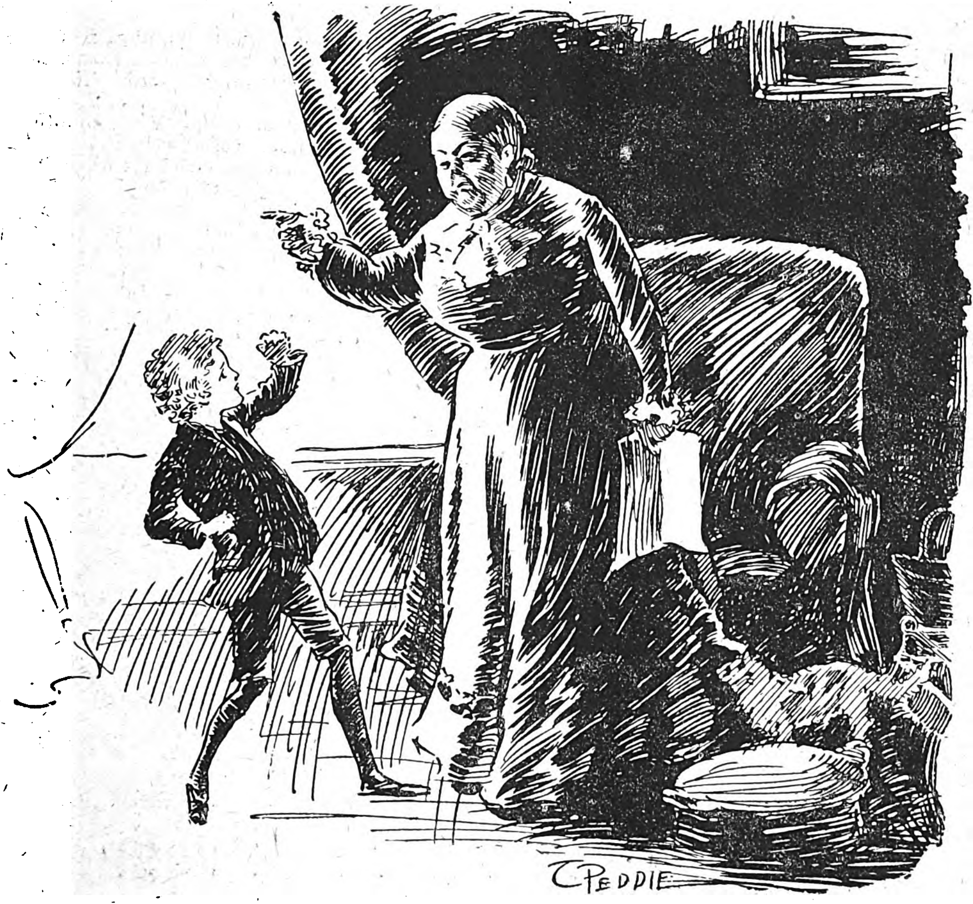
A knock at the door checked further dispute between

"Adventures of an Actress" begin next week.

Brian and his singular teacher, and a maid, wearing broken boots and a limp print dress, carried through a tray. This supported a plate of watercress, cut bread-and-butter, a brown pot, and a cup and saucer.

"Tea, ma'am," she gasped, "and please, Mrs. Schwartz, will you step down and see a party as has been looking at the front parlour. I showed it according to orders, ma'am, but could anything be took off the rent for a permanency?"

The lodging-house keeper smoothed out her garments and sailed out as the servant relinquished the tray and stole towards Brian. He had picked up the cat, which, nestled in his arms, purred its contentment.



The baby baornet shrank before the virago into a corner of the apartment.

"Bless your heart," murmured the girl. "I've been longing for a glimpse of you since they smuggled you up the other night. Do you like goodies? I've fetched you a pennorth. I nipped off and bought 'em an hour ago."

She showed a paper bag of mixed sweets. The child accepted them eagerly.

"What are you called," he asked, "Eliza or Jane? Our maids were Eliza and Jane."

The servant patted his curls.

"I am Louisa," she replied; "Lou for short. Who are you?"

Brian shook his fair locks.

"I am to be Jack," he said; "I must not tell you my real name. If I do she will whip me till I bleed."

"The brute!" cried Louisa, biting her lip. "Never mind, Jack, I'll bring you some chocolate-creams to-morrow. But don't speak of them or of these to her."

The child promised, and, Mrs. Schwartz's masculine tread sounding on the stair, Louisa hastened to the table and laid it for her mistress's repast.

The lodging-house keeper was in a bad temper, the effect of her experience below.

"Shabby respectability," she muttered, as she gained her padded lounge-chair. "I should be glad to learn, Louisa, what use shabby respectability is to me. I know the sort — a grumbling, fretful, cheese-paring lot. Get me the spirits out of the cellaret. I'm all of a flutter from annoyance."

Mrs. Schwartz delivered a key to her domestic, and Louisa produced a square, high-shouldered flask. Filling her cup with tea, sugar, and milk, the landlady added a quantum of gin and sipped it thirstily.

"Give the child a piece of bread-and-butter," she desired, "and don't drag me down again to no purpose."

"Yes'm," said the maid, secured Brian the biggest slice on the plate, restored the key of the cellaret, and slipped out sighing.

Mrs. Schwartz absorbed her meal with gusty pants betwixt each bite of food and drink of spirituous tea.

Wearied by his enforced quietude, the little baronet slumbered at length, the cat on his lap, Louisa's goodies clasped in his moist palm. Ultimately the eyes of the lodging house keeper noted the tiny parcel. She reached over, plucked it out of the hand that held it, and sniffed.

"Louisa!" she grumbled. "Sentimental idiot!"

As a commentary on the phrase, she bent a powerful elbow, flung the bag from the open sash, and proceeded to blend herself another strongly-flavoured jorum.

Her enjoyment of this was suspended by a quick step on the creaking flight close to, and she turned to regard the lean form and threadbare costume of Neal Garland.

Mrs. Schwartz waved him a jovial greeting, and pointed at a seat by the table.

Sensational stage revelations appear in "Adventures of an Actress."

"You don't care for gin, Neal, my man," she remarked, "but you'll find the sherry in the usual quarter. Here's the magic wand."

Neal made use of the implement thus humourously described, unfastened the compartment in the mahogany chiffonnier, and lifted out the wine.

"Kid's asleep," he said, brimming his glass. "Cause much trouble?"

The other grinned—a wide, yet repulsive grin.

"Howled a while," she responded, "but I soon shut him up. Taught him to christen himself Jack in two twos."

Neal munched a leaf of cress.

"Your methods are so convincing!" he yawned.

Mrs. Schwartz wiped her double chin and loose throat.

"What are you going to do with the brat?" she queried.

"Dashed if I'm sure," conceded Neal; "I'm waiting for an inspiration. The lad's safe enough under your hospitable roof until he has forgotten those three syllables—'Brian Dering.' He'll eat less than a bird, and when the game is played out there'll be money in it for both of us."

"Perhaps," said the landlady; "but I don't see all the cards. It may be cautious, but I do love to know where the ace of spades is."

"The ace of spades," pursued Neal, "being the Law. My dear creature, you are beyond its clutch; you understand nothing, and they can't prove you do."

"I don't deny I'm all right—as far as I can calculate," admitted Mrs. Schwartz; "but I want to be told how you propose ridding yourself of him. A kid is a nuisance, and that's the truth."

"Cure him of his fondness for his name," said Neal Garland, "and I'll have him adopted or shipped to a foreign port, or——"

He stopped, reflectively. His reverie was shattered by the entrance of Louisa.

"Please'm," she began, "would Mr. Garland wish to be out or in? There is a young woman downstairs as must speak with him if he's at home. I was to say 'from W.'"

Neal read his hostess's glance.

"Let her come up," he murmured, "and spare us a minute, like a kind soul. Judith won't comprehend your value at first."

Mrs. Schwartz grunted, but dragged her huge body up and tottered from the room, motioning to Louisa, who followed on her heels. A few seconds later Judith Garland hurried into the apartment.

She was thickly veiled and disguised by the same dark and ample cloak which she had worn on the night of Brian's abduction. After a rapid scrutiny of the chamber she pushed up the net that hid her features. Their expression was scornful, her bearing impatient.

"You are the last visitor I dreamed of," faltered Neal. A sudden alarm had seized upon him, his sister's gaze was so ruthless.

Judith, unheeding this observation, approached him deliberately, and with great precision uttered the one word "Foley."

Neal's jaw dropped.

"The deuce!" he said. "I omitted to explain about him. The rogue spied on us at that *tête-à-tête* near the Cross, when we discovered those links of Dering's chain. He picked me up in the lane by his cottage subsequently and demanded an arrangement. He had heard too much and I yielded. Of course I should have mentioned the matter to you, but it escaped my mind in the rush."

Judith sneered.

"You are a clumsy conspirator," she chafed; "you might have spoiled everything. I could not guess if this Foley were spy or colleague. He came to me, asked news of my plan, and spoke as one who appreciated all. Baffled, I obtained leave of absence and journeyed to consult you."

"Your plan!" repeated Neal. "I gave him no particulars. Did you?"

"He needed none," said Judith. "He told me he supposed the 'missing kid'—his elegant phrase—was my idea, and congratulated me as a 'clipper.' Is he knave or clown?"

"I would rather not risk an opinion," answered her brother. "Destiny has thrust him into our plot and we must do the best we can. Is the hunt up after the child?"

"Hot and hard," declared Judith. "I am not positive I myself was not tracked here. Have you disposed of Brian?"

Neal indicated the hearth-rug where the little baronet slept, the little kitten beside him. Judith Garland pondered the unconscious figure.

"Neal," she murmured, "the boy shall not be traced. It would ruin our grasp upon Felix Dering. What do you recommend?" She lowered her voice so that it reached him in an almost inaudible whisper. "Alive," she said, "the child might always baulk us."

(*To be continued.*)

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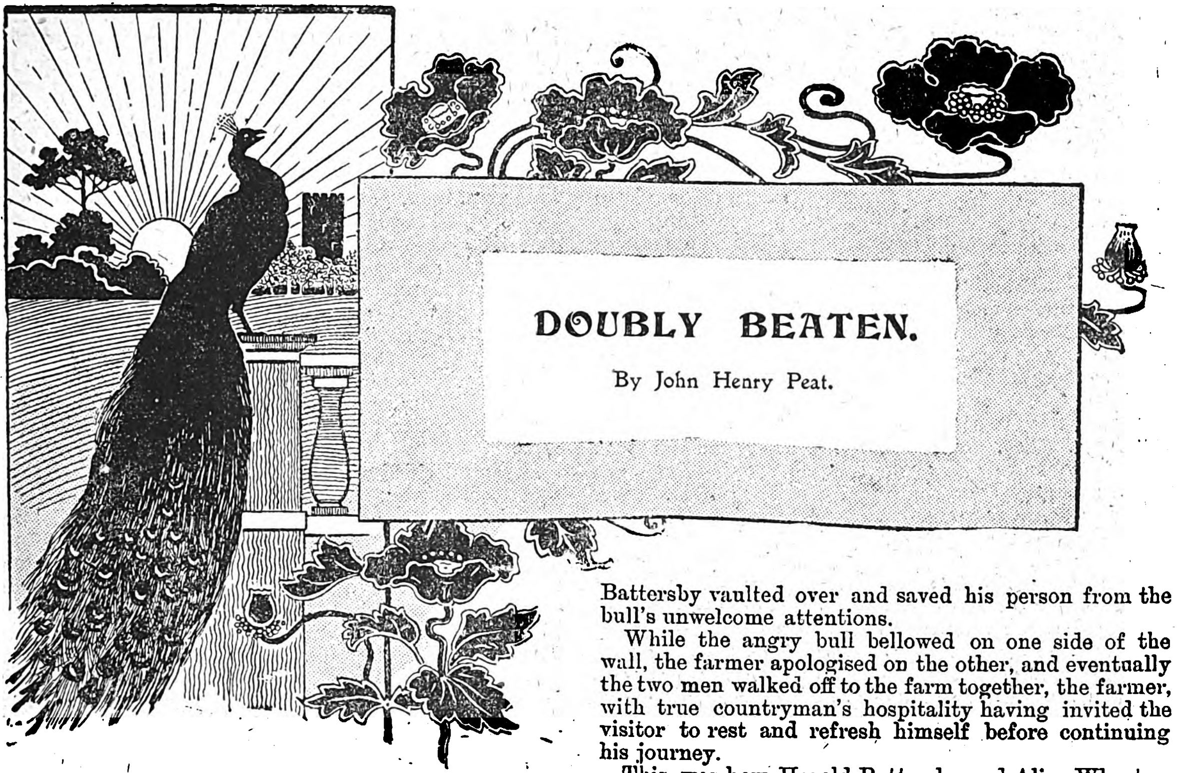


DOUBLY BEATEN.

By John Henry Peat.

The autumn tints were fast giving place to the bareness of winter, and the balmy breezes were being succeeded by the biting winds.

The swallows were departing to warmer climes, and following their example, Harold Battersby was also making preparations for seeking fresh fields, or rather, renewing his acquaintance with old ones.

He had originally come to Watersbury to stay three months, but the three months had drifted on into almost a year, varied with brief visits to town, and the reason of this extension was, of course, a woman.

The dissipations of several seasons—late hours, wines, and other things which go to make up an idle and wealthy young man's programme—had resulted in a serious breakdown in health, and he had come to Watersbury to recuperate. A lonely stroll and an adventure had brought about his introduction to Alice Wharton. She was a farmer's daughter, and it was in crossing her father's meadows that he had met with his adventure. He had lost his way, and on inquiring from a rustic whom he met, he had been told that the nearest way back to Watersbury was by the footpath that led through Farmer Wharton's meadows.

The rustic had omitted to inform him, however, that in these same meadows was a bull endowed with dangerous inclinations, and this omission had led to a sharp race between Harold Battersby and the aforesaid bull. The biped, however, just managed to beat the quadruped by a short head, and landed, breathless and panting, on the safe side of a stone wall. The attention of the farmer had been drawn to the race and he had just landed at the wall, accompanied by his dog as Harold Battersby vaulted over and saved his person from the bull's unwelcome attentions.

While the angry bull bellowed on one side of the wall, the farmer apologised on the other, and eventually the two men walked off to the farm together, the farmer, with true countryman's hospitality having invited the visitor to rest and refresh himself before continuing his journey.

This was how Harold Battersby and Alice Wharton became acquainted. Alice Wharton was plump and rosy as became a farmer's daughter. She was also good-looking and intelligent, and Battersby, to whom country life was insufferably dull, decided that a flirtation with the farmer's daughter would be at least something in the way of diversion. Nothing was more natural, then, than he should stroll out to the farm next morning, ostensibly to thank the farmer for his hospitality, but really to improve his acquaintance with the farmer's daughter. Hence he was not at all displeased to find that John Wharton was away at a distant market, and that his thanks had to be received by Alice, who was her father's housekeeper.

Harold Battersby was a man of the world well versed in all its wiles and sophistries, while Alice Wharton was well versed only in the arts of the world in which she lived. Thus did the unequal contest begin. Like her sex Alice Wharton was not averse to receiving admiration, nor proof against flattery, and she soon began to look forward to the visits of the handsome visitor. The peeps she got into the gay world, through the descriptions given by Harold Battersby set her longing to partake of its gaieties, and the rest was easy. The woman unsophisticated, the man specious and unscrupulous, it was the old, old story of woman's trust in a man's honour, with the usual result. This brings us up to the time of the afore-mentioned preparations for departure. The trusting woman and the man she had trusted, stood together in the lane which ran at the back of the farm.

"Well, Alice, I must be going," Harold Battersby was saying, "I have my packing to do, yet."

"Adventures of an Actress" begin next week.

"I wish I could go with you," she replied tearfully.

"Don't I tell you it's impossible?" he answered irritably. "You must wait here until I send for you. As soon as I can arrange matters I will let you know."

"But you won't be long, because——"

"Yes, I know. I don't want it dinning in my ears everlastingly."

"Harold, you don't know how much I fear."

"There you go again. Why the dickens do you keep on worrying me? Hang it all, you women think only of yourselves. It never occurs to you that I am making sacrifices. I might have done better than marry a farmer's daughter."

This brutal speech only brought a flood of tears, and Harold Battersby saw that if he were to get away at all comfortably he must adopt a different tone. Putting his arm round the sobbing girl, he drew her to him, and in the tenderest tones he had hitherto been accustomed to use, he tried to soothe her.

"Come, Alice, don't be silly. Surely you can trust me. Once more I tell you that as soon as I can get matters arranged you shall join me in London. Now dry your eyes or you will have your father wanting to know the reason of their redness."

With a great effort Alice Wharton checked her tears. Her meetings with Harold Battersby had been mostly clandestine. In the early days of their acquaintance John Wharton had warned his daughter.

"Alice, lass, don't thee have too much to say to that London young feller. He may be reight enough, but lasses is apt to get fond o' good lookin' young men, and tha knows theer can niver be nowt between him and thee. He belongs to a different set to us. Even if he wanted to wed ma' lass, which isna likely, aw shouldn't consent, becos tha couldn't make thisen comfortable among his set."

Thus had the farmer spoken, but even then it was too late. The girl's eyes had been already dazzled, for Harold Battersby was not the man, once having decided upon his course, to let the grass grow under his feet. The only result of this warning was that thence forward their meetings were arranged secretly.

The interview shortly afterwards terminated and Alice Wharton stole home to begin her period of weary waiting. Though she had been troubled, she doubted not that Harold Battersby would keep his promise. True, in the course of her reading, which consisted chiefly of novelettes and the weekly paper which circulated in their district, Alice Wharton had become acquainted with characters such as Harold Battersby. She had read of men who had betrayed the trust of innocent girls, but in her lover she did not recognise one of these. Like many another she fondly dreamed that he was good and honourable. Though others were base, not he. Yet she was troubled, and would be until she received the summons to join him, and then all would be well.

In the meantime Harold Battersby departed. He had promised to write on his arrival in town. Two days after his departure, Alice Wharton received her letter, and as her father was away in the fields she sat down to enjoy her first love letter. Eagerly she tore it open, and then came disillusion.

"Dear Alice," it ran, "as I did not want a scene when I left you I deferred saying what I must now tell you. It is, of course, quite impossible for me to marry you. Such a course would not only ruin my prospects, but it would make you forever miserable, as you could not adapt yourself to the usages of society. It is better that things should end now. I enclose you bank notes for £20, and trust you will take a sensible view of the case.—Yours sincerely,

"Harold Battersby."

Alice Wharton did not faint. She did not cry. She simply sat and read and re-read those heartless lines. This man, then, was just like those others, she had read of. She had thought that such as he only existed in the novelettes she read, that they were the creations of the story writer's brains. Now she knew that they did exist, that Harold Battersby was a cowardly villain. As she realised what a mean, contemptible creature she had set up on a pedestal and worshipped, her love turned to hate.

She never wanted to see Harold Battersby's face again. Not under any conditions would she marry him now. She wanted a man—a true man—and he was not such.

Having decided what she would *not* do, the next thing was to settle what she *would* do.

To begin with she must leave home. She had let her father's warning go unregarded, and now she could not face his anger. She remembered that in the afternoon he would be going over to the market town to attend a farmers' dinner, and that he would be very late home. He would not expect her to wait up for him. On these occasions he always took the backdoor key with him and let himself in. Therefore, she would not be missed until the following morning. Anxiously she waited his return from the fields for then he would not be long ere he departed.

When John Wharton returned Alice was upstairs. Dearly though she would have liked to have kissed him before she stole away she dare not. The probability of her breaking down would be great, hence she must forego this last kiss.

As she sat she heard his voice in the yard. She heard him ordering one of the men to put the horse in. She heard him come up to his room to dress. She stole a glance at him as he descended the stairs when this operation was concluded. Finally, she heard him calling her.

"Alice, Alice," he called, "where art ta lass?"

It required all her efforts to answer without betraying her emotion, but she managed it.

"I am busy, father," she answered from her bedroom door.

"All right, lass. Aw'm off to 't dinner, an' aw shan't be hoam till latish. Tha needn't wait for me."

"Good-bye, father!" she called back.

"She might think aw wor gooin' a long journey wi' her 'good-bye.' muttered the farmer. "What's tha meean bi 'good-bye,' lass? Good mornin'."

"Well, then, good-morning," replied Alice, and to her relief he moved off with this. Had it been necessary to say more she would have given way, for she knew it was "Good-bye," and not simply "Good-morning" she was saying.

As she watched him drive out of the yard the tears welled up, but she dashed them away. They hindered her sight, and she must gaze upon that retreating figure as long as possible, for was it not the last time she would see him? Hungrily she looked until a bend in the road hid him from her view.

"Good-bye—good-bye and God bless you," she mur-

Sensational stage revelations appear in "Adventures of an Actress."

mured as he vanished, and then flinging herself on her bed she abandoned herself to her grief. Not for herself was she weeping, but for the father whose home would be desolate on his return.

For a while she wept on, and then she commenced her preparations for flight. She had a little money—a very little—for she would not take anything but her own. She had the housekeeping money, but that was her father's. She had the twenty pounds, but that she would not touch. Dressing herself in her most serviceable clothing and hiding away in her pockets her few trinkets, she prepared for the next ordeal. When all her preparations were concluded—all, God knows they were few—she slowly descended the stairs.

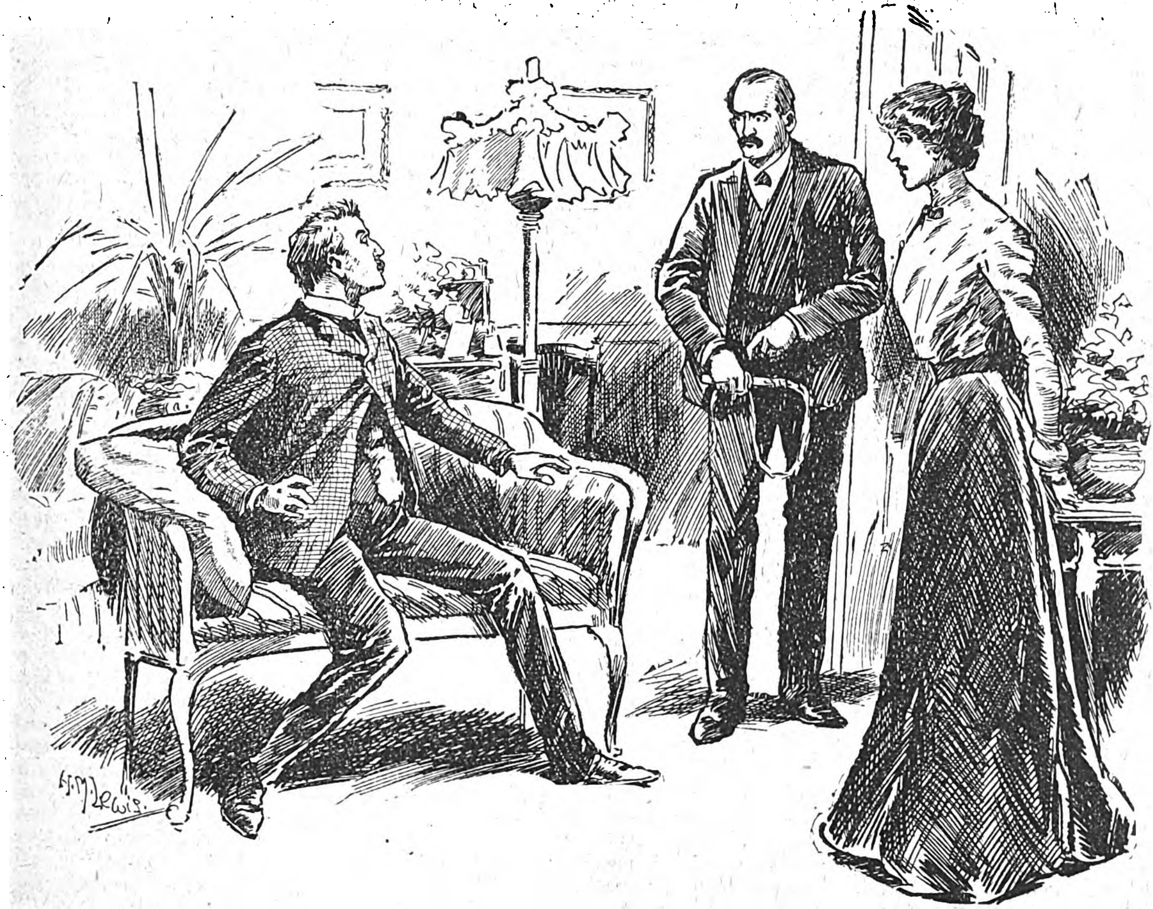
The maid who assisted her in the household work, and who slept at her own home at night, was busy with her duties.

"Sarah," said Alice, "I am going out for the afternoon. You can tell the men to look up to-night and not wait for me, as I shall come home with father."

"All right, miss," replied Sarah, and went on with her work.

There was only one more thing to do. Upstairs again she went to do it, taking with her writing materials.

"Father," she wrote, "it was good-bye and not only good morning. You warned me and I took no heed, so now I must bear my punishment. I am not going to him. I never want to see him again, and I shall never see you again. Once more, good-bye. Don't try to find me. Let me go my own way. Your sorrowing Alice."



To Harold Battersby's surprise and dismay, there stood John Hardcastle.

This she placed on her father's pillow, and then she stole out of the house, taking only a small parcel, and went forth to she knew not what. Straight to the station she went, and booked to a place only a dozen miles away. From there she continued her journey on foot, avoiding houses and people as much as possible. She was a good walker, and before night closed in she had covered a considerable distance, and was in a district where she was not known. On, on she went until she came to another railway line which crossed the country at right angles to the one on which she had first travelled. When she arrived at a station she went in and scanned the table of fares until she saw the name of Birmingham. Nobody in their district that she had heard of ever went to Birmingham, and she decided that she would be safe there. Accordingly she paid her fare, and late that night—the clocks were striking twelve—she arrived in the metropolis of the Midlands, hungry and weary. She wandered out of the great station into the still busy streets, for busy they were to her, not knowing where to go. As she looked helplessly around, a middle-aged woman accosted her.

"Are you looking for someone?" asked the woman.

"No," replied Alice nervously.

"Surely a bonny-looking lass like yourself is not alone?"

"Yes, I am. Can you tell me where I can stay to-night?"

The woman looked at Alice and hesitated before replying. Her scrutiny seemed to satisfy her, and so she went on.

"Well, my lass, I don't know who you are, but it's not a fit time of night for a girl to be wandering about alone. Come along with me, and I will find you a bed. Have you any friends here, or anybody you know?"

Alice sadly shook her head.

"Whatever brings you, a young girl, to Birmingham, without friends? I am glad I met you, for goodness knows what might have become of you. Now, come on home and have some supper."

Alice followed her guide. Leaving the busy thoroughfares, they turned up a side street, and then through several alleys into another street, badly paved and dimly lighted. Into one of the houses in this street her guide led her, saying apologetically. "It's not a very handsome place, my dear, but it's a good deal better than wandering about the streets alone, and, besides—I don't want to hurt your feelings—but you would not easily find a place where they would take a young woman travelling alone."

Alice's heart went out in thankfulness to her friend.

Very quickly a substantial supper was prepared—of which, however, the girl could only partake sparingly. When she had finished she drew out her purse, but the woman stopped her.

"Never mind about that now, dear. Just you come upstairs, and then in the morning we can talk about that."

Grateful for the woman's thoughtfulness, and anxious to escape any further questioning, Alice went up to her bedroom, and soon, from utter weariness, she was fast asleep.

She awoke early next morning, but her hostess had arisen still earlier and when she got downstairs she found breakfast was on the table. To her great relief the woman asked no questions during the meal. At the conclusion Alice again asked the amount of her indebtedness.

"Let me see—supper, bed and breakfast—that will be five shillings," replied the woman. "I am only a poor woman or I would not charge you that."

Alice once more produced her purse, but on opening it she gave a cry of dismay.

"What's the matter my dear?"

"I've—I've lost my money,"

"Lost your money. What do you mean?"

"I had over twenty-two pounds last night and now I've only this," and Alice took out a two shilling piece.

"Where did you lose it, do you think?"

"I don't know. I had it when you spoke to me a the station."

"What do you mean?" and the mask fell off. "Do you mean to insinuate I stole it. Give me the two shillings and get out. Aren't you ashamed to impose on a poor woman and then insinuate you've been robbed in my house. If you're not off at once, I'll call a policeman."

Terrified beyond measure Alice put on her hat and went out of the house. That the woman had robbed her she was sure, but she was helpless. Not knowing where she was going she hurried on, anxious to get away from the city. No more acquaintance did she want with city people.

All that day she wandered on, not daring to stop anywhere. At the sight of a constable she trembled. Darkness came on and still she pursued her course. She was now out in the open country, where the pedestrians were few and far between.

At last wearied out she sank down by the wayside and soon fell asleep. Ere she had slept long the slumber gave way to delirium.

The events of the last few days had been too much for her and she babbled on, until her mutterings attracted the attention of a passing member of the county constabulary.

"Hello! what's this?" exclaimed P.C. Jenkins, as he turned his bull's-eye on the unconscious woman. For the moment he was puzzled. She was not one of the tramp order, that was certain; neither was it a "drunk."

"Here, miss," he exclaimed, "you mustn't stop here."

"Good-bye, father—not good morning," murmured the unconscious girl.

Police-constable Jenkins scratched his head. What was to be done?

Then an idea struck him. John Hardcastle, whose house was close by, was reputed to be a good-hearted man. He would call him up, and procure a conveyance for the girl to be removed in. Acting on this, he proceeded to the house. In response to his ring at the bell, the head of the worthy householder appeared at the window, and after hearing the officer's statement, he was soon downstairs. Having looked at the girl, John Hardcastle quickly made up his mind.

"Give me a hand, officer—let us get her indoors."

"Wouldn't it be better to take her to the hospital, sir?"

"Hospital?—no! Bring her in, and we'll see what we can do for her here."

John Hardcastle was a bachelor, and his household was presided over by his sister, a lady as good-hearted as her brother. This lady had been aroused, and was waiting to second—or, rather, to take the lead in—the work of restoring the lonely wanderer.

For weeks Alice Wharton lay at the Grange, a victim to brain fever, which left her weak and helpless. During those days Mary Hardcastle learned to love the girl thus strangely thrown upon her hands. During the stage of convalescence the patient was not worried by questions, but when she grew strong again Mary Hardcastle tried to learn the story.

When she did eventually hear it, she felt nothing but sympathy which was shared by her brother.

Her father was communicated with, but his grief and anger at her treatment of him was equally great, and he refused to have anything more to do with her.

"Adventures of an Actress" begin next week.

John Hardcastle anathematised the stern father when this decision reached him.

"Well Mary, what's to be done?" he asked as he discussed the matter with his sister.

"John, she must stay with us. She is not fit to go out into the world alone."

"That's right, sister. I knew you would say so."

Alice at first demurred when this was proposed, but her objections were quickly overruled, and she became one of the family, despite the comments of the gossips of the district, whose knowledge was, however, very limited.

Several years rolled by, and there appeared on the scene one who desired Mary Hardcastle to come and preside over his home. When this happened, John Hardcastle took an early opportunity of having a long chat with his *protegée.*

"Alice," he said, "you know Mary is going to leave us?"

"Yes!" replied Alice with downcast eyes, for she had thought much on this subject.

"Well, look here, Alice, I am a plain fellow. I can't make long love speeches, but I want you to take Mary's place. I want you to become my wife."

Alice blushed and hesitated. She loved her benefactor, but she had never dared to hope to be loved by him. John Hardcastle guessed of what she was thinking. He took her hand in his.

"Alice, I love you. Never mind what has happened in the past. If you can love me, that is all I want. Say, lass, do you love me?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"Well, then, that settles it."

"But can you really love me, knowing what you do?"

"Yes, I can, and do, that's more."

The upshot of all this was that there was a double wedding at the Grange, and Alice Wharton became Mrs. Hardcastle.

For six months after the wedding Alice Hardcastle's life was one of happiness, the only cloud being the persistent refusal of her father to communicate with her. John had been over to Watersbury to try and effect a reconciliation, but his mission had failed.

During this intervening period what had been happening to Harold Battersby? After the despatch of that insulting letter, he had lived in doubt. True, he had given no address in his letter, but he was for some time haunted with a fear that the girl he had wronged might some day cross his path, even in London.

But as time wore on, and he heard nothing he almost forgot the incident. He went back and lived the old life, drinking, gambling, and the like, until at last he came to the end of his resources, and at the time Alice Wharton became the wife of John Hardcastle he was reduced to living on his friends, until they one after the other dropped him disgust.

It was just about six months after the date of Alice's wedding that an old chum offered him a berth in his office in Birmingham, and Harold Battersby accepted. He had only been there a few days, when Fate brought him face to face with the former object of his attentions. He was stepping out of a public-house when she passed the door.

"Alice Wharton!" he exclaimed.

On hearing her maiden name, Alice turned and gazed in astonishment at the speaker. At first, so much had he altered she did not recognise him.

Then she knew him, and the colour receded from her cheeks.

"You! Harold Battersby," she ejaculated.

"Yes! You don't seem pleased to see me, Alice."

"Is that surprising?"

"Well, no, I suppose not. But let byegones be byegones. Can't you forget and forgive?"

"I can do neither one nor the other, and I must ask you if you meet me again not to speak. Remember we are strangers now."

"Allright, my fine lady," muttered the scamp, "things seem to have gone better with you than they have with me. What the good people would call retributive justice, I suppose. Nevertheless I am not going to lose sight of you."

Mrs. Hardcastle had moved away and did not hear this speech. Shortly after leaving Battersby she was joined by her husband. John was quick to note the pallor of his wife and remarked thereon.

"Aren't you very well, dear? You look as though you had seen a ghost."

"I am not very well, John. I should like to get home as soon as possible."

"Very well. I have nothing more to do in the city, so we will go at once."

Accordingly they proceeded direct to the station. Harold Battersby had followed and just as the train was moving out he sprang into one of the rear compartments, bent on knowing more, and if possible, profiting by this chance meeting. John Hardcastle and his wife were the only passengers to leave the train at their station. It would never do for him to get out there so he went on to the next stopping place only a short distance away but as the train pulled out he heard one of the porters address the gentleman by name. This was something to work upon. He returned by the next train. As he alighted he saw the porter who had spoken to Mr. Hardcastle. To him he addressed himself.

"Can you direct me to Mr. Hardcastle's house," asked Battersby. Having received the directions he put another question, which brought him just the information he wanted.

"Can you tell whether Mr. Hardcastle is likely to be at home?"

"Sure to be, sir. He and his wife came down from the city by the last train almost half an hour ago."

"Thank you," replied Battersby, and he meant it.

Then Alice Wharton was married. This was good news to him. The appearance of her husband betokened affluence. It never occurred to Battersby that John Hardcastle was acquainted with her story. Such an idea never crossed his thoughts. What did occur to him was that here lay a chance of getting money easily. Mrs. Hardcastle, he doubted not would readily purchase his silence. He turned into the village inn until night came. Then he commenced operations. He wrote a note which he entrusted to a lad with instructions to deliver it to Mrs. Hardcastle. The note was brief and to the point.

"Dear Mrs. Hardcastle," he said, "I am happy to hear that you are married and have money. I have very little money, but I have a secret which might be of interest to your husband. My silence should be worth something to you, and I shall be glad to arrange terms. A line here will find me to-morrow evening.—Harold."

This missive was duly delivered. Mrs. Hardcastle

Sensational stage revelations appear in "Adventures of an Actress."

was seated in the drawing-room with her husband when it was handed to her. She at once recognised the writing and she was in a critical position. She was not however, the simple girl that Battersby had known. Her experiences had altered all that. It took but a few minutes for her to make up her mind. Trembling with nervousness, but not fear, she addressed her husband.

"John," she said, "I must ask your advice on a subject which we had agreed was never more to be mentioned."

"What is it, dear?"

"I have just received this note from the man who deceived me. I met him in the city to-day, and he has evidently followed us down here. What his object is you will see from his note," and she handed it to him.

"What an infernal scamp!" exclaimed John. "He has a secret which might be of interest to me, has he?"

"What am I to do, John?"

"Let me think a minute, Alice."

For several minutes neither spoke, both being absorbed in thought. It was John who broke the silence.

"I have it, dear, that is, if you can bear to go through with your share of the plot. If not, I must think of something else."

"What do you propose?" she asked anxiously.

Quietly John Hardcastle unfolded his plan, and after thinking it over, Alice agreed.

Early next morning Mr. Hardcastle went to Birmingham. In the afternoon, the two servants were surprised by being told they could go out for the remainder of the day. The next move was to despatch a letter to the inn. The following were the contents:

"Mr. Battersby, I have received your communication. My husband left early this morning on a visit to a friend. I have sent the servants out of the way and shall be alone to-night. If you will call at eight o'clock I will discuss terms with you. Bring this note with you and come to the house as an ordinary visitor. But kindly remember to confine yourself entirely to the business which has brought you.—A. H."

When Harold Battersby read this he chuckled.

"I thought I should not have much difficulty with her," he muttered. "She is smarter than I thought, though. She wants the note back to destroy it. Well, that increases the price."

Punctual to the moment he rang the bell and was admitted by Mrs. Hardcastle who ignoring his greeting, led the way into the drawing-room. Battersby seated himself with the air of a man who has triumphed.

"Things appear to have gone well with you, Alice," he began.

"Mrs. Hardcastle, if you please, and please confine your remarks to business."

"Oh! we are coming the high and mighty game are we?" thought Battersby. "Very well, my lady, up goes the price again."

"Have you brought my note?"

"What! are you afraid of it being used as evidence against you?"

"Answer my question, please."

"Yes!"

"Very well. Now I shall be glad to hear what proposals you have to make. Be as brief as possible, as I do not want to prolong this interview."

This cool, business-like manner somewhat disconcerted the blackmailer. He had expected tears and entreaties. Instead of that Mrs. Hardcastle was much the cooler of the two.

"If you had not been so confoundedly cool I should ——"

"Confine yourself to business," interrupted Alice.

"Hang it all! What do you want me to say?"

"I want you to make any proposal you have in your mind as briefly as possible."

"Well, as I was going to say——"

"State your terms or leave!"

"Well, then, £100 now, and more when I want it," blurted out Battersby insolently.

Mrs. Hardcastle gave him a look in which she took no pains to conceal her disgust, and then she replied:

"You will probably remember that when you wrote to me after you left Watersbury you enclosed twenty pounds."

"Yes, I believe that was the amount."

"That is so. I have listened to your proposal; now you shall have my decision. I shall return you that amount, but let it be understood it is not with the object of purchasing your silence. Had you given me any address I should have returned it on the day I received it. I am only taking the opportunity now of doing what I always wished and intended to do, if ever it were possible. As for giving you anything further, you may take it as final that I have not the least intention of doing anything so foolish. The twenty pounds are your own, and I shall not give you more than that."

"So you think to get off as easily as that, do you? Then let me tell you you are greatly mistaken. Now, don't be foolish! Pay me my price, and I will leave you in peace. I would not ask you, only I am so awfully hard up."

"You have heard my decision," replied Alice coldly.

"Very well, Mrs. Hardcastle, perhaps your husband will pay to avoid his name being dragged in the dust."

"Yes, her husband will pay, and pay well!" broke in a voice from the doorway, and to Harold Battersby's surprise and dismay, there stood John Hardcastle.

That gentleman at once strode into the room, and it did not improve Battersby's state of mind to see that he carried a dog-whip in his right hand.

"Alice, leave me to settle with this gentleman," he said, and Mrs. Hardcastle left the room.

"You don't seem pleased to see me," remarked John ironically. "Well, I am very pleased to see you."

Battersby shuffled uneasily on his seat.

"Let us get to business. There's your twenty pounds for a start. Now hand over that note."

Harold Battersby's discomfiture was complete. The tables were turned upon him with a vengeance. He handed over the note and was just going to indulge in a sarcastic remark when another sight of the dog whip caused him to change his mind. John Hardcastle tore the note into fragments and flung it into the fire.

"Now, Mr. Battersby, may I trouble you to sign this?"

This was a confession of attempted blackmail.

Battersby refused.

"Very well, please yourself, my man, but the alternative is a police cell. Now then, are you going to sign?"

Battersby glanced at the face of the man opposite and decided to comply. Accordingly he affixed his signature to the document, remarking as he did so: "I suppose I must admit I am beaten."

John Hardcastle placed his confession in his pocket, and then coolly asked, "Is there anything more you would like to say?"

"No, I think not," feebly replied Battersby.

"I think you said you were beaten," went on John. "I agree with you. But you have another beating to take yet," and with this he pounced on Battersby and thrashed him till the coward fairly howled for mercy. That strong arm stayed not, however, until John Hardcastle was tired. Then he flung the whip aside and pointed to the door.

Harold Battersby slunk out like the whipped cur that he was, and they were troubled with him no more.

That night the train by which his smarting carcase was being conveyed from the scene of his just punishment was run into by another crossing it diagonally, the engine of the other train striking the very compartment of which Battersby was the only occupant. Several people were injured, but he alone was killed.

Next morning John Hardcastle read the report in his paper. The man had been identified by means of documents in his pockets. As he read, it came somewhat as a shock to his usually kind heart to find himself almost rejoicing in another man's death; but it was for the sake of the woman who sat opposite to him. Harold Battersby was effectually and eternally silenced; she need fear him no more.

Thenceforward the pair lived in unbroken happiness, for about this time the stern heart of the farmer, far away in that country district, softened towards his lassie, and her cup of joy was full.

* * *

MRS. JUDDENHEIMERS: "Oh, you vas awfully ill Isaac!" Juddenheimers: "Yes, Repecca, but dere is von goot tings about it—I'm getting the vort of my money out of the doctor."

"YOU'RE beautiful!" the young man cried,
His eyes with ardour all aglow.
"Oh, say," the modern girl replied,
"Do tell me something I don't know?"

I AM so weary—yet I fear to sleep!
How hard it seems to lose myself—to go
To that strange world where tyrant Dreams hold rule;
Where I may kill my friend, or wed my foe.

"YOU are rather hoarse this morning." "I am, and I can't account for it." "You have caught a cold, perhaps?" "To look at it in the light in which people ordinarily view it, I have, but as I haven't exerted myself in the least lately, it looks as if the cold had caught me."

"I'VE been taking nerve tonic," said Willie Wishington, "and it has worked first-rate, don't you know." "Indeed!" "Yes, I called on Miss Bankins last night, and the first thing her father said to me was, 'Well. young man, I like your nerve.'"

SMITH: "Now, I maintain that the words 'accident' and 'misfortune,' are pretty nearly synonymous." Brown: "Oh, no, they are not. If that mother-in-law of yours fell into the river it would be an accident, but if anyone pulled her out again that would be a misfortune." Smith: "Ah! now I appreciate the distinction between the words."

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Sensational stage revelations appear in "Adventures of an Actress."

Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, July 29th. Postcards only, please. The first prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mrs. T. Gordon, of 44 York Street, Dover, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

JIMMY: "What time do yer have ter get ter work?" Johnny: "Oh, any time I like, as long as I ain't later than seven o'clock."

EDITH: "Colonel Gore is the hero of many engagements." Helen: "Matrimonial?" Edith: "No; he hasn't courage enough for that."

PENN: "Can you suggest any way in which I might improve my new novel?" Editor: "You might put the last chapter first." Penn: "But all the characters die in the last chapter." Editor: "Yes, I know."

"MY dear," he said, with an ill-concealed ring of relief in his voice, "diamonds have gone up nearly fifty per cent. So I find the earrings I promised you will cost more than I can afford." "Oh!" she cried, "isn't it too bad?" "Yes, I am very sorry." "So am I, my dear. It's a shame that you'll have to pay more than you can afford."

CYCLIST (to sleepy-looking villager): "Are you a native of this village?" Villager: "Am I what?" Cyclist: "Are you a native of the village?" Villager: "Hey?" Cyclist: "I asked if you were a native of this place?" Mrs. Villager (appearing at the open door, acridly): "Ain't ye got no sense, Jim? He means wuz ye livin' here when yer wuz born, or wuz ye born before yer begun livin' here. Now answer 'im."

THE mayoral chair of a certain town was occupied by a gentleman of great generosity. Among the applicants who sought relief from him during his tenure of office was a well-known local character who asked the loan of a few pounds to buy a donkey and cart, and set up in the rag and bone business. "Well, Tim," said the mayor, "if I give you this money, how are you going to pay me?" This was a poser for Tim, but a thought struck him, and he blurted out: "Well, yer worship, if ye are kind enough to give me the money, I'll tell yer what I'll do—I'll name the donkey after yer worship!"

* A FRENCHMAN having eaten plum pudding for the first time was so delighted with it that he asked his English hostess for the recipe, which, of course, she gave him. He carried it home, gave it to his wife, and at the same time gave her an enthusiastic account of the delicacy. Not long afterwards the pudding came on the table in a soup tureen, and was ladled out into soup plates. "What is this, my dear?" asked the Frenchman. "Plum-pooding," answered his wife. He laughed at her, and she produced the recipe, which, as she declared, had been strictly followed, and so it had been, for the English lady had omitted all mention of the cloth. The ingredients had been put, according to directions, into a pan of boiling water, had been cooked for the prescribed time, and had come out—soup!

FOND PARENT: "No, he won't work! He never would work! He never will work! There's only one thing—he'll have to go in for the Civil Service!"

FRIEND: "Well, Doc, how's business?" Doctor "Fine. Got two new cases in the next room." Friend: "What, smallpox?" Doctor: "No, champagne."

GEORGE: "I assume to have some knowledge of women." Ethel: "I quite agree with you on that point." George: "What point?" Ethel: "That your knowledge is assumed."

"So she jilted you," said the sympathetic friend. "Yes." "Did she give any reason?" "She did. She said it was because of her philanthropic nature; that it was better to make a great many men happy by being engaged to them than to make one miserable by marrying him."

A MAN showed a lawyer a five shilling piece and asked him whether he thought it was a good one. The lawyer said that it was, put it in his pocket, said his usual fee for advice was 6s. 8d. and would the enquirer please send the balance of 1s. 8d. round to his office at his earliest convenience.

THEY watched the storm. The tempest howled and the rain dashed madly against the earth. "Darling," asked the living skeleton, "are you afraid of lightning?" The bearded lady smiled. "No," she answered confidently. "It is now well established that electricity will not remove superfluous hair." A crash of thunder made it impossible for them to resume their conversation for several seconds.

AT Blackpool the other day a rowing contest took place between crews made up of the single and married men of the town. One of the young fellows who was to row in the "single" boat on the morning of the race was asked what sort of a chance he thought his boat stood. "No earthly chance," he promptly exclaimed. "If we do win it can only be by a fluke." "How's that?" "Why," replied the joking bachelor, "don't you see we've got to row against the 'tied' all the way."

AN old lady came into a local post-office the other day and aggressively addressed the clerk thus: "How is it my son Tom, at York, hasn't got that ten shillings I sent last week?" "Really, I can't say," said the clerk. "Did you post it yourself?" "Yes, and paid you the money. I have your receipt for it." "Please let me see it," said the clerk. The old lady produced a postal order, and waved it triumphantly in his face. When it was explained that the order should have been enclosed in the letter she wasn't at all satisfied, but went out shaking her head and talking to herself.

DURING a recent case a lawyer of the bullying type was examining the prosecutor, who charged the defendent with assault and battery. Lawyer: "Where did the defendant strike you?" Witness: "He struck me on the bridge——." Lawyer (sharply interrupting): "How's that? You said a while ago that he struck you on the balcony." Witness: "So he did, sir, I am telling you no lie." Lawyer: "Did he strike you more than once?" Witness: "Only once, sir, and I was satisfied with that." Lawyer: "How, then, could he strike you on the bridge and on the balcony at the same time and with one blow?" Witness: "He did it, anyhow, sir." Magistrate (interrupting): "On what balcony?" Witness: "The balcony of the hotel, your worship." Magistrate: "But on what bridge?" Witness: "The bridge of my nose, sir. Had the gentleman waited, I'd ha' told him myself."

WONDERS OF FACE TRANSFORMATION.

Every year thousands of new books are published. They are read and forgotten. But once in a hundred years a new book appears which THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR. It contains some new truth which alters the history of mankind. Such a book has just issued from the press. You will read it. If not to-day, then some other day, for sooner or later it will be read by all men and all women. And when you have read it your life will be altered. It will become better, happier, more joyous. The writer of the book is Professor Boyd Laynard. The name of the book is "SECRETS OF BEAUTY, HEALTH, AND LONG LIFE." It is pronounced by the Press to be the most remarkable work of the century.

"The book is not a novel! Then who wants to read it? People only read novels and newspapers nowadays." That is what you say immediately. But for once you are wrong. At the present moment hundreds of thousands of people are turning over, and eagerly reading, the pages of this book which is not a novel. They are telling their friends about it, and very soon everyone will be reading the book that is not a novel. If you want to be interested, if you want to be instructed, if you want to live long, if you want to be healthy, if you want to be beautiful, you must read the book that is not a novel.

The first part of this remarkable book consists of a practical guide to the attainment of good looks without the aid of art. Professor Boyd Laynard will have nothing to do with powder, paint, face-washes, and the like, but gives plain instructions for the scientific cultivation of beauty. The rest of the book deals with health and long life. These chapters are of the highest value.

This remarkable handbook to the three subjects embraced in the title has been a long period in preparation by the author; being, in fact, the labour of many years of diligent research and earnest investigation. The work is arranged in 127 chapters, the whole of which (in the popular edition now offered to the public) is bound in one volume. The book, although published at Two Shillings, will, if ordered direct from the Publishers, be forwarded to readers of Short Stories, carriage paid, at the low discount price of

ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE.

Amongst the numerous subjects dealt with in Professor Laynard's work the following are but a few. A Complete Syllabus, showing the contents of the whole of the 127 chapters, enumerating upwards of **500 subjects** and divisions of subjects, can be had free on application to the Publishers:

The way we make our own faces—Secrets of face transformation—Changeableness of beauty and its causes—Some Strange facts concerning the variableness of beauty—"Odd-faced" beauty—The countenance the counterpart of the mind—How pleasing expressions become permanent—How a person's habitual look is acquired—How permanent expressions can be transformed—Metaphysical secrets of keeping young and preserving a youthful appearance—The author's investigations into the causes why some individuals look younger than others at a certain age—Discovery of a great metaphysical secret—Wonders of the skin—Relation of the skin to beauty—Effects of mental emotions upon the skin—Effects of heat, cold, and changes of temperature upon the skin—Bad complexions and their causes—Diet that spoils and diet that improves the complexion—General care of the complexion—Construction, growth, and wonders of the hair—Why hair falls out, and its remedy—Premature greyness: its causes and prevention—General care of the hair—Superfluous hairs and how to treat them—Wrinkles: their prevention and treatment—Freckles, tan, and blackheads—Oily skin, dry skin, and loose skin—How the nose can be improved—Protruding ears and their treatment—Offensive breath—Anatomy of the teeth—Why teeth decay—General care of the teeth—Tallness, and how to attain it—Round shoulders and how to cure them—How to acquire a full chest—Perfect form and figure: their proper proportions—Thinness, and its treatment—Excessive stoutness—Care of the hands—Care of the feet—Physiognomy; or, the art of reading character from the face—Mental influences upon health—Power of the mind over the body—Influence of the mind in curing diseases—How the mind can cause dyspepsia—Effect of the direction of thought to the heart—How real diseases often supervene upon fancied ailments—How violent passions injure health—Laughter as a medicine—Ailments cured by laughter—Wonders of digestion—Relative value to our bodies of the principal articles of food—Fruits and vegetables as medicine: their various influences upon the physical system—Health preserving diet and its consistency—Diet favourable to mental exertion and intellectual culture—Influence of various foods upon our passions and propensities—The influence exerted by the mind upon the appetite and digestion—Some perilous articles of food—Light, and its influence upon health—Exercise and its relations to health—Baths and bathing: their influence upon health—The marriage state, and its influence upon health—Statistics showing the comparative vitality of married and single persons—100 professions, trades, and occupations: their respective influences upon health and long life—Sleep, and its relation to health—Insomnia, and its treatment—The eyes, and how to preserve them—The ears and hearing: how to prevent deafness—The voice: its cultivation and preservation—Memory, and how to improve it—Sudden failure of memory—Rules for cultivating the memory—Effect of some foods upon memory—Stammering, and how to cure it—Prevention of disease—Nervousness—Blushing: its physiology and treatment—Rules of life for attaining longevity—How to live to a hundred—Premature old age and its causes—Short biographies of 30 modern centenarians, whose ages range from 115 to 185 years—General principles that can be laid down for the anticipation of longevity—The eight signs of long life.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

In next week's number will be commenced a splendid series of stories, entitled:

"The Adventures of an Actress."

As I told you last week, these tales will deal with the career of Hazel Harlow, an innocent, young, and beautiful country girl. They will recount the many temptations that beset her, and her triumphant issue from them pure and unspotted. The seamy side of stage life will be vividly exposed, and revelations of a startling character will be made.

In view of the tremendous rush which such a series is bound to cause, it is imperative that you should order your copy beforehand. You can do this by filling in this form and handing it to your newsagent:

Please reserve for me a copy of *Short Stories* dated August 10th.

Name..............................

Address..............................

....

Here is a pleasant letter from "S. P.," of Gaisford Road, Kentish Town:

"Just a word *re Short Stories.* I was recommended to take this in by a friend, and did so. Since then I have persuaded four of my friends to follow my example. I read the whole of the story, 'The Fate of Michael Standridge,' and a very interesting story it was. But the new one, 'The Golden Dwarf,' fairly (to put it in slang) 'takes the cake.' All my friends are simply mad over it.'

Which just shows the value of recommendation. Would that all my readers would follow the example of my correspondent, and get their friends to read the paper.

* * *

Apropos of "The Golden Dwarf," I have received the following from Miss Louie Spencer, who has been appearing recently at the Grand Theatre, Leeds, with great success:

"As an old subscriber and admirer of your charming little paper, *Short Stories,* I venture to point out a slight mistake in the new serial story, 'The Golden Dwarf.' The hero says he visited the theatre and followed the sorrows of Eily in *The Shaughraun.* Now, Eily is the heroine in *The Colleen Bawn*—the chief feminine parts of *The Shaughraun* being Moya, Claire, and Arte O'Neal.'

I am much obliged to Miss Spencer for the correction.

* * *

Another criticism of "The Golden Dwarf," but not a very serious one. "J. G.," having pencilled the names of seventeen characters on the back of a postcard, intimates that it is "too great a strain to remember them all."

For which I am sorry—for "J. G." For if the remembering of seventeen characters in a story is beyond his mental capacity his loss is considerable. It is quite a reasonable number, as he will see on comparing "The Golden Dwarf" with any novel of Dickens or Scott, or any play of Shakespeare, or for that, most of the novels or plays of note. In "The Golden Dwarf" the characters are so cleverly differentiated that no difficulty should be experienced in following the parts they take in the story.

* * *

"Eccentric."—Any man who desires to do so may easily become ambidextrous. All he has to do is to begin and systematically use his left instead of his right hand whenever it is possible. The ambidextrous man not only has the advantage over his opponent in sparring and all athletic sports, but he has a great advantage over others in games of skill, in almost any kind of business, and is a better man all round. The one-handed man is a one-sided man. The muscles on the right side of the right-handed man become developed at the expense of the muscles of the other side; that shoulder becomes higher, and the man grows lopsided.

To avoid this ought to be the effort of every youth, for then the muscular habit is formed. The difficulty may be corrected in some degree, however, by systematically using the left, or weaker hand and arm. Keep your keys and things in your left-hand pocket, reach for things with your left hand, pick up weights with your left. You will be astonished to see how rapidly your hitherto neglected member can be brought into active and useful service.

LATEST NEWS.

In the event of any important news arriving when the paper is going to press it will be found in this space.

Newsagents' shops will be besieged by people ordering next week's *Short Stories* containing "Adventures of an Actress."

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories,*
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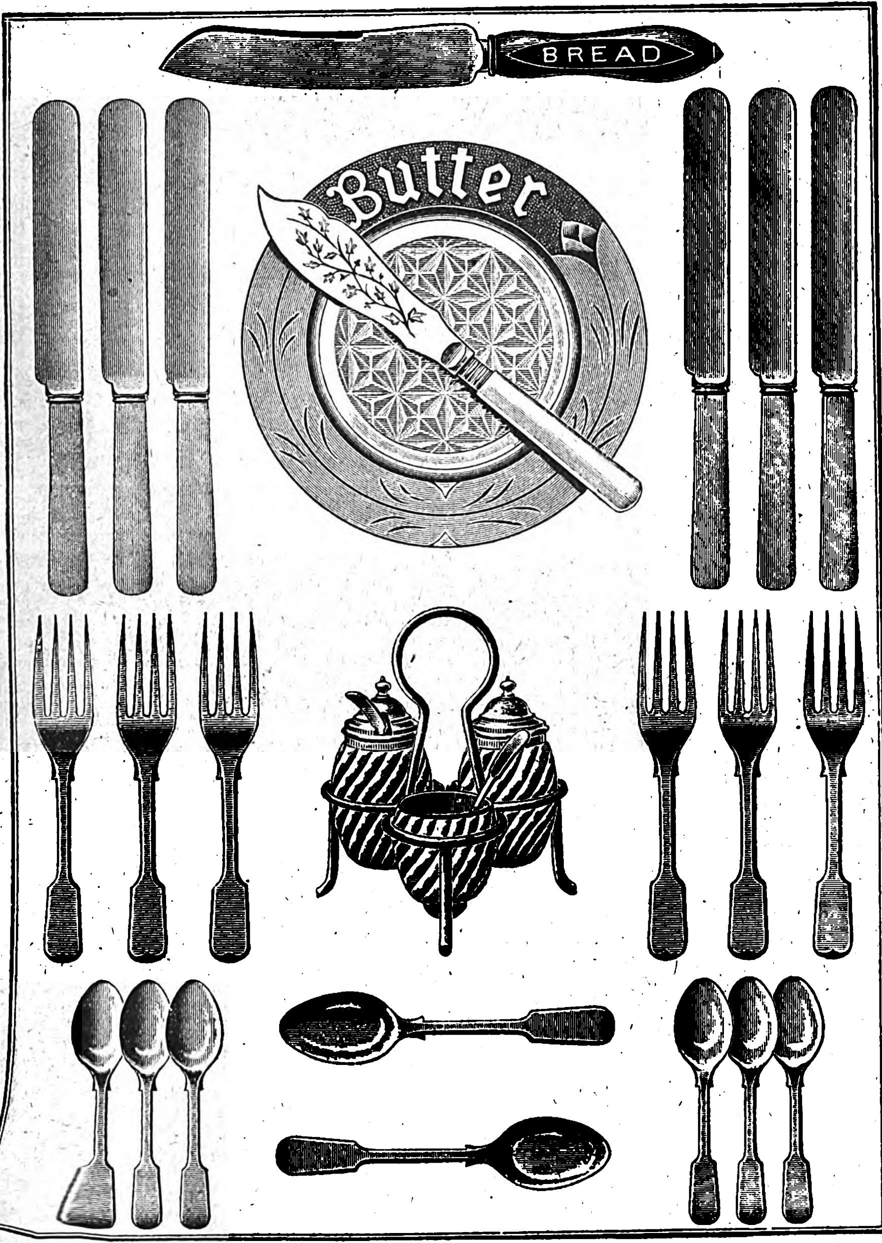

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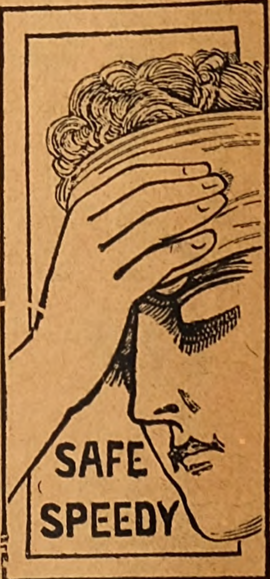

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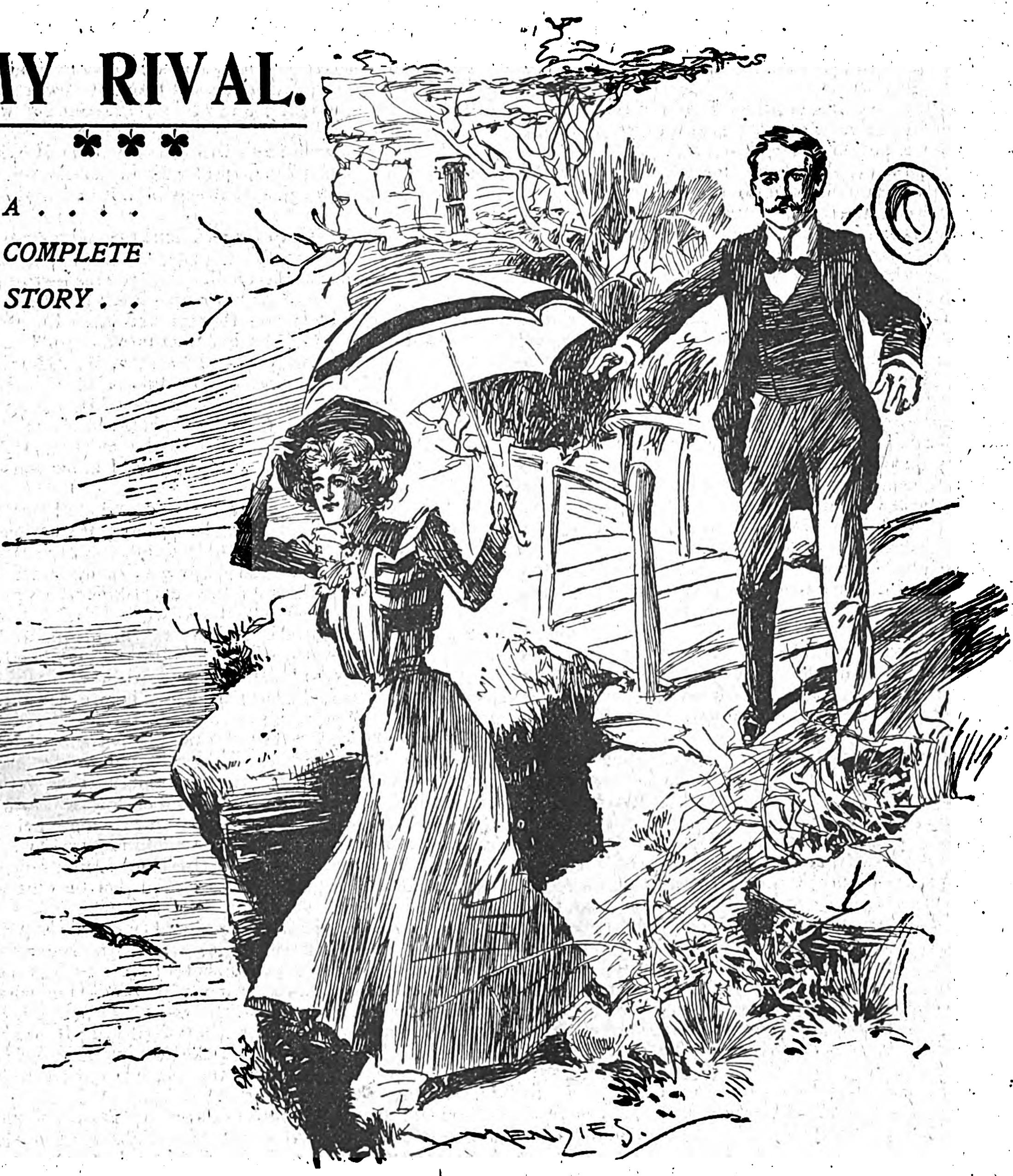
SHORT STORIES.

No. 657.] For the Week Ending August 3rd, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

MY RIVAL.

✱ ✱ ✱

A . . . .
COMPLETE
STORY . .



Presently she was off like a bird to the very verge of the cliff. I sprang after her.

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MY RIVAL;

Or, A WEEK AT AN IRISH WATERING-PLACE.

By M. J. GREEN, Author of "My Mother's Diamonds."

I WISH Madge Merrington had not been so provokingly pretty, a perfect gossamer fairy, weaving her webs on all sides, and ensnaring with equal facility the wary and the incautious.

She was seven years old when I first knew her. I was eight-and-twenty, and, as a matter of course, I took her on my knee, petted and caressed her.

But years pass on—lucklessly for some, happily for one who steps from childhood to the fuller fairness of maturity. When Madge was fourteen it grew to be a question of nicety when my friendly admiration should cease, or rather how far it should go.

If I had not seen her so constantly the matter would have been less embarrassing. I should have left her at one date a charming child, and found her after due interval a graceful girl. But I was on the most intimate terms at her home. Mr. and Mrs. Merrington were my oldest friends, and as I lived on the same terrace with them in a select suburb of the Irish metropolis, they extended their hospitality to me with the warmth and impulsiveness of the genuine Hibernian heart. Now on what precise day or at what precise hour I was first to cease my coaxing attentions and bestow my last kiss, was a point which puzzled me considerably. Wherefore should I be unchecked in my demonstration one day, restrained the next? What reason could I, or any one, assign for an abrupt change from freedom to frigidity? The difficulty, nevertheless, was solved for me in a manner which I had least expected.

One afternoon, in the month of May, I had returned early from my office, and had made my way direct to Merrington Villa, with a bouquet in my hand and a parcel under my arm. Madge had reached the mature age of fifteen on this memorable day, and this was an event I could not forget.

I found her alone in the drawing-room, which looked on a lovely little flower-ground at the back. She was in white muslin, with pale-pink bows, and large rosettes of the same hue on high-heeled shoes—rather a juvenile costume for the hour; but she was to have an early party of young friends, and was ready dressed for their arrival. I presented my gifts, and I don't think anyone can blame me if I accepted her thanks; but at that instant the door opened, and Mrs. Merrington appeared.

I do not wish to be evasive, but I really cannot distinctly recall in what exact attitude Madge was at the crisis. I have a faint recollection of the touch of some dear little fingers at the tips of my mcustache. Another shock, however, overpowers the memory of this electric thrill. It was that caused by the tone of Mrs. Merrington.

"Madge! come down this moment, miss! You are too great a girl to be on Mr. Hartwell's knee."

I started; but the young lady was more self-possessed.

"Dear old fellow!" she exclaimed, "Why shouldn't I thank him? Of course he must have a kiss for the big book and bouquet he has brought me on my birthday."

And then, with a sweet roguish look, she was gone. A quick knock at the hall-door had brought new excitement to her thoughts, and I and the reproof were alike forgotten.

"Madge is very wild and wilful," said Mrs. Merrington, drawing near to me, and fixing her hazel eyes full on mine. "She forgets that she is not a child any longer."

"She does not wish to forget friends, at all events,' I said quietly.

"Nor I either, Mr. Hartwell. But you see—you feel for yourself that she has grown up quickly; in fact, she is tall and old for her age, though her manners are so unformed. I must not let her turn into a romp."

"I shall not encourage the propensity, Mrs. Merrington," was all I could say, for somehow a blow seemed struck at me as she spoke; the gates of a too happy paradise were closed swiftly by an inflexible hand.

"That is all right," returned the mother, with a smile. "If Madge needs a hint again, I know you will not."

After this day I visited only occasionally at the Merringtons'. Yet whenever I saw my young friend I felt that she could never be tutored into worldliness, and that the warm heart of the child was being preserved true and guileless through the more difficult stage of girlhood.

Three years passed; Madge was eighteen, and a brighter being never dropped the garb of girlhood for that of lovely womanhood, and rose, fresh as a fairy in some dazzling transformation scene, before the enrapt gaze.

She was *petite*; but her figure was perfect with the slightness which develops into roundness; her hands small and white, with that rapidity and deftness in their grasp which marks the brisk decided character. Nothing betrays more weakness of temperament, more helpless indecision, than the limp touch which is given by some fingers. They seem to follow the slow motions of the brains, and to be unable to catch quickly or surely at any object upon earth.

Madge had large hazel eyes, like her mother's, with a short but dark fringe of lashes, and their gaze was clear and open, more penetrating than pensive. Her hair was wavy, brown in its tint, and she wore it brushed in curly ripples off the whitest of temples. Of her charming rosy mouth I will not speak. It was the feature of all others which spoke for itself, and which smiled too straight into the heart to leave actual impression upon the memory.

Mr. and Mrs. Merrington did not see much company, and thus it came to pass that an invitation to the young lady to spend a month with a friend at a northern watering-place was met by her with a joyous response. The consent of her parents had been gained, and she

Startling stage revelations next week.

set out radiantly on her trip. The month was July, the weather propitious; Madge was to have sea-bathing, boating, riding, and dancing. If she were high-spirited before she left, what might not be expected from such exciting regimen as this!

The time for her stay passed over, and she did not return. A further extension of leave was asked for, and conceded amidst some laments from her parents on the loneliness they were left to. Meanwhile I saw them more frequently than before.

They were very kind to me, and when an office holiday came to both of us gentlemen, it was proposed at once that we should follow in the steps of the little truant, and taste for ourselves a week's refreshment among the Atlantic breezes on the far coast of Antrim.

Madge had been staying at Fairbank, an inland residence about two miles from the coast; but on our arrival at the fashionable hotel of the adjacent watering-place, she was to join us there.

Too well I remember the exquisite evening on which we reached our destination. It was in the middle of August. The sea was grand but not menacing; the sun was sinking in glowing splendour behind the bold promontory to the left of the town; and the air, blown across the crested waves from the far western world was borne like a breath of new life upon the heart.

The terraces were gay with promenaders, and every eye looked clear, every face bright, from contact with the exciting elements around.

Sea breezes and waters had been tasted of till mists and moodiness were swept away, till sunshine and brilliancy seemed the predominant features of life.

Just as the bell rang for the *table d'hôte* dinner a carriage drove up, and looking eagerly from the bow-window in front of the hotel I saw Madge spring out of it.

She ran up the steps. and was greeted by her father and mother who stood in the portico, and lastly with a quiet smile and a grasp of the hand by me.

"I am so glad you have come," was her pleasant welcome. "We shall be so happy all together. I have been longing for you to be here."

All three seemed included in this greeting, and indeed Madge, if more beautiful than ever, was unchanged in her sweet joyousness of manner towards myself.

After dinner we adjourned at once to the headland, which was a fashionable resort for an evening walk, and many a glance was attracted to the merry young lady of our party.

For some time Madge tripped along on the grass promenade of the centre platform, where numerous strollers were enjoying, like ourselves, the parting loveliness of sea and sunset.

Presently, however, she was off like a bird to the very verge of the surrounding cliffs, to catch a fuller view of the great Atlantic steamer bound for the New World. I sprang after her. A gust had risen, and Mrs. Merrington looked apprehensive.

"Oh, there is no fear," was Madge's rejoinder to my expostulation. "I am as sure-footed as a goat, I am made for high life!" and her sweet lips parted in their loveliest smile.

"Madge, come back!" cried her mother. "You are too giddy."

"No, not the least light-headed, I assure you mamma."

"Light-footed, rather?" I suggested.

"Yes, and light-hearted too, I hope."

"There is no doubt of that."

"Oh, how I wish Harry was here!" was her quick exclamation. "We should be all the merrier then."

"Harry? Who is he?" I inquired.

She looked at me for an instant; then lowered her eyes, and the slightest flush rose into her face.

"Oh, a great friend of mine. Did not mamma tell you?" she murmured. "We met at Fairbank."

"Indeed! And you like him very much?"

"Yes," with another mischievous glance. "Have you any objection?"

"Of course not. If you are pleased, that is enough for me."

"Well, Harry is delightful," she pursued. "You would think so yourself. We were inseparable at once. Mamma knows all about it, and has asked my dear Harry to join us here to-morrow. I shall be quite happy then." And then a beautiful light came into her eyes—a light which I could not mistake.

I was silent for a while, and we walked on together, Mr. and Mrs. Merrington having turned back on the promenade.

"I suppose he is young?" I hazarded, after a pause.

"Yes, not old, certainly, but a good many years in advance of me."

"And good looking?"

"Too handsome, I think. That is my one objection."

"It is no great drawback, Madge," and I sighed.

She caught the sigh, and the half-sad expression that accompanied it, for she questioned me the next instant, with her eyes fixed on my face.

"What makes you so grave, Mr. Hartwell?"

"I suppose because I am growing grey," was my response.

"What nonsense! Your hair is just the right hue, none else would suit you so well."

"But it does not make a younger man of me."

"And why wish to be young? What good would it do you?"

This was a poser certainly; and fearing I was getting on hazardous ground, I hastened to change the conversation. I began to think Madge something of a coquette. She knew—she must have known—what I felt, that I was wild enough to love her, and yet she restrained in no way her fascinations; she looked at me with her bewildering eyes, smiled on me with her enchanting lips, and then all but laughed at me if I showed sentiment or susceptibility. She could talk of "Harry" and her admiration for him with coy delight, and expatiate on his youth and attractiveness, while I, grave and saddened, was expected to listen and congratulate.

On returning to the hotel we adjourned to the inner saloon at the end of the long coffee-room, which we found pretty well filled with company. It was amusing to watch the groups of friends who chatted together, and of strangers who eyed one another. A scanning glance was given to each personage who entered, and there was either a quick greeting from some amongst the party, or the new-comer found himself condemned to a sort of suspicious isolation. We, being four in number, were independent of such scant courtesy as might be offered, and contented ourselves with the accommodation of a comfortable couch and the entertainment of watching the scene from a theatrical point of view.

"Adventures of an Actress" next week.

There were several Americans amongst the assembly, and these were easily recognised by their gesticulations, their elaborate dress on the ladies part, and their harshly attuned voices in the case of the men.

Madge could scarcely restrain her smiles at one specimen of the fraternity, who wore his red hair in a flame-like pyramid with a sort of crater in the middle. He spouted forth volubly as he stood in a conspicuous position in the room, his small eyes making the most of their vision, and a long hand extended "right ahead," as he would himself express it.

"Your Cosway," he exclaimed, after some expatiation on the scenery of the locality, "your Cosway, as I take it, is a worked out viaduct, overwashed now by our big ocean; and your two specks of islands were once one ——"

"Won! by whom?" said a supercilious-looking gentleman, who twirled a yellow moustache.

"One, I said—run up together."

"I'm as glad they're a trifle apart now," interposed a bluff black man, whose accent flavoured somewhat too strongly of Tipperary. "We are near enough to please me an' many others too. The farther off the better from those who are neither kin nor kind."

"You're a bit of a Home Ruler, I guess?" rejoined the American.

"I'm for Home Rule, if that's what you mean. We haven't got it yet."

"Nor won't for many a day, while there's a stone on the Giant's Causeway or a northern foot on the ground."

This was declaimed in a vehement brogue by another listener.

His staunch figure, broad open features, and freckled face stamped him at once as the genuine Orangeman of the North, who is proud of his country, his prowess, and his Protestantism.

"You're a Belfast boy, perhaps?" retorted the representative of the South. "You can spin a yarn of linen, I make no doubt, but you had better leave the talk alone. You can't run on there."

"I can cut short if I can't run on," was the retort, "and that's sometimes more to the point," and he turned off abruptly.

At this juncture a lady with prompt tact rose to propose some music. She glided over to a friend who showed herself pleasantly acquiescent, and in her turn moved to the piano, which a gentleman opened for her.

The southern, apparently an old acquaintance of the musician, at once sprang forwards.

"A song of my own choosing, then, Mrs. Lanyon," he said. "You can't refuse it to me. Let us have 'The Wearing of the Green.'"

"No, no!" cried a dozen voices.

But at the moment the lady began, in a voice so sweet that no one could hush it, the somewhat rebel words:

"Farewell, for I must leave thee,
  My own, my native shore,
And, doomed in foreign lands to dwell,
  May never see thee more;
For laws, our tyrant laws, have said
  That seas must roll between
Old Erin and her faithful sons
  That love to wear the green.
Yet whatsoe'er our fate may be
  When oceans wash between,
Her truest sons will ever sing
  The wearing of the green.

"My father loved his country,
  And sleeps within her breast,
While I, that would have died for her,
  Must never so be blest.
Those tears my mother shed for me—
  Far fewer they had been
If I had proved a traitor
  To the wearing of the green.
Yet brighter days will surely come
  Than those that we have seen,
When Erin's sons may proudly sing
  'The Wearing of the Green.'"

The Orangeman had risen, and was listening with such a knit brow that some stormy passage seemed inevitable, till, just as the last note died away, the air was changed with pantomimic rapidity, and the loyal chords rang forth of "The Boyne Water."

Everyone laughed then. Anger at the charming *mélange* was impossible. Even the Tipperary blood seemed restrained from ebullition by the soothing potion which had been first drunk in, and presently all settled down in detachments to chess, cards, or music.

The next day was bright and bracing, and at ten o'clock our party mounted the long car which starts from the hotel at that hour for the Giant's Causeway.

I had a place beside Madge, and was content. She, on her part, looked bewitching in a gipsy hat crowned with wild flowers, and talked alternately to me and a companion on the left. The acquaintance of the latter gentleman she had made at the *table d'hôte*.

He was a Professor from the Belfast College, wore spectacles and a sort of astrologer's hat, and was sufficiently antiquated to stifle any pang of jealousy I might have felt, and give me a sensation of rejuvenescence and agility which was very gratifying.

I could bound off the car quicker than he on our arrival, offer Madge my hand, and carry her off, the first of the pedestrians, for the cliffs. The sea was wild and lovely. A north-westerly wind blew the waves in foaming cascades upon the rocks and strand, and the curious pipe-like pillars of the great organ facing seaward were burnished by a gleam of the most golden sunlight.

Presently I heard Mrs. Merrington's voice behind.

"Madge is it in your pink llama you are? That looks too glaring out of doors. You should only wear it in the evenings."

The young lady had just thrown off a grey cloak which had enveloped her on the drive, and stood forth brightly in the above apparel.

"But why, mamma?" she responded. "What harm, if it is pretty? Daylight should be as honoured as gaslight. I am not afraid of colour."

She certainly need not be so, while her fair faultless complexion eclipsed all in brilliancy, and threw every tint, even of rose, into the shade.

"We shall be hurried on our return, and have no time to dress," she confided to me roguishly, "and Harry will have arrived then."

"Oh! that accounts for all."

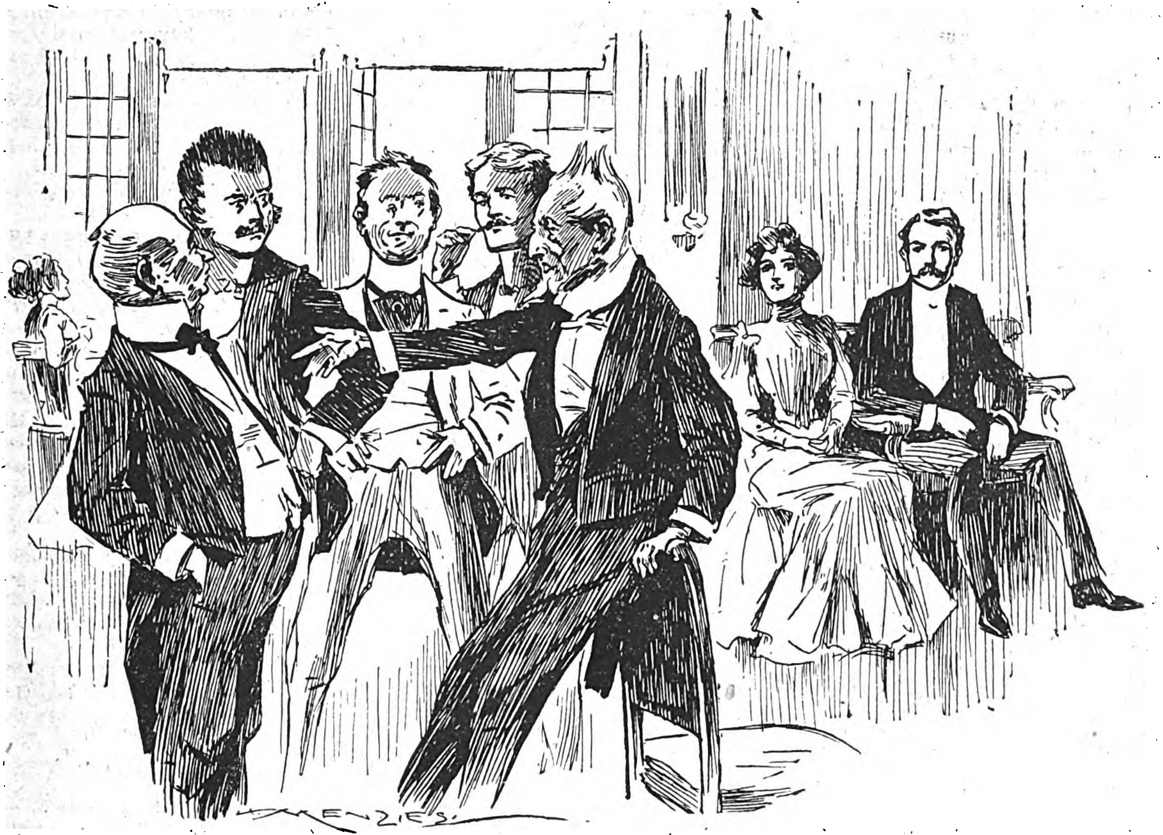
"All what?"

"Your gaiety and your garb."

"But when am I grave? Do you ever see me dull, Mr. Hartwell?"

"No, in truth; but there are degrees even of liveliness. Sunshine in the heart throws the strongest light of all. You know what you told me: 'When Harry comes I

Tell your friends of Hazel Harlow the Actress.



Madge could scarcely restrain her smiles at one specimen of the fraternity, who wore his red hair in a flame-like pyramid with a sort of crater in the middle.

shall be quite happy.' Does not that imply a want, now?"

"Ah! don't criticise me on my words, don't draw logical conclusions. I speak what I think at the moment. But there are many moments—many moods."

"The more the merrier in your case, I think." And saying this I gave her my hand to help her over a barrier of rock which was our first approach to the Causeway. The rest of the party were on a more circuitous path, and followed us leisurely.

Madge was agile enough to accept but little assistance, and she stepped lightly from stone to stone till we had gained the further projection of broken columns fitting curiously into one another, which our American would describe as "the Viaduct."

This rocky groundwork showed fragments of every fantastic shape, some regular, others irregular, round, triangular, octagon, and nonagon.

Above us were pillars of colossal height, inlaid, as it were, into the dark cliffs; while the ocean stretching out far before our gaze, dashed its noisy waters upon the basement of the pedestals, and fled in more foaming waves towards the mouth of the caves beyond.

"We must have a boat!" cried Madge. "See, there is a party in one at this moment. They are at the entrance of the large cavern. How they toss up and down in the surge! Harry thinks boating slow work; but there is nothing tame, I am sure, in a row about here."

Harry again! How I hated the name, and especially the soft blush that announced it! Looking at Madge, I saw that sparkle in her eye which betrayed her secret, and struck a blow equally at my own presumption.

The professor came up just then, and began some disquisition on geological researches. He brought out his knowledge in allusions to stratified and igneous rocks, to the classes of strata comprising palæozoic, post-tertiary, &c., and might have wandered on into still more puzzling terms, had not Madge shown something of impatience.

She gladly seconded my move for an adjournment to the heights above us, which were covered with a mossy undulating turf, and looked inviting for the picnic luncheon that was in prospect.

The repast having been spread and partaken of, Madge was the first to proclaim its conclusion, and dart in her usual impulsive way to the very verge of a cliff.

"Such a great seagull!" she cried. "He has just risen from the crag beneath us, and flies direct seaward. A good omen for the weather—is it not? Oh, I should

Beautiful Hazel Harlow's adventures next week.

love to take wing in that way! I feel really as if I could flit off quite securely; and alight on the head of one of those pedestrians below."

"You would be much more likely to alight on your own," said her father, pulling her back somewhat brusquely from her airy situation. "If you feel safe yourself, Madge, that is no reason for making your mother and every one else uncomfortable about you."

The young lady succumbed to this reproof and was tolerably amenable for the rest of the morning.

On our return to the hotel she became excited anew. At the same time she did not try to escape from my companionship, but, having put a question to the waiter, she turned to me with a smile, and announced that "Harry" was awaiting her in the inner saloon, and asked if I would not wish to be introduced. I acquiesced with the readiness which is allied to curiosity, and followed her promptly.

I could not but wonder to myself, as we traversed the coffee-room, at the gentleman's tardiness in hastening forth to meet her. He could scarcely fail to have seen the long car drive up to the door as it passed the windows of the drawing-room, and yet she was left to seek him out, instead of accepting the first greetings and attentions at his hands.

However, Madge seemed perfectly satisfied, and it was assuredly not my part to desire a more lover-like alacrity.

The door of the saloon was closed, and as Madge had her grasp on the handle she said to me in a whisper:

"Now what do you expect? Tell me beforehand."

"An Adonis, of course," was my reply. "But I am afraid not a very active one. He ought to have been earlier on the scene."

She laughed.

"You are a famous guesser. Indolence is just the one fault I have to find," and thereupon the door was thrown open and she went impulsively forwards.

At this hour the room was usually deserted, and a glance showed me that it contained but a single occupant.

I paused in perplexity, and a strange sensation sent a throbbing to my heart. Madge had her arms round someone's neck; her soft clinging embrace was given with a warmth and impulsiveness which would have been too much for me under other circumstances. As it was, I felt my colour rise, and, stepping closer, I uttered her name in quick accents.

"Madge, Madge, who is this?"

She was round in an instant, with her hazel eyes full of their merriest light.

"My friend *Harrie*. Won't you recognise her? Allow me to introduce you in full form. Mr. Hartwell, Miss Henrietta Delancey."

Never, I think, had I greeted a stranger with such impetuous delight before. I am almost afraid that my excessive eagerness must have been mistaken for familiarity; for Miss Henrietta, who was very handsome, gave me a scanning glance from her fine eyes, and drew back with the slightest degree of hauteur. Her expression was by no means so sweet as Madge's, though she had the advantage of her in height, and possibly in what is termed *style*.

Madge evidently admired her immensely, and clung about her in a delighted way which was very childlike and charming. I had still, I found, a rival in "Harrie"; for words and smiles were all given in this quarter now, and I was left pretty much to the task of reflection till we were out on the hill in the evening for our usual promenade. Miss Delancey had accepted then the escort of an old acquaintance, whom she had met unexpectedly at the *table d'hôte*, and Madge was content perforce to fall back on my companionship. She did it with so good a grace that I had to forgive her everything—her previous artifice, and her recent neglect. I could not but call her to some account, however, as we found ourselves side by side.

"Why did you tell me it was a gentleman friend I was to expect?" I questioned, with a full glance beneath her hat. She met the look with wide-open eyes.

"I never said so, never, indeed, Mr. Hartwell?"

"Well, you allowed me to assume it."

"Oh! the mistake was a too amusing one to be set right. You spoke so touchingly of '**Harry**,' looked forward so longingly to his advent."

"I doubt about the latter part of that statement, Miss Madge. I should have been quite satisfied never to see the expected guest, if you had been of the same mind."

"And why, pray, if you pictured him so fascinating?"

"Possibly for that very reason. Have you ever heard of such a thing as jealousy?"

The flush deepened on Madge's cheek; but then she indulged so often in this bewildering loveliness I could not appropriate anything special from the token.

"Madge," I said as we went onwards, "I am in your hands now. Lead me to some charmed spot."

"Do you want to be enchanted?"

"Scarcely that. The magic chains are too fast already; but I would cast a spell over you. In this delicious dreamy air it might be possible."

"And not in daylight? You have given me fair warning. I refuse to be deluded."

"Illusion I spoke of; but if you prefer a reality——"

I stopped, her gaze was turned on me, and something in its questioning light forbade interrogation of mine.

"There is my nook!" she exclaimed the next instant. "Far down in the steepest part of the cliff, where no passer-by can penetrate. Seated there, looking straight seaward, I can forget the whole world."

"And you enjoy that?"

"When I am selfish."

"You give it a right term. Whenever you are thus hard upon others, be so upon yourself."

We were watching the last glimpse of sunset as we spoke. The globe of fire, which had floated, as it were, on the surface of the water, vanished with a strange suddenness from our eyes, and at the moment a soft vapoury atmosphere replaced the former radiancy.

Madge turned landwards with one of her swift motions.

"We must hasten now," she said; "my mother will be lamenting the loss of my cloud. I am to follow the sky, it seems, and when it wraps itself up I must do the same."

"Well, you like to look high, I remember that."

She only smiled, made no disclaimer. Yet the charge was for ever refuted when I grew aspiring on my part; and to a question put to her at last no denial rose, either, to her lips.

With this happiness my stay at the seaside ended. It was a farewell to the place, but not to what had passed in it. The memories of the visit and its summer lights were to live in a brightness which has had no sunset.

"Startling Stage Revelations" next week.

THE POWER OF HOPE.

BY JOHN HENRY PEAT.

We called him "Doctor"—not because he was a medical man, or had ever attempted to join the ranks of the profession, but because he was chiefly to be found in the company of young medicos, and largely interlarded his conversation with the terms he had learned from them.

When first I made his acquaintance he was, in appearance and manner, a gentleman, but a gentleman who bade fair to lose the instincts of his class. For two years he had been known to the circle in which I found him, but nobody could give any information as to his previous history.

His name was Alfred Barber. He was in receipt of an income sufficiently large to provide him with all the necessaries and some of the luxuries of life, and which also left him with a sufficient margin to enable him to join the Bohemian crew in convivial evenings at "The George," the house specially favoured by the embryo doctors. From what source his income was derived, or who and what his family were, no one knew.

The night my brother took me down to join the charmed circle at the "George," Alf, as he was called when the nickname was not substituted, was present, and I was introduced to him. I have always remembered the manner in which he acknowledged the introduction.

"Youngster," he said, he was considerably my senior, "I am glad to welcome you among us, provided you have a strong head and a firm will. If not, Tom has made a mistake in bringing you here."

There was a general protest against this.

"What do you mean, Barber?" interrogated one.

Ignoring this question he put another to me.

"Are you anxious to acquit yourself creditably and rise high in your profession?" he asked.

"Most certainly I am," I replied with all the enthusiasm of youth.

The "Doctor" turned to the crowd sitting round the table, all of whom were gazing half in wonder, half in amusement at Barber.

"Will any gentleman present who has realized his early ambitions kindly signify the fact by rising," he exclaimed.

Nobody rose.

"There, my friend, you observe the mute confession of at least partial failure, and this particular society, to which you are now introduced, has provided more instances of this kind than any other, and now having warned you as to the probable result of becoming a member, if you fail I am guiltless in the matter."

"Fancy Doctor Barber moralising," broke in a lively looking member of the company.

"Shut up, Jingle," retorted Barber. "You protest too much, considering you are one of the most lamentable instances of failure present."

"Oh, indeed!" remarked the worthy addressed.

"Yes, that you are, and I have no hesitation in venturing on a prophecy concerning you."

"Is Barber also among the prophets?" sarcastically inquired Jingle.

"At any rate I am prophetically inspired concerning you."

"Let us have the benefit of your prophecies, then."

"Very well. Your exam. is fast approaching. You will be 'ploughed,' and eventually find yourself on the dicky of a hansom."

"If I thought you were anything of a prophet, doctor, I should immediately cut this crowd," replied the one addressed as Jingle, dropping his bantering tone. "After pinching and saving as she has done to give me my chance, it would break the mater's heart were any such thing to come to pass as you so gloomily predict."

"I am surprised at you, Jingle. The idea of a medical student talking of a broken heart. Why, man, such an expression as that is in itself such a display of ignorance of the very rudiments of your profession as to effectually bar the way to your further advancement."

"Bravo, Doctor!" shouted the crowd.

"Gentlemen," broke in the member who occupied the chair at the head of the table, "you are talking shop, which is a breach of our rules, and you are allowing the requirements of a guest to go unattended to, which is a gross violation of the laws of hospitality. Jingle, you and Barber are the offenders in this matter, so I jointly fine you drinks round."

Thus was the manner of my introduction to the "Doctor."

Though I was not a very frequent visitor at the meetings of the "Jollyboys club," yet occasionally I dropped in to spend an evening with them, and from my observation I concluded that the most likely man to drive a hansom was the "Doctor" himself.

He was fast losing the smartness of appearance and manner which had characterised him, and the income which had been sufficient was now evidently far too small for the demand made upon it.

This was apparent in trifles. The various articles of jewellery which at one time had adorned his person were now conspicuous by their absence.

His rings went first, then the neat scarf-pin—a valuable one—vanished, and his watch was so long absent, ostensibly undergoing repairs, that we formed our own conclusions as to its abiding place.

About that time I was called home and temporarily lost sight of my acquaintances, and during this time the exam. had come and gone.

In one respect my friend "Doctor" had prophesied only too truly. Jingle—careless, lighthearted and sanguine Jingle—had been most ignominiously "ploughed," and the consequences had been still more disastrous. From the day the results were announced Jingle had become utterly reckless. Thoughtless and perhaps selfish he had been, but he most uncompromisingly refused to return home to his widowed mother with his failure. He could not bear, he said, to face her and say that her sacrifices and her care were all of no avail, and so he grieved her more by staying away and maintaining a dogged silence.

Night after night he went home helplessly drunk. When his cash had gone, he commenced pawning his possessions, until at last all that remained were the clothes in which he stood.

"Adventures of an Actress" next week

At this point, his maternal uncle came upon the scene, and after a while his persuasions, backed by those of Jingle's colleagues, resulted in his promising to return home; but when the time really came for his departure the thought of facing his mother with his failure was too much for him and he disappeared leaving no trace behind him.

All this was retailed to me on my return to town.

"But what about our prophetic friend?" I asked.

"Oh, that is another surprise in store for you," was the reply.

"Why, what has happened?"

"The unexpected, of course. You remember how he was gradually sinking. Well, suddenly he pulled up short, turned completely round, and started to climb again. Since then we have not seen much of him."

"And the reason of this—what is it?" I queried.

"That we have not yet learned, but I should guess there is a lady in the case."

"What! the 'Doctor' in love!"

"Well, why not?" queried my informant.

"Oh! I know of no reason against it, but I never thought of the 'Doctor' as a man likely to come under a woman's influence."

A few weeks elapsed before I ran against Barber, and when I saw him I could scarcely believe the evidence of my own eyes. There stood the redoubtable "Doctor" himself, smiling and fresh. He was immaculately attired, and looked more a gentleman—which he really was—than ever I had seen him before.

"Hello, youngster!" he exclaimed, "you seem surprised to see me."

"Well," I stammered, "I—I am rather surprised."

He looked at me in an amused kind of way.

"I say, youngster"—he always addressed me in that manner, by the way—"come on, now, confess, is it merely seeing me that has surprised you so perceptibly?"

"It is partly that and partly—well, never mind about the rest, I am glad to see you."

"All right, my boy," he replied, his eyes twinkling in enjoyment of my embarrassment, "I know. You are surprised to see me 'clothed and in my right mind'—is that it?"

I nodded assent. Then he continued.

"Have you any engagement this evening?" he inquired, "if not, you must be my guest, and I will promise you an interesting story."

"I'll come with pleasure," I replied, and with this we parted.

At the time appointed I arrived at my friend's abode, and we were soon deep in conversation.

"You know, youngster," he said, in his own congenial style. "I like you, and I am going to tell you something of my story. I shall not trouble you with details of my boyhood and youth, but proceed straight to the time when I became engaged to be married. For a long time the course of our love ran smoothly, in spite of the old adage that 'the course of true love never runs smooth,' until there came a time, when, owing to certain untoward circumstances I embarked on a course of deception. Now, in justice to myself I must say that this deception was not of a kind that would have injured anyone, but nevertheless it was deception, and as such, was, of course, reprehensible. There came a time when I was discovered. Then came a cruel, crushing blow. The young lady to whom I was engaged was the soul of honour and truth, and she had esteemed me likewise. When she learned that the man she had set up on a pedestal and almost worshipped, was merely an idol with feet of clay, she wrote me a curt—very curt—note, finally and forever terminating our engagement. It was then I commenced the life I was leading when first you met me. As you know, I was rapidly going down, when another turn of events put a stop to it."

Here he paused and looked reflectively in the fire, but it was evident his thoughts were not unpleasant ones, for he smiled as he gazed. For a moment or two we sat thus and then he again broke the silence. Raising his eyes from the fireplace to the mantel-piece he resumed his story.

"There, right in front of you, is the photograph of the lady who has brought about the change."

A question rose to my lips, but ere I could frame it into words he had answered it.

"That is the lady to whom I was engaged, and to whom I hope to be again engaged when I have proved my worthiness. While you were away we met, and as a result of that meeting a second interview was arranged in a quiet corner of the park, where we could converse undisturbed. The appointment was kept, and out of the fulness of my heart my mouth spoke. I told her that my love for her was true gold, purged of all its dross by the fires of suffering through which it had passed. I also told her that with some hope of regaining the love which had formerly been mine I could work, but without it my life would be a blank.

"Ultimately she gave me that hope and now you know the reason of the change in me. I am afraid I have wearied you with my story youngster."

"Not in the least," I hastily interposed.

"I am not great at moralising, my boy, but out of my own experiences let me give you just one word of advice. Don't ever—no matter what the circumstances—deceive your friends. One word more and I have done. Don't let that old club of ours blight your career as it has done that of others, notably poor old Jingle."

During the next six months I was studying hard. My friend and I occasionally spent an evening together and with each meeting I left him with increased respect. At last, the period of his probation came to an end. How well I remember that evening. He received me with quite a boyish delight.

During the time of his test he had avoided the subject that lay nearest his heart in his intercourse with Miss Harding, but to me he had spoken without reserve. If ever a man really and truly loved a woman, Alfred Barber loved, with the utmost strength and fervour, Miss Harding.

"Wish me joy, youngster," he said, "to-morrow the ban of silence is removed. To-morrow I shall receive my reward, and the bitter past will forever pass into oblivion. To-morrow I shall place this outward emblem on her finger and again call her mine," and he drew a magnificent half-hoop diamond ring from his pocket.

"You seem pretty confident that the answer will be favourable," I remarked.

"Of course I am. Did not Maud give me her promise, and have I not—egotistical though my words may appear—honestly complied with the terms of the agreement? Good heavens, youngster," he added more gravely, "were I to be disappointed now I should go utterly and irretrievably to the bad."

On the following evening I was sitting in my own room thinking of my friend, wondering what was happening, and picturing the happy scene attending the renewal of his engagement when I heard footsteps on the stairs, and a moment later there was an imperative knock at my door. I opened it hastily. There stood a messenger, panting breathless.

"What is it?" I asked, fearing the reply for a presentiment of disaster had seized me.

"Are you Mr. Boydell?" was the inquiry.

"I am," I replied. "What is it?"

"Will you come round to Mr. Barber's rooms?" was the answer.

"What has happened?"

"He is dangerously ill, sir. Will you kindly come at once?"

Quickly slipping into my overcoat, I seized my hat and accompanied the messenger downstairs. Hailing a passing cab I sprang in and directed the driver to go at top speed. As we dashed up to the door it was flung open hurriedly.

"Is that Mr. Boydell?" inquired my friend's landlord.

"Yes!"

"Will you go up to his room at once?"

"Tell me what has happened."

"I can't, sir. He went out this afternoon looking brighter than ever I remember to have seen him. He came back about two hours ago with the look of a man completely bowled over. I followed him up to his room, but he turned on me quite savagely and ordered me away. About half an hour ago I heard him fall and I immediately rushed up I found him insensible on the floor. At once I sent for a doctor and then seeing one of your cards on his dressing table I despatched a a messenger for you. That is all I can tell you, sir."

I proceeded to my friend's room.

He had recovered consciousness and as I entered, his eyes turned in my direction. I was inexpressibly shocked by his appearance.

As his landlord had said, he indeed looked completely bowled over! As I approached the bed on which he had been placed he extended his hand.

His first remark startled me.

"Hearts do break, youngster," he said, "mine is broken."

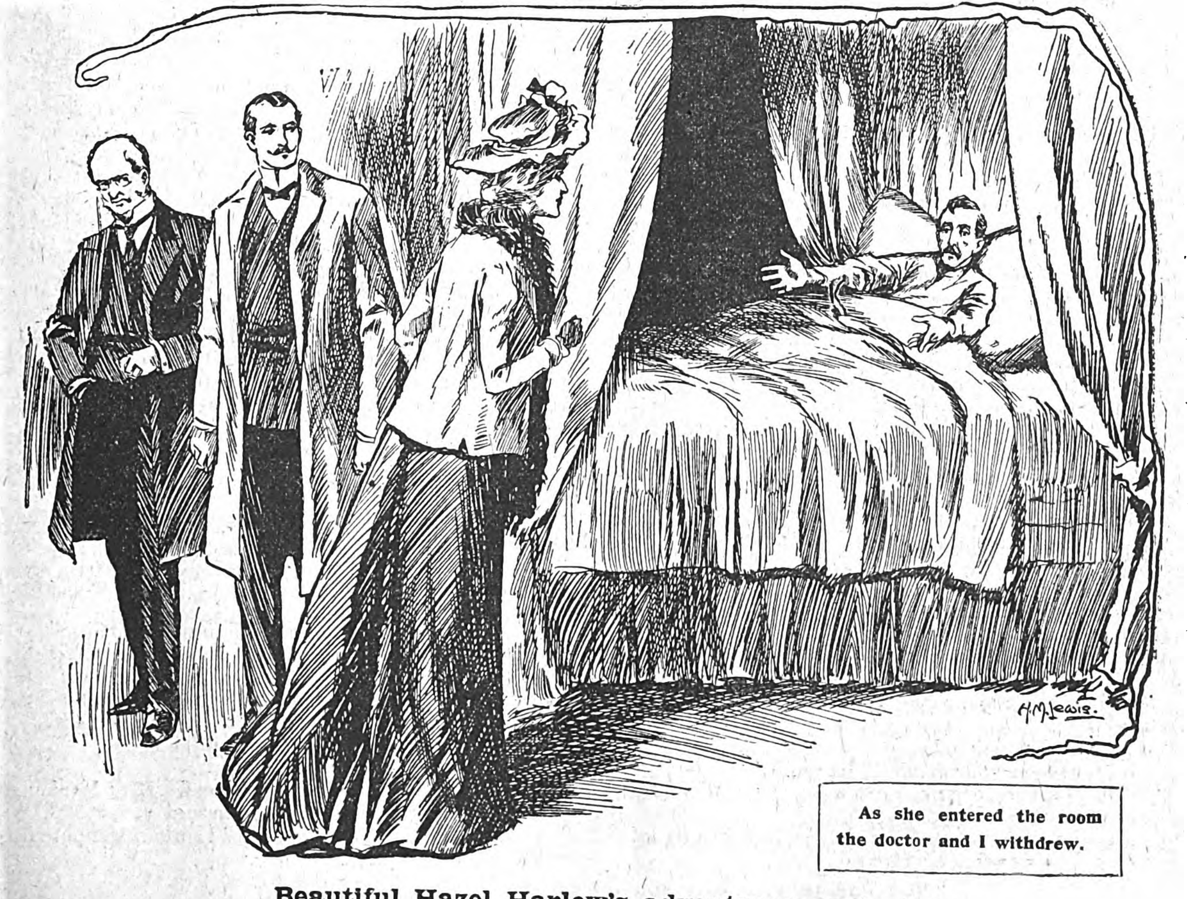
My mind immediately reverted to the occasion. When he had taken Jingle to task for the use of that expression, and with this thought came another. Where was Jingle now? My reverie was disturbed by my friend's voice.

"It's all over, youngster. I have been living in a fool's paradise."

I looked at him inquiringly.

"Doctor," he said to the medical man who had been summoned, "will you leave us together for a few minutes?"

The doctor bowed and withdrew.



As she entered the room the doctor and I withdrew.

Beautiful Hazel Harlow's adventures next week.

"Youngster," he began, "she has rejected me. Her love died when she discovered my deception. Now she has deceived me, and my guilt in that matter is expiated."

"Miss Harding has deceived you?" I queried.

"She has done more, youngster. She has broken my heart. Let me tell you."

"Some other time. You had better rest now," I answered.

"No, I must tell you now. I must talk, or I shall go mad."

"Well, if it will relieve you, go on."

The story he told me, put briefly, was this. On the occasion of that meeting, which had resulted in a change of life, he had told her that without her the burden of his life was becoming intolerable, but that with hope he could carry it cheerfully.

After much pleading Miss Harding gave him that hope on which he had lived for the last six months.

She argued with herself thus: If Alfred Barber pursued his course unchecked it was plain that there could only be one end. Could he but be induced to reform his habits, there was the possibility that strength of mind and purpose would also be established and remain. In plain words Miss Harding held out a hope which she had no intention of fulfilling. But if he were only lifted out of his morbid and depressed state and placed amid better surroundings, the improved conditions, and the new habits would be sufficient to sustain him. His protestations that he could not, would not live without her, she had treated as the outcome of a weak and somewhat disordered mind. Hence her action.

This was the story Alfred Barber had to tell and as I heard it I wondered what would be the result of it all. I turned to my friend.

"But surely you are not going to give way utterly. This has been a severe shock, I know, but you must pull yourself together."

"Youngster, it may be a confession of weakness but I cannot. I had one hope, one aim, one incentive. Now I have nothing."

I was silent, for in the presence of this hopelessness I could find no words. At this juncture the doctor re-entered the room and an idea seized me.

"Will you stay until I return?" I asked.

Having received his promise I approached my friend, and told him that I had an appointment which I must keep but that I would return shortly.

When I reached the door I found, to my surprise that the cabman whom I had dismissed was still there.

"How is Mr. Barber?" he asked, and stepped on to the footpath.

"He is very ill," I replied. "Do you know him?"

"Know him—I should rather think I do."

My first thought was that he had been employed at some time by my friend and had a grateful recollection of a liberal fare, but there was something in his tone that puzzled me.

I sprang on the front of the hansom, and as he leaned forward to take my instructions I looked into his face. It was Jingle. The prophecy of my sick friend had been fulfilled.

"Jingle!" I exclaimed.

"The same—at your service," he replied.

"Well, look here, Jingle, I can't stop to talk now, I have important work to do."

I gave him the address I desired to be taken to, and very quickly I was landed there.

I handed my card to the man who answered the bell and was shown in.

A few minutes elapsed and Miss Harding came to me.

As she entered the room I noticed that her eyes were red as though with recent weeping, but all my sympathies were with my friend.

Brusquely I plunged into my subject.

"Miss Harding," I began, "Mr. Barber is dangerously ill and you are the cause of it."

It was a brutal speech, but I felt savagely inclined, so I continued:

"I thought it only right you should know the effects of your action."

"Has he sent you to me?" she inquired.

"No," I replied, "he knows nothing of my visit."

She touched a small bell on the table and I wondered whether I was about to be shown out.

When the servant came, Miss Harding simply said, "Ask my father to come to me."

"Now what on earth does this mean?" thought I.

Mr. Harding promptly responded to his daughter's summons.

"Father," she said, when we had exchanged greetings. "Alfred is very ill and I am going to him. When I return I shall be wearing his engagement ring, that is if he will permit me."

Turning to me, she continued,

"Mr. Boydell I believe you know the story of my former engagement to your friend and also the subsequent events. When I first held out to Mr. Barber the hope of a renewal of our betrothal, I had no intention of fulfilling it. It was an experiment. During the probationary period my love for him revived, but I was persuaded by my parents that I should be unwise to renew the engagement. They acknowledged his ability. they admired his social qualities; but they were afraid that he was too weak to keep his resolutions and that when his object was achieved, there would come a relapse. Thus my answer was dictated by my head, not my heart. Now take me to him and let me repeat this in his hearing."

"Maud, you will not be so foolish," expostulated her father.

"Father," she replied, "my mind is made up," and she left the room, desiring me to wait.

On her return we were allowed to depart without further remonstrance. We did the journey in silence. On our arrival I left Miss Harding in the outer room, and proceeded to my friend's bedroom. The medical man shook his head as I entered.

"My medicines will do him no good," he said.

"So I thought," I replied, "so I have taken the liberty of calling in another doctor."

"That won't be much use I'm afraid," said he.

"I am inclined to differ with you. My doctor can heal a wounded heart."

"Ah! I understand you now. You may tell him."

I walked to the bedside and lightly touched my friend.

"I am glad you have come back, youngster," he said in a tone that touched me deeply. I decided to act promptly, on the presumption that joy never kills.

"Where is that ring?" I inquired.

"Why, what do you want it for?"

"You had better have it in readiness. Miss Harding is waiting for permission to come in and receive it."

"Youngster, you don't mean it," he almost shouted.

"Yes I do," I replied.

Startling stage revelations next week.

THE RIFLE SHOT:

A Madman's Confession.

It is midnight. The stealthy step of the restless maniac is no longer heard in the long, cheerless corridors; the ravings of the incurable cannot penetrate the deep walls of the cells in which their despair is immured; even the guardians of the establishment are asleep. Without, what silence! The branches of the immemorial trees hang pendulous and motionless; the last railway train, with its monster eyes of light, has thundered by. The neighbouring cry seems like one vast mausoleum, over which the silent stars are keeping watch and ward, and weeping silvery dew like angels' tears. Only crime and despair are sleepless.

To my task. They allow me a lamp. They are not afraid that the madman will fire his living tomb and perish in the ruins. Wise men of science! Cunning readers of the human heart, your decrees are infallible. am mad. But perhaps some eager individual whose eyes shall rest upon these pages will pronounce a different sentence; perhaps he may know how to distinguish crime from madness.

A vision of my youth comes over me—a happy boyhood—a tree-embowered home, babbling brooks, fertile lawns—a father's blessing—a mother's kiss that was both joy and blessing—a brother's brave and tender friendship—and first love, that dearest, sweetest, holiest charm of all. Oh, God! that those things were and are not! It is agony to recall them.

Pass, too, the brief Elysian period of wedded love. Julia sleeps well in her woodland grave. I was false to her memory.

If my boyhood was happy, my manhood was a melancholy one. A morbid temperament, fostered by indulgence, dropped poison even in the cup of bliss. I loved and I hated with intensity.

To my widowed home came, after the death of my wife, my fair cousin Amy, and my young brother Norman. Both were orphans like myself. Amy was a glorious young creature—my antithesis in every respect. She was light-hearted, I was melancholy; she was beautiful, I ill-favoured; she was young, I past the middle age of life, arrived at that period when philosophers falsely tell us that the pulses beat moderately, the blood flows temperately, and the heart is tranquil. Fools! the fierce passions of the soul belong not to the period of youth or early manhood. But let my story illustrate my position.

Amy filled my lonely home with mirth and music She rose with the lark, and carolled as wildly and gayly the livelong day, till, like a child tired of play, she sank from very exhaustion on her pure and peaceful couch. Norman was her playmate. In early manhood he retained the buoyant and elastic spirit of his youth. His was one of those natures which never grow old. Have you ever noticed one of those aged men, whose fresh cheeks and bright eyes, and ardent sympathy with all that is youthful and animated belie the chronicle of years. Such might have been the age of Norman, had not—but I am anticipating.

Between my cold and exhausted nature and Amy's warm, fresh heart, you might have supposed that there could have been no union. Yet she loved me warmly and well—loved me as a friend and father. I returned her pure and innocent affection with a fierce passion. I longed to possess her. The memory of her I had loved and lost was but as the breath on the surface of a steel mirror, which heat displaces and obliterates.

I was not long in perceiving the exact state of her feelings towards me, and with that knowledge came the instantaneous conviction of her fondness for my brother, so well calculated to inspire a young girl's love. I watched them with the keen and angry eyes of jealousy. I followed them in their walks; I played the eavesdropper, and caught up the words of their innocent conversation, endeavouring to turn them to their disadvantage. By degrees I came to hate Norman; and what equals in intensity a brother's hate? It surpasses the hate of woman.

In the insanity of my passion—then I was insane indeed—I sought to rival my brother in all those things in which he was my superior. He was fond of field sports, and a master of all athletic exercises; he was fond of bringing home the trophies of his manly skill and displaying them in the eyes of his mistress. He could bring down the hawk from the clouds, or arrest the career of the deer in full spring. I practised shooting, and failed miserably. His good-natured smile at my maladroitness I treasured up as a deadly wrong. While he rode fearlessly, I trembled at the thought of a leap. He danced gracefully and lightly; my awkward attempts at waltzing made both Amy and her lover smile.

But in mental accomplishments I was the superior of Norman; and in my capacity of teacher both to Amy

"Adventures of an Actress" next week.

and my brother, I had ample opportunity of displaying the powers of my mind.

Amy was gifted with quick intelligence; Norman was a dull scholar. What pleasure I took in humbling him in the eyes of his mistress! what asperity and scorn I threw into my pedantic rebukes! Norman was astonished and wounded at my manner. As he was in a good degree dependent on me, as he owed to me his nurture, sustenance, and training, I took full advantage of our relative position. With well-feigned earnestness and sorrow, I exaggerated my pecuniary embarrassments, and pointed out to him the necessity of his providing for himself, suggesting, with tears in my eyes, that he must adopt some servile trade or calling, as his melancholy deficiencies precluded the possibility of his success in any other line.

Norman had little care for money. Before the fatal advent of Amy, I had supplied him freely with the means of gratifying his tastes; but when I found that he expended his allowance in presents for his fair cousin, on the plea of hard necessity I restricted his supplies, and finally limited him to a pittance, which only a feeble regard for the memory of our indulgent mother forced me to grant.

One day—I remember it well—he came to me with joy depicted in his countenance, and displayed a recent purchase, the fruits of his forced economy. It was a fine rifle; and he urged me and Amy to come and see him make a trial of the weapon. I rebuked him for his extravagance with a sharpness which brought tears to his eyes—but I consented to witness the trial. His first shot centered the target. He loaded again, and handed the weapon to me. My bullet was nowhere to be found. Norman's second shot lapped his first. Mine was again wide of the mark.

Norman laughed thoughtlessly. Amy looked grave, for with a woman's quickness she had guessed at the truth of my feelings. I cut the scene short by summoning both to their studies. That morning Norman, whose thoughts were with his rifle, blundered sadly in his mathematics, and I rebuked him with more than my usual asperity.

Be it understood that my character stood high with the world. I was not undistinguished in public life, and had the rare good fortune to conciliate both parties. I was a working man in many charitable and philanthropic societies. I was a member of a church, and looked up to as a model of piety. As a husband and brother, I was held up as an example. I had so large a capital of character, I could deal in crime to an unlimited amount.

Some days after the occurrence just related, I was alone with my brother in the library.

"Come, Norman," said I, "leave those stupid books. Study is a poor business for a young, free heart like yours. Leave books for old age and the rheumatism."

Norman sprang up joyously. "With all my heart, brother; I'm with you for a gallop or a ramble."

"I'm but a poor horseman, and an indifferent walker," I answered. "What do you say to a little rifle practice? I should like to try to mend my luck."

Norman's rifle was in his hand in a moment, and whistling his favourite spaniel, he sallied forth with me into the bright, sunshiny, autumnal day. We hied to a hollow in the woods where he had set up a target. He made the first shot—a splendid one—and then reloaded the rifle.

"Take care," said he, "how you handle the trigger, you know the lock is an easy one—I am going to have it altered."

And he went forward to set the target firmer in the ground, as his shot had shaken it.

He was twenty paces off—his back turned toward me. I lifted the rifle, and covered him with both sights. It was the work of a moment. My hand touched the trigger. A sharp report followed—the puff of blue smoke swirled upward—and my brother fell headlong to the ground. The bullet had gone crushing through his skull. He never moved.

A revulsion of feeling instantly followed. All the love of former years—all the tender passages of our boyhood—rushed through my brain in an instant. I flew to him and raised him from the earth. At sight of his pale face, beautiful in death, of his long bright locks dabbled in warm blood, I shrieked in despair. A mother bewailing her firstborn could not have felt her loss more keenly, or mourned it more wildly. Two or three woodmen rushed to the spot. They saw, as they supposed, the story at a glance. One of those accidents so common to the careless use of firearms—and I was proverbially unacquainted with their use—had produced the catastrophe. We were borne home, for I had fainted, and was as cold and lifeless as my victim. What passed during a day or two I scarcely remember. Something of strange people in the house—of disconnected words of sympathy—of a coffin—a funeral—a pilgrimage to the woodland cemetery, where my parents and my wife slept—are all that memory records of those days.

Then I resumed the full possession of my senses. Amy's pale face and shadowy form were all that were left of her—my brother's seat at the table and the fireside was empty. But his clothes, his picture, his riding-cap and spurs, a thousand trifles scattered round, called up his dread image every day to the fratricide. His dog left the house every morning, and came not back till evening. One day he was found dead in the graveyard where his master had been laid.

Amy clung to me with despairing love. She would talk of the lost one. She would find every day in me some resemblance to him. Perhaps she would even have wedded in me the memory of the departed. But that thought was too horrible. I loved her no longer.

Friends came to condole with me. Every word of sympathy was a barbed arrow. I could bear it no longer. Conscience stung me, not to madness, but confession. I repelled sympathy—I solicited denunciation. I told them I was my brother's murderer. I forced my confession on everyone who would hear it. Then it became rumoured about that my "fine mind," so they phrased it, had given way beneath the weight of sorrow. I was regarded with fear. A physician of my acquaintance made me a friendly visit, and shook his head when he heard my story. One day this gentleman invited me to ride in his carriage. He left me here. Society believes me mad—that I am not, is to me a miracle.

Oh, ye wise ones of the earth—legislators of the land—would ye avenge the blood that has been spilt by violence on the ruthless murderer, would ye inflict punishment upon him, spare and slay him not. Take down the gallows, and in its place erect your prisons doubly strong, for there within their ever-enduring walls of granite, lies the hell of the villain who has robbed his brother of his life.

Tell your friends of Hazel Harlow the Actress.

The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"It is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Felix in vain protests his innocence.

But the cloud of suspicion gathers around him. Meantime, the child Brian has been kidnapped.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Felix, Darling, Don't Leave Me."

"Do not cry so, Barbara; you, who know him better than anyone else, have the best right to be certain of his innocence."

Esther Carew bent over a despondent yet dainty figure, which, clad in a neat print gown, lay, her face hidden, upon the end of the big lounge by the hearth of the Rosery drawing-room.

"I'm quite sure he—he didn't kill the squire, miss," was the broken answer, and Barbara Preston lifted a flushed countenance to that of her young ally; "but what wrings my heart is not having the ghost of a notion where he can be. I've not slept a wink for nights, miss—since he broke out of the cell at the station—but just sat and watched the garden-gate. I thought, perhaps, he might try to get a word with me by tossing up a pebble at my window. Ted was very romantic, Miss Esther, and would have me show him which it was."

"The course of true love never did run smooth," sighed Esther. "You mustn't despair, Barbara," she added; "a letter may come from him soon. Surely he will write to you when it is safe."

Barbara rose, brushing her chestnut hair out of her grey eyes. She was a pretty creature, trim and active, with all a town maid's grace, in addition to her own vigorous health.

"If Ted Spencer were alive and free, miss," she said, drying her tears, "he would have let me hear it before now. I may have been a bit wilful, but Ted could have been sworn I loved him better than life, miss. He wouldn't have made me suffer like this for want of a line or two, whatever risk he took. I'm afraid some—some harm's happened to him." And Barbara wept again.

Esther stepped closer and put a soft palm on the maid's shoulder.

"Bab," she murmured, "you can trust me. Have you no idea who it was that helped Ted to escape?"

Barbara Preston shook her head.

"No, miss," she answered; "but they did the poor fellow a bad turn, I'll be bound. Mr. Geddes at the chemist's in the High Street says there wasn't enough evidence against him to satisfy a judge, however it might have done a Wyresdale coroner's jury. He'd have left Duchester Assizes without a stain on his character."

She paused, and a look of indecision crossed her shrewd features.

"Miss Esther," she faltered, "it isn't many in Wyresdale believes my Ted guilty of Sir Christopher's murder. I've wondered if—if you oughtn't to hear what's being said about—about——"

"Yes, Barbara," responded Esther Carew proudly; "about whom?"

Barbara coloured and then sobbed.

"I—I can't repeat it, miss," gasped the maid; "you've been a real friend to me and I can't repeat it."

Esther paled.

"I understand, Barbara," she confessed; "you mean about Mr. Dering. He told me himself Sir Christopher and he disagreed over—over something. Felix—Mr. Dering, as a consequence, had to ride to Duchester and give some orders at his bank. He had arranged with his uncle to go abroad."

The speaker closed her lips tightly for a moment and then went on.

"He was detained and stayed in town for the night, so—so he could not have been responsible for Sir Christopher's murder."

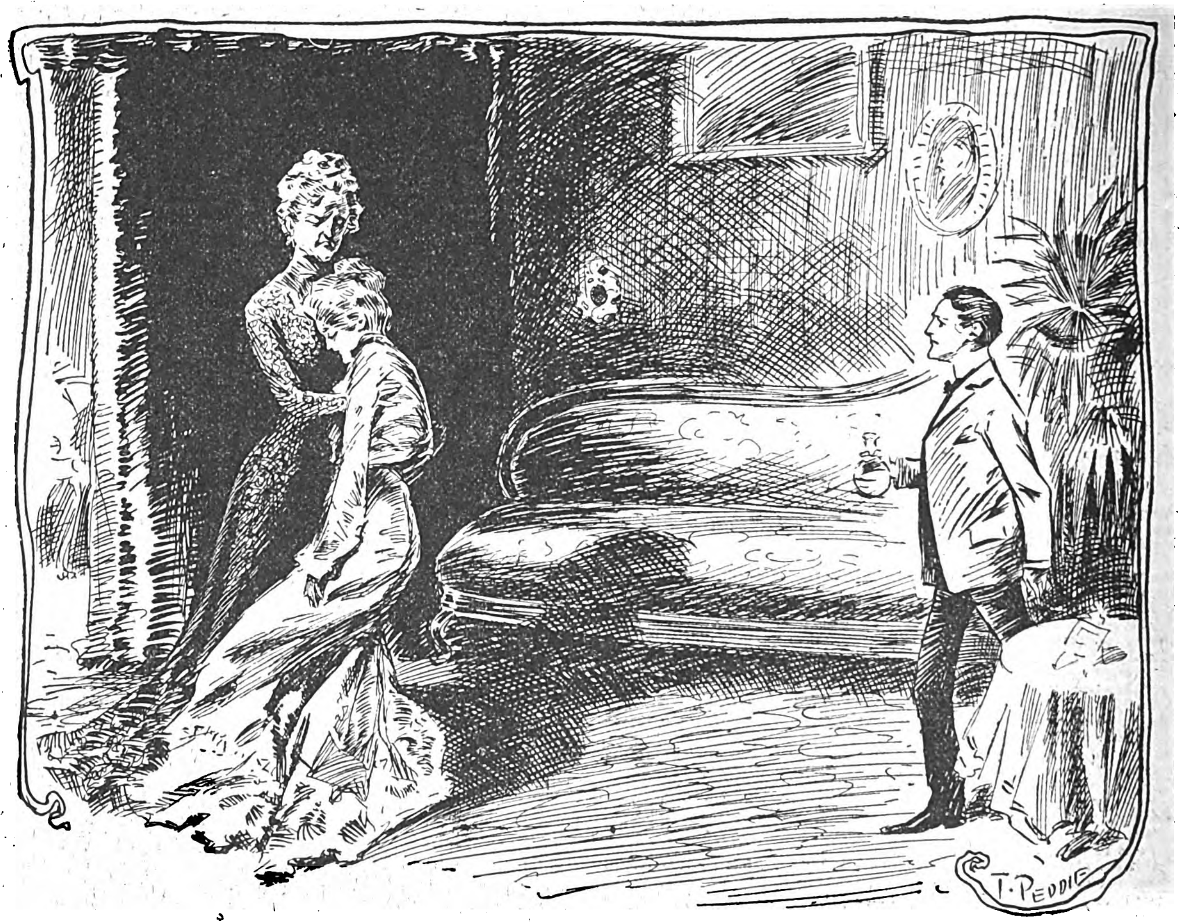
"You believed in my Ted, miss," declared Barbara, "and I'll believe in Mr. Dering. But, Miss Ether, folks say nobody but him would have been able to do away with little Brian in such a strange fashion, and that now the squire and his heir are out of the road, Mr. Felix might be made Sir Felix and have the Dering lands by asking the law to consider little Brian dead."

She paused and leaned over the back of the settee.

"Besides," she whispered, "there are those as argue Mr. Dering could have come back that evening and not a soul be the wiser."

A long and shuddering respiration interrupted the sen-

Beautiful Hazel Harlow's adventures next week.



Mrs. Carew, quick and cool, bore her to the couch, while the Golden Dwarf brought a carafe.

tence. Barbara flung down her duster and leapt forward, to receive the nerveless body of Esther Carew in her arms. The girl had fainted.

Alarmed at the result of her gossip, Barbara supported the delicate frame and drooping limbs to the settee, and would have hastened for water and help. But intelligence returned to Esther's brain, and with it a perception of the dangerous purport her swoon might convey to her attendant. She sprang up unsteadily.

"Don't fetch mamma," she begged; "I'm not ill, Barbara. Only you horrified me, you did, indeed."

"I am sorry, miss," said the maid, and placed a heap of cushions for the tremulous girl; "forgive my bothering you with the nonsense I pick up in the High Street. Don't you pay the least notice to it."

Esther clasped the other's fingers as they hovered around her.

"Barbara," she pleaded, "don't let mamma hear I went off. She—she doesn't like me to think so much of Mr. Dering. I should have such a lecture."

"Bless you, miss!" cried Barbara, "I understand all that. And Mr. Dering is a gentleman and no mistake. The police-officer as was with Inspector Brasher when Ted was arrested told us Mr. Dering couldn't have been kinder. He promised Ted should have every chance to clear himself, and said he didn't think him guilty."

She brought Esther's book to the side of the couch, drew the blind to moderate the heat of the sun, and finished her dusting. At length she halted to put a question.

"Miss Esther," ventured the maid, "who do you imagine did kill the squire? I know it wasn't Ted Spencer, and you know it wasn't Mr. Dering."

Esther Carew fluttered aimlessly the pages of her novel.

"I can't even think, Barbara," she confessed; "but, oh, I do wish they could find out."

There was a rattle of portière-rings at the door, and Mrs. Carew entered, a sheet of notepaper in her hand, her sallow, fretful visage an odd contrast to her smart gown of mauve foulard. Esther got up, staying herself by the settee.

"Ah, you are here, darling," exclaimed her mother, and turned to fix a cold gaze on the maid: Barbara had devoted a sudden and extreme attention to her work. "That will do, Barbara," observed Mrs. Carew sharply; "you may finish your dusting later."

Barbara made a wry mouth—unseen by her mistress. She detested Mrs. Carew no less than she feared her, a characteristic of all the Rosery servants. But she obeyed at once and Esther was left alone with her mother.

Startling stage revelations next week.

"I have been draughting the list of guests for Mr. Hare's garden party," said Mrs. Carew. "It is plain we must invite the Derings, though, of course, thanks to Sir Christopher's death, not to mention Brian's disappearance, none of them will be there."

Esther tottered rather than walked from her place to the French window.

"I don't care what you do, mamma," she rejoined wearily. "Mr. Hare intrusted the affair to you, he can hardly criticise your conduct of it."

"I must play my cards well, though," answered Mrs. Carew, reviewing the files of pencilled names; "it is a great thing for me to be, a whole day, hostess at Wyresdale Park. Really, yours was a most fortunate encounter with Mr. Hare. Gracious, child," she broke off, "how white you look. Are you indisposed?"

Her daughter glided out on to the verandah, the sunbeams dancing in her fair locks and sparkling in her blue, dilated orbs.

"No, mamma," she said; "it is hot and I am dizzy. I will get a breath of air, if there is one stirring, and come back again."

"Don't catch a chill then, pet," warned Mrs. Carew as she sank, with her list, into the luxurious lounge; "what should I say to Mr. Hare if you proved unable to grace a function that is practically given in your honour. I am glad the Derings will be away. Felix Dering's presence in the *rôle* of discarded lover would have been ridiculous, and by this time Mr. Hare's overtures are beyond a doubt."

Esther struggled hard for self-control.

"I have not discarded Mr. Dering, mamma," she objected, clinging to the painted frames of the tall casement, "and I wish I had never met Mr. Otto Hare. Tiny as he is, I dread and hate him. You could not persuade me to marry him, no, not to save my life."

And this concise statement delivered, Esther beat a retreat.

Mrs. Carew saw her graceful figure flit athwart the verandah, dart through the garden, and vanish in her favourite corner of the shrubbery. The keen, selfish gaze of her mother followed her flight.

"Esther has more will than I looked for," confessed Mrs. Carew; "she must not be hurried. Would to Heaven Felix Dering would leave Wyresdale; she will not be tractable while he is in reach."

"Mr. Otto Hare!" announced Barbara, acidly, from the door.

Mrs. Carew started up; a diminutive form, exquisitely groomed, superbly tailored, had just gained the apartment. The mistress of the Rosery advanced to greet her caller.

"Pardon this unseasonable visit," said the Golden Dwarf, and bowed low; "but I have just recollected, Mrs. Carew, that a recent proceeding of mine may seem, to you, not quite in correct taste. Miss Carew honoured me so far as to accept a little mare to which she took a fancy. I forgot myself sufficiently to send her down without seeking your permission. I offer you a thousand apologies."

Mrs. Carew smiled, yet a shrewd light illuminated her expression.

"You are most scrupulous, Mr. Hare," she assured him; "but so valuable a gift——"

"Should not be tendered or received without due consideration," said Otto Hare. "It is for that reason, Mrs. Carew, that, on reflection, I hastened here to repair my error."

He motioned his hostess to a seat and placed himself beside her.

"I am not fond of admitting my defects," he continued; "but I should be a vain fool if I did not recognise that, as a wooer, I am at some disadvantage. Yet it was as a wooer I first sought the Rosery; it is as a wooer I hope to seek it in the future."

The Golden Dwarf coughed and cleared his throat.

"Mrs. Carew," he said, "I love your daughter, Esther. Can you, will you, consent to regard me as a possible son?"

The mistress of the Rosery wrestled with a spasm of delirous joy. Fifty thousand a year and the finest estate in Derbyshire had been deposited, by that brief sentence, at her child's feet.

"Mr. Hare," she conceded, "your proposal flatters both Esther and me. I will not pretend that I have been blind to your liking for her, or that I have not regarded it with entire satisfaction; but, as you admit, you have merely put your suit on a correct basis. It would be indiscreet to approach Esther yet."

Otto Hare assented by a gesture. He was on the point of answering when a slender outline crossed the verandah and stepped in at the French window. Esther had returned.

"Ah, Esther, dear," said her mother, "I have a surprise for you. Mr. Hare has been good enough to pay us a morning call."

The girl faced about, the advent of the Golden Dwarf always disturbed her. Otto Hare proffered a small hand, muscular, though delicate as a child's. Esther touched it reluctantly, and then, mastered by the heat, Barbara's news, and her loathed contact with the Golden Dwarf, fainted once more.

Mrs. Carew, quick and cool, bore her to the couch, while Otto Hare brought a carafe. As the drops of water splashed on Esther's pallid skin she parted her lips to utter an appeal.

"Felix, darling," moaned the girl, "don't leave me!"

The glances of Mrs. Carew and the Golden Dwarf spoke volumes. Mrs. Carew seized and pressed her visitor's hand.

"Do not let her recover and see you," she whispered. "You may trust me; I am devoted to your interests."

Otto Hare kissed her withered fingers theatrically and strode from the room, not waiting for Barbara to escort him.

A few seconds the Golden Dwarf paused on the gravel kerb before the spider phaeton dashed up, Kraft driving, a groom in the rumble.

"You've been quick," he said; "I saw you from the corner of the High Street."

Hare climbed in.

"You can walk home," he told the groom bluntly, and the man descended. His master grasped the reins and whipped the cobs into a desperate trot. As they flew along the Golden Dwarf addressed himself to the elephantine frame that occupied the space by him, its enormous bulk tilting to the near side the finely-poised carriage.

"Kraft," he hissed, "we must get rid of him."

"Who?" queried the huge German.

"Felix Dering," snarled Hare; "who else, you sleepy Deutscher? Didn't you swear I should have the girl? There is no other way. Rack your fat brains for a plan, can't you?"

"I do not need to," said Kraft slowly, cutting a Havana, "while you went to flatter the lady's mamma, I thought—and not fruitlessly." The German felt for a battered match-box and lighted his cigar. "I go to London to-night, Otto," he added, "to lay a train, a trickle of unseen gunpowder a hundred and fifty miles long, between Wyresdale and—and Pimlico."

The Golden Dwarf surveyed his companion; a curious furrow had spread from cheek to cheek of Joseph Kraft. It suggested a kind of mirth—mischievous, intelligent, fantastic.

"Do you know, Kraft," said Otto Hare with a shudder, "there are moments when I could believe you to be the very deuce!"

"Adventures of an Actress" next week.

CHAPTER XVII.

Mrs. Schwartz is Surprised.

"No more of that, Judith, I am deep enough in the mire already; but what's a taste of penal to the white cap and the noose."

As he spoke Neal Garland thrust his soiled fingers between his throat and his crumpled linen to ease off the pressure of his collar; it might have been bent on strangling him prematurely. He had grown pale and his mouth twitched.

Judith sneered.

"Calm yourself, my pusillanimous brother," she said, "I won't press the point. It's unusual for you to admit cowardice, yet you are too much of a bully not to be a dastard at heart. However, since you won't adopt the short way, what do you propose doing to rid us of this?"

She touched lightly with a small foot the prostrate figure of the slumbering Brian Dering.

Neal gazed at her; his pinched features betrayed a reluctant admiration.

"You're a tiger-cat, Judith," he muttered. "I fancied you'd something of the sort in you, but curse me if I thought you'd quite so much of it. Listen, I'm not scrupulous when a grim bit of work provides the sole chance of safety. Here violence is absurd; Mrs. Schwartz will teach the young dog to forget his name and drop his aristocratic manners. When it's prudent we'll slip him into the East-end, to a baby-farmer, and he can be worked off in quiet."

Judith shrugged her shoulders.

"A cur's trick," she commented, "but a clever cur at that. Well, employ your own methods; you know the sewers of society better than most. What about your awkward colleague, the one-armed sailor?"

"Keep him satisfied as best you can," retorted Neal. "Tell him he shall share the proceeds when we get Felix Dering fairly in our clutches. Persuade him he must be patient."

"And you really intend to let the brute blackmail you?" queried Judith, her lip curled by a sudden disdain.

Neal Garland frowned.

"Not I," he declared. "Perhaps Foley will meet with an accident, perhaps I shall be at the back of the said accident. Go slow, Judith, you women are a reckless lot."

Judith put down her veil and folded her cloak about her.

"I suppose I shall understand you ultimately," she confessed; "but you seem to me at present a strange mixture of daring and indecision."

Her brother grinned.

"It's my patent," he replied, "and it's kept me off the gallows so far. *S-sh!* the kid's awake."

Brian had, indeed, stirred and sat up. His glance fell on Judith and he sprang to his feet, dropping the kitten in his delight.

"It's Miss Garland!" he exclaimed; "dear, dear Miss Garland, take me away, please take me away!"

The woman evaded him, but the boy clung to her skirts. Angered, Judith Garland wrenched them out of the childish fists, and, bidding Neal adieu with a nod, hastened from the room.

The door that had closed behind her swung open, and the stout proportions of Mrs. Schwartz sailed into the apartment. Seeing her, Brian retreated precipitately to his hassock near the old-fashioned steel fender. Mrs. Schwartz sank into a chair and fanned herself with a newspaper which lay convenient to her grasp.

"Your sister's a credit to the Garlands, Neal, my man," she observed; "are there any more of you at home?"

"Dash it, Keturah," growled Neal, "you've been listening."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Schwartz, and poked her red coiffure into position; "no secrets between friends. Don't you imagine," she went on, "you've bitten off this time rather more than you will be able to chew? You've a sight too many partners for me. Why's Judith in it? She's fetching enough to marry some rich idiot if she wants cash, and not sufficient of a fool to help you from mere sisterly affection. What's her game? You told me precious little but the nipper's name the other night, and I hate half a tale."

Neal Garland scowled.

"Speak low, you forget the child," he muttered, and glanced at Brian, who had returned to his playmate the kitten.

"Let the brat hear," snarled Mrs. Schwartz; "I'll knock it out of his skull when I tackle his education in earnest."

Neal stooped to the ear of the inquisitor.

"If you must have the truth," he explained, lowering his voice, "Judith adores Felix Dering, this child's cousin. She wishes to bring him in to the title and estates and compel him to make her his wife."

Keturah Schwartz wrung her thick palms.

"Heavens!" she cried: "love next! Neal, you're an ass! You'll get me gaoled as sure as eggs are eggs. Work on the cross for money if you will, but don't meddle with the tender passion."

The other brimmed a glass from the bottle of sherry that stood on the table by the tray.

"I'd no choice," he argued; "Judith drew the covert and set the pace. She needed help to dispose of the kid so I joined, on shares. Besides, I am essential to her hold over Dering. We could get him swung, if we chose, on my evidence."

Mrs. Schwartz poured herself out a cup of cold tea, diluted by her favourite spirit, gin.

"Mark me, Neal," she said after a prolonged gulp of the blend, "Judy there will dupe you. She's smart and she's bold, while you hate risks. Also, she's in love, and love's a queer thing. Blest if I wouldn't back her to round on you any time for the sake of her dear Felix."

Neal muttered an oath.

"The day she does," he hissed, "she will sign her death-warrant. But you're wrong, Keturah; Judith can't fling me—I'm her trump card."

Mrs. Schwartz emptied her cup and prepared to toss her lace apron over her head. "Positive as ever, my lad," she yielded; "time will show, I'm sick for a nap. Go and scrape your stubbly chin and I'll stand you a shillingsworth of the Aquarium and an oyster-supper to follow."

The person invited to these gaieties winced and his jaw set rebelliously. Yet he lounged towards the exit and disappeared on to the rattle-trap landing. Keturah Schwartz composed herself beneath her apron; soon her regular, stertorous respirations announced that she slept.

The tiny baronet, thus ignored, gained the window, and pondered the squalid panorama of the mean street below. The yellow sunshine irradiated his tear-stained features and patched garments, the tortoiseshell kitten purred gravely against his bosom. In the thoroughfare outside children ran and shouted, lost in their boisterous sport. Brian watched them from a corner of a cracked pane.

As he stood there a gentle touch distracted his attention. He turned and saw the sympathetic countenace of Louisa, the slatternly servant that had given him the sweets. She held in her fingers a couple of sponge-cakes.

"Poor lamb," she murmured, "you didn't have much tea, I'll be bound. Could you eat these? I had to come up for the tray, and I allowed she'd be dozing."

"Thank you very much," faltered the little baronet. "You are kind, Louisa; but I wish I could go home. Why would not Miss Garland take me home with her?"

"Who is Miss Garland?" whispered Louisa, keeping a vigilant espionage on the figure of her snoring mistress.

Brian broke a piece of his cake for the tortoiseshell kitten.

"She is my mother's companion," he said. "She was here just now. Please," he broke off, "I should like a drink of milk."

The girl brought him the jug from the table and the child swallowed what was left of the fluid. Tears trembled on Louisa's lashes as she carried the vessel back again. For this purpose she had to approach Mrs. Schwartz. To her horror the lace had been twitched somewhat aside, and a human orb, large, bloodshot, malignant, was studying her. Louisa dropped the milk-jug and recoiled.

Mrs. Schwartz chuckled.

"Be off, you inquisitive, sentimental huzzy," was her advice, "and don't *prowl*, or I'll lose something and have you arrested."

A knock suspended Louisa's retort, a triple knock that echoed from the distant hall to the top of the stairs. The servant hastened to answer it.

A moment later a heavy step creaked down the passage, mounted the steep flight, and reached the parlour door. A massive bulk rolled in, straw-hatted, frock-coated, spectacled. It was Joseph Kraft.

The smile died out of Mrs. Schwartz's face, the quivering mirth from her loose limbs. She gasped, and passed her hand over her eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MESSAGE IN SCRATCHED LETTERS.

"AND so things are just being permitted to slide, Mr. Brasher. A fine state of affairs when a baronet, justice of the peace, and lord of the manor is murdered on the high road and nobody is punished for it."

Archibald Geddes twisted his big brown moustache and regarded provokingly the stalwart police-inspector. Mr. Brasher leaned against the glass-fronted counter of the chemist's shop and played with the scent sachets that formed a small pile on it.

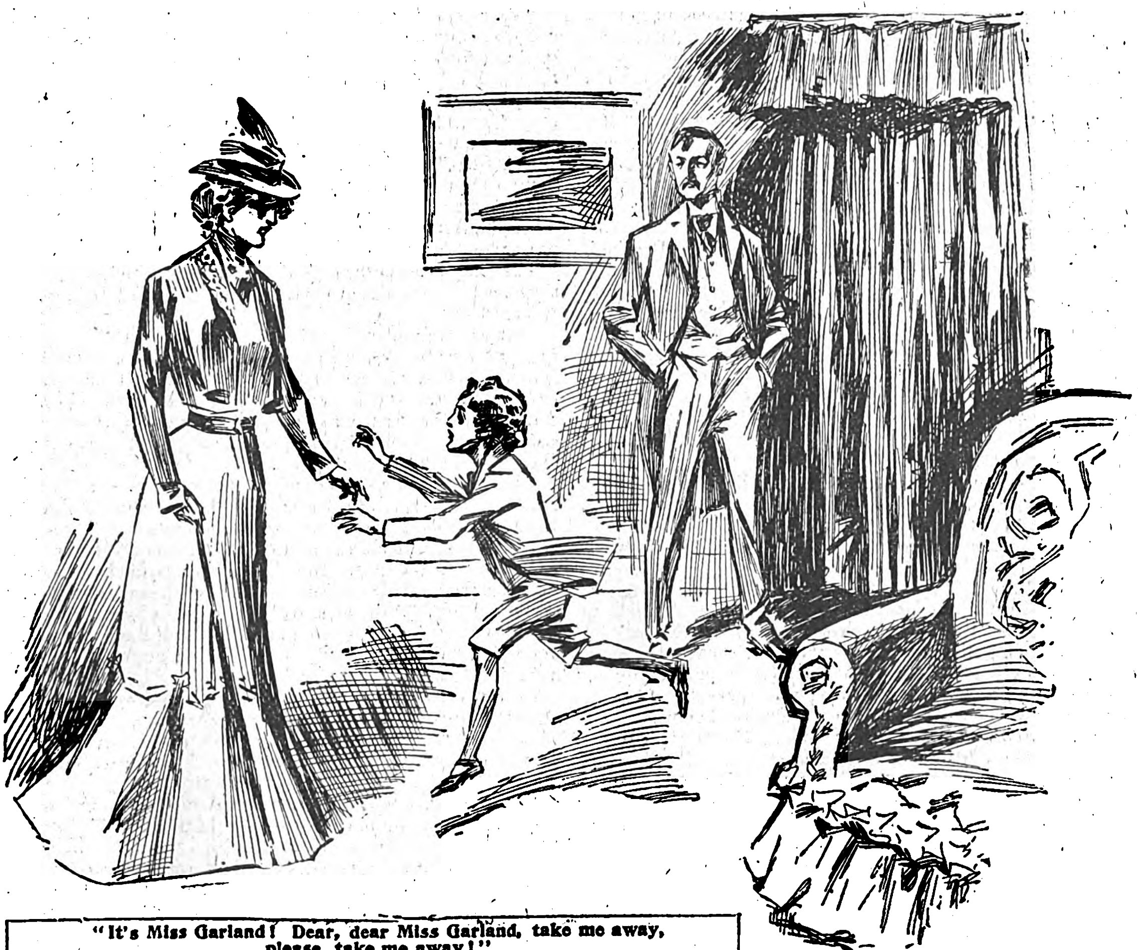
"Your conclusions are not justified, Mr. Geddes," he said; "our best attention is still given to the events which preceded, and followed, the death of Sir Christopher. It is just eight days, almost to an hour, since the squire's body was discovered, and if our researches have not yet proved successful—to your knowledge, Mr. Geddes, to your knowledge!—we may claim a reasonable time in which to make them."

The assistant came round, lowered the awning, and remained in the public portion of the shop. He had a quill between his teeth and chewed it thoughtfully.

"Any word of Spencer?" he queried.

Michael Brasher coughed.

"Official reticence apart," said the Inspector, "I may



"It's Miss Garland! Dear, dear Miss Garland, take me away, please, take me away!"

Beautiful Hazel Harlow's adventures next week.

confess that we have not got upon a valid clue as to his whereabouts. The secret is uncommonly well kept—for Wyresdale. I would sacrifice half a year's pay to recapture the fellow; he has put a black mark against me in the books of the force."

"No idea as to who helped him from outside?" demanded Geddes: "those bars were neatly taken out, Brasher."

Brasher shook his head.

"You're discreet, Mr. Geddes," he owned, "and I will admit that there, at least, we are dished, clean dished! I feel it; Michael Brasher's professional self-esteem is cut to the quick. Any suggestion, even the slightest, would be gladly received. You are a clever theorist, Mr. Geddes; does no probability occur to you?"

Geddes smiled and twisted his moustache till it threatened to curl from his cheeks and lip.

"I am taking an interest in the case," he admitted, "but I prefer to work alone."

Brasher rubbed a pair of great palms together.

"I could have you watched," he threatened.

The Scotchman tapped his forehead.

"I conduct private detective operations in here," he declared; "by ratiocination. You can't post a constable in my brain, Brasher. Go along with you, unless you wish to make yourself ridiculous by arresting me on suspicion."

Michael Brasher sighed and took his tall frame and large reflective face across Caleb Forester's business premises. In the High Street he met the chemist's daughter and bowed low. The rush of colour to his swarthy complexion showed that the Inspector's romance still weighed upon his heart.

Connie stopped and extended her little hand. Mr. Brasher accepted it as though it were some fragile flower.

"I called to see your father," he observed, "but he is out, they tell me, so I had a chat with Mr. Geddes. Will Mr. Forester be at the Wheatsheaf?"

Constance Forester blushed.

"I'm—I'm afraid he will," she stammered. "Mr. Brasher, you'll be sure not to let there be trouble if—if father should get arguing one day when he's had too much. He grows so excited, and a policeman might be rough or impatient. You'll protect him, won't you—for my sake, Mr. Brasher?" she added, bringing her natural coquetry to the support of her filial affection.

The Inspector retained the small fingers.

"Duty is duty, Miss Connie," he said, and breathed hard.

Connie snatched her hand away.

"I beg your pardon," she snapped; "I thought you were a friend of mine." And hurling this shot into the Inspector's magazine left him without more ado.

Michael Brasher walked on, a sorrowful, blue-coated form.

"It's hard," he muttered, "that I, who would give my life to win the little lass, should be driven to plot against her peace; and no Victoria Cross or glory for it, either."

He pushed on, grumbling in his stiff, dark beard, towards the open country at the foot of the quaint thoroughfare. The sound of a horse's hoofs aroused the Inspector from a distasteful reverie, and he glanced up to behold Felix Dering, mounted on his chestnut hunter. The young rider's seat was nerveless, his gazed abstracted.

Mr. Brasher stepped into the road to salute. Felix drew rein.

"I've some news for you, sir," said the Inspector, and fixed a keen survey on the gallant countenance above him. "We've been dragging the Black Pool, as you wished."

Felix gripped at the rein.

"Have you discovered any—anything?" he faltered.

Brasher nodded.

"I'm keeping it quiet for a while," stipulated the Inspector; "it's better so. But the fact is, sir, we hooked up a paper parcel. The contents were a water-worn stone and a little flannel night-gown, with a monogram on the collar, 'B.D.'"

"Great Heavens!" cried Felix; "the child must have been kidnapped and the garment discarded!"

"So I conclude, sir," said Brasher; "I had just that to report, sir. We are prosecuting our inquiries in every direction but without effect at present."

Felix bit his lip.

"Brasher," he murmured, "the rumour you mentioned to me—that I was responsible for the disappearance of my tiny cousin—would thrive on the discovery you have made."

"It would, sir," conceded the Inspector; "and unless you can track the boy and restore him you will not be able to choke the slander."

"I am glad, at all events," said the rider of the chestnut, sadly, "to hear you term it a slander, Brasher."

"Slander it is, sir," responded Michael Brasher, with dry point, "till it be proved."

He saluted again, and was about to continue his walk when he halted, struck by an idea.

"Excuse me, sir," he added, patting the chestnut lingeringly, "but I believe you are well-affected towards Caleb Forester, the chemist in the High Street. You gave him a lift bytimes, the gossips say."

"A mere trifle," answered Felix; "the poor beggar collapsed under the loss of his wife, took to drink, and couldn't meet a quarter's rent. I played the good fairy so far as his landlord was concerned. I fear no beneficent spirit will cure him of the passion for liquor he acquired in his efforts to drown his grief. Has he been falling into your clutches?"

"Hardly," said Brasher, "but he talks in his cups. A dangerous habit, don't you think so, sir?"

Felix stared.

"I shouldn't imagine Caleb had any secrets to blab or to preserve," he decided.

The Inspector mumbled an incoherent comment, gained the kerb, repeated his soldier-like farewell, and strode away.

Felix Dering gasped and roused the chestnut to a canter. Lost in meditation, he reached the avenue which led to Dering House, trotted up it to the stables, and stalked thence through the raftered hall to his own chamber. On the staircase a figure passed him, shrinking away with a painful convulsion. It was Lady Dering, pale, wide-orbed, distraught. Felix shuddered.

"I alone stand to profit by the blows that have stricken her," he sighed; "what wonder if she has come to shun me. Heaven knows how soon she will doubt me also."

In his pleasant chamber he flung himself into a wicker chair and trifled with the hunting-crop he had brought up from the stables. Its handle had been formed by a perfect length of Malacca, once magnificently polished.

"Now why," pondered Felix, "why did Brasher speak to me of Caleb Forester. 'He talks in his cups, a dangerous habit.' How can that interest me?"

He flipped at the dangling loop of the crop; the end of the cane struck him as unreasonably crushed and scratched. The shape of the scratches caught his attention; they resembled letters. Felix scanned them, revolving the Malacca slowly.

It was not his whip, he perceived suddenly, but one of Sir Christopher's much resembling his. The baronet had carried it on that mysterious last ride, and it had been found beside the squire's dead body, to be brought home along with its owner. What message had it borne unnoticed all these days?

(*To be continued.*)

Startling stage revelations next week.

S. Brewster Fisher

LADY DUGDALE'S DIAMONDS.

By Mrs. J. H. RIDDELL.

Author of "George Geith of Fen Court," "The Senior Partner," etc.

"SHE was not My Lady then."

Thus Mr. Thomas Walters, the rotund, rubicund, good tempered landlord of that well-known village inn, "The Dugdale Arms," which hangs forth its sign, resplendent with all the colours of the rainbow and a dazzling amount of gold emblazoning, across the green, friend or stranger must pass by, if he wish to reach Oakhill, Lord Dugdale's ancestral seat.

She was not My Lady then, although we often called her my lady, for she had married in order to get as near having a right to be so addressed as an Honourable could bring her; and I name my story "Lady Dugdale's Diamonds" for that reason.

There were plenty of heirs between her husband and the title when we took up housekeeping at Johnesborough. but they are all dead and gone.

Mr. Will, my old master, is now Earl of Dugdale. I have known him hard up for a guinea, and this day he can hold his own with the wealthiest in the land.

He is just the same as ever, though—just the same careless, kindly gentleman we all loved so dearly.

There is much talk in these days about servants caring for nothing and no one, save their own interests and their own selves. For my part I say there always were and there always will be some masters and some mistresses no servant could like.

I never served anyone except Mr. Will, and I can honestly say I would have gone through fire and water for him.

The Honourable William Pattingham—that was his name and title. My father chanced to be one of the tenants on the Oakhill estate, where Mr. Will, an orphan, was brought up by his uncle, the seventh earl; and many a morning we two little lads whipped the trout stream, or surprised puss at an early toilette, or startled the partridges amongst the stubble.

When he grew up he was the most devil-me-care young gentleman I ever did see—always in debt, always falling in love—quite as often falling out of it—in one way the most reckless, restless, extravagant master a man could have had, and yet in another, thoughtful, and occasionally even sad.

"Why did my uncle bring me up to all this, Tom?" he would say sometimes, pointing to the useless and expensive articles he gathered about him. "Why did he not put me to some honest calling? If he had not a living to spare, why could not he have made a lawyer of me? I think, Tom, I might have been Chief Justice myself, issuing urgent invitations to various poor wretches to appear before her most gracious Majesty, instead of having to decline her most gracious Majesty's pressing invitations as best I can. It is enough to drive a fellow mad. I have the tastes, habits, extravagances of ten thousand a year, and I never had but a bare five hundred pounds per annum, which went to the Jews (would the race had never been permitted to leave Babylon) half a century ago, or thereabouts."

That was his style, and a man, no matter how stupid he might be, could not help brightening up under such an employer.

We are very much like horses, a slow one always tries to keep pace with a fast goer—I did. For instance, I did not understand what Mr. Will meant by an invitation to appear before Queen Victoria, till I had read the next writ which my master flung down on his dressing table with an oath, when that little blackguard Simeon—a true descendant of him who, with his brother Levi, is stigmatized in Holy Writ, as "having instruments of cruelty in their habitations"—touched him on the shoulder and asked him, rather pressingly, to spend the evening at Mr. Absalom's in Cursitor Street.

The wretch had contrived to reach even the innermost sanctuary by representing himself as a hairdresser and his man as an assistant.

"Good-bye, Tom," said Mr. Will after I had taken off his dress-coat and helped him on with another, holding out his hand just as if he had been my equal—and by that I knew he felt it dreadfully. "Good-bye, and keep up your spirits. I will disappoint these beastly Jews

"Adventures of an Actress" next week.

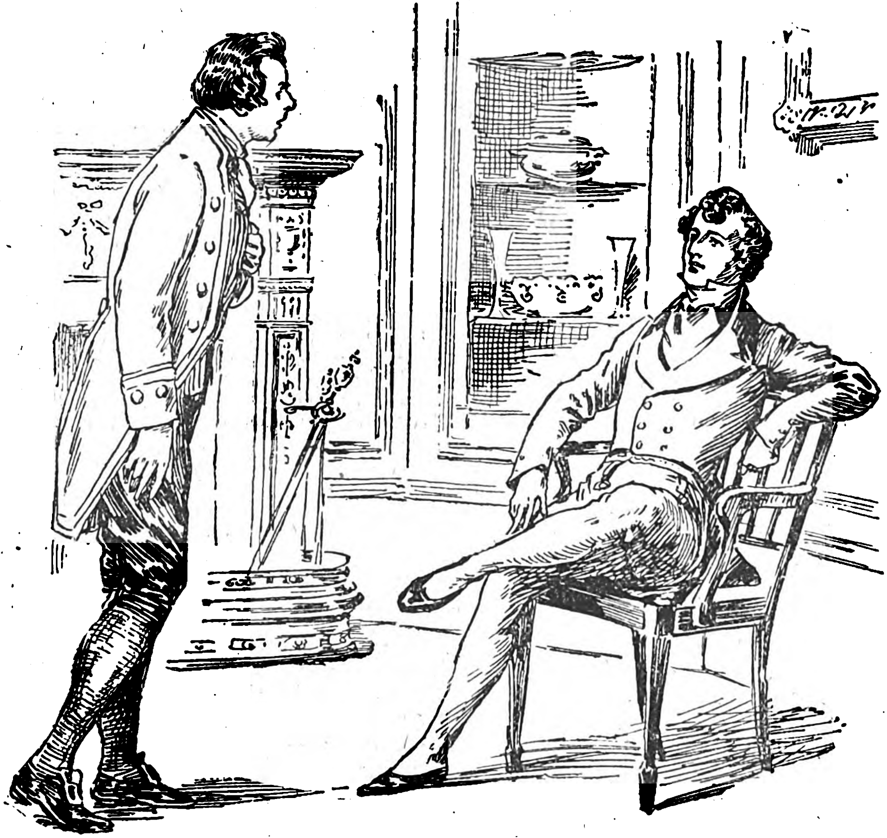
one of these days, if it be even at the expense of an ounce of lead."

And then with a mocking bow, he turned to Simeon and said:

"It is not to your tribe I am alluding, my dear fellow. I fancy it has not been all milk and honey with your branch of the family, and that the rough part of the labour fell to your share."

And so he went—a gentleman, every inch of him—for the last time to Cursitor Street.

You may guess how I felt after he was gone. Every time these fellows had him in their clutches, it seemed harder and harder for him to get out of them again.



"I had no idea things were so bad as all this," he remarked.

All he owned had gone long and long before. His relatives would neither give or lend him a shilling. His friends were getting tired, and I could not wonder at it.

One gentleman may be willing to help another at a pinch, but it is not in Christian nature to like spending good money to fill a Jew's coffers.

I sat down in the dressing room he had just left, with his clothes littered about as he had thrown them off, and wondered where we could turn for help—wondered till I grew tired with casting about in my mind whether there was one left who would see him out of this trouble, and if so, where that one ought to be looked for.

My head was young then, but it grew giddy reckoning up, or rather trying to reckon up, what he owed, and how the tangle was ever to be unravelled, when who should walk in but a lawyer who had seen Mr. Will through with a few bad scrapes.

Though on the last occasion he had vowed he would never advance another sixpence, still my heart leaped into my mouth for joy at sight of him.

"Your master is gone to Berkeley Square, Walters, I suppose," he began. "I saw the countess was entertaining as I passed, but I thought I would take my chance of finding him dressing, and late, as usual. Will you tell him he had better keep out of the way for a little while? Marston is going to arrest, and two or three more will follow suit. Thought he would like to know. What an extravagant sinner it is," he added, looking at the array of articles on the toilette table; and he would have gone with that, but I shut the door and implored him to listen to me.

Perhaps I was wrong to talk so freely of things that I only knew in confidence; but I could not help it. I loved Mr. Will with all my heart, and those Jews, with their evil faces, and heavy gold chains sprawling over their gaudy waistcoats, and huge rings on their dirty fingers, had filled me with a disgust and hatred that I could not have expressed in words.

Although he happened to be a lawyer, Mr. Perrin was a gentleman. As a rule, I do not think much of lawyers and such like; but they say every rule has its exception, and Mr. Perrin was an exception to mine.

I think he must have been fond of Mr. Will, too. Lawyers, even the worst of them, I have noticed, entertain a sort of sneaking fondness for wild characters, for reckless, improvident chaps, such as Mr. Will used to be. It is the redeeming point about them. There may be a providence about it, too, as there is about a mother being fondest of her lame, or blind or imbecile child.

Anyhow, it was not for the money he got out of Mr. Will, his lawyer looked after his affairs then. He is making a good thing of the Earl of Dugdale's estates now; but Lord! which of us then ever dreamed he would some day reign at Oakhill?

I, for one, never could have served him as I did, with a perfectly single heart, had such a change seemed probable, or even possible. He was a poor master, and I a poor servant, and he made me his friend, and I loved him, for all he was the Honourable William Pattingham and I Tom Walters; and I think, for the same reason that I was fond of Mr. Will, Mr. Perrin liked him too.

With a very grave face he listened to what I had to say, and then he remarked:

"I had no idea things were so bad as all this comes to, Walters."

Then I made answer:

"Sir, they are worse; and you would think so, too, if only in a minute, so to speak, I was able to remember all about everything."

"You have remembered enough," he said, and sat for a minute quiet.

Then he got up to go, but stopped to observe:

"I wish your master would follow my advice."

"He would follow anything, sir, that meant ease of mind and a berth in the colonies," I was bold enough to reply.

"Following my advice would mean ease of mind and a comfortable life in England."

"Ah! sir, I don't think his pride would let him do that," I answered, for I thought Mr. Perrin wanted my master to pass through the Court, and I knew it would go sorely against the grain to have such a proposal even made to him.

It was not the fashion then, as it is now, for noblemen to shuffle off their debts in that way like any butcher or greengrocer; and it may be that very idea of its being supposed Mr. Will could so demean himself made me speak quick and sharp, but Mr. Perrin only laughed and said:

"His pride did not stand in the way of his getting into debt, and ought not to stand in the way of his getting out of it; it is not so much his pride though, as his prejudices."

I looked in a dictionary after he went away, to learn what he meant by the last word, but the dictionary explanation did not help me.

Next day he came again.

"Marston has been paid," he said, "and your master has left Cursitor Street, but I have advised him not to come back here until an arrangement can be effected with the tribes of Israel, so if you put up some of his clothes I will take them with me."

"Can't I go to him, sir?" I asked.

"No, you had better stay where you are and answer questions. All you know about Mr. Pattingham is that he was arrested last night and that you have not heard from him since. You need not mention my name in connection with his affairs."

"No, sir. Please give my duty to Mr. Will, and I hope he won't be long away."

"If he follows my advice he will never come back here," said Mr. Perrin.

But Mr. Will did come back. Months after that night when Simeon arrested him, he walked into his rooms as if he had only left them an hour before.

"Yes, Tom, I am free," he said, in answer to my awkward expression of delight at seeing him once more, "and yet I have lost my liberty—there's a paradox—at least I shall lose it at half past eleven to-morrow morning."

Still I was so stupid I did not see his meaning.

"Oh sir," I exclaimed, "I was in hopes all that was over."

"All what was over?" he repeated; then burst out laughing. "Oh, the Simeon and Levi business. So it is, Tom. No more arrests, unless I am a greater idiot than I take myself to be—no more royal invitations, unless they are dated from Windsor Castle—no more credit—everything is to be cash on delivery for the future with Will Pattingham—ironically styled The Honourable."

"Have you had any money left you, sir?" I asked; "or," I added, a light breaking in upon me, "is it——"

"Yes," said Mr. Will, "it is——"

My heart leaped into my mouth, and then fell back again like a leaden weight. I tried to wish him joy—I tried to look cheerful and pleasant, but it would not do. He saw the news had shocked me, and so he went on:

"All men must die, you know, and I suppose most men must marry, at any rate I must, therefore it behoves me to make the best of a—good bargain," he finished after a pause so slight, that many a one might not have noticed it. "The lady is wealthy, generous, kind; my people are delighted with the match, they make no objection on the score of family—why, indeed, should they? Her grandfather on the one side bore a name better known throughout England than that of Pattingham-Smith. Her grandfather on the other side came of an almost equally old race—he was a Jones. Her father thought the two names too good to be divorced, and so dubbed himself 'Smythe-Johnes,' after which he died, and bequeathed his cognomen and fortune to his only daughter Amelia Selina Annabella, whom I am to marry to-morrow."

"Are—are you going to take me with you, sir, on the wedding trip?" I asked.

"I am afraid not," he said, with one of his old queer smiles. "You like a pretty face, Tom, and it would not suit for you to be flirting with my wife's maid. The future Mrs. Pattingham has strict ideas, and might not approve of any indiscretion. There, I declare the fellow has tears in his eyes. Tom, do you think that my marriage is going to part us? Did you think me such a cold-blooded monster as to contemplate flinging over an old friend—for you are my friend?

"I have been considering into what good berth I can slip you in the new establishment, and have decided that you shall be butler. You must, therefore, go down to Johnesborough, and have everything ready for our return.

"We are not to reside much in London. I mean to become a model country gentleman. I shall interfere with the poor people, and see that the children learn their catechism.

"Do you know, my grandmother is so charmed with my prospects that she has sent me her diamonds to present to the bride. They came to her, not through the Pattinghams, but some of her own more august progenitors. They would have been a catch for the Jews in the good old times—eh, Tom?"

I answered him with what spirit and heart I could muster. The old times had often been bad enough; but it seemed to me the new times were promising to be worse still.

"You will let me know where you are going to be married, sir?" I asked after awhile. "I should like ——"

Beautiful Hazel Harlow's adventures next week.

"To be present when the bolt is drawn," he interrupted. "Well, I don't know that there need be any difficulty about the matter. The sacrifice is to take place at St. George's, of course; and—yes, you may come—only, Tom, my lad, if you feel surprised at anything in the ceremony, try not to look so, there's a good fellow, and keep a still tongue afterwards," and with that he held out his hand, and I—well, you can think what you please about it; but we had been boys together, and I loved him, and he seemed going away from me for ever.

So I kissed it, and then broke out crying like a woman —or a fool.

"Cheer up, Tom," he exclaimed, "when we come back you will know Mrs. Pattingham for the true, honest, amiable creature she is. She has been liberality itself to me, and I only hope I may be able to make her as good a husband as she deserves. I mean to try. Heaven knows I do," he added, and then he went off humming an opera air; and I thought I had seen the last of light-hearted, easy-going Mr. Will.

The next morning I thought so more than ever. As the bride came down the aisle, leaning on her husband's arm. I caught a glimpse of her face for the first time.

I knew then the part of the ceremony he imagined would surprise me, and I turned my face towards the wall that no one might see the amazement I knew was written on it.

She looked old enough to be his mother. She was ugly enough to have been burnt for a witch in the days when witches were burnt. She had no figure—she was no shape—she had no presence; and her tall, handsome, winning, gracious, well-born husband had sold himself for life to this woman to get out of the hands of those Jews.

Though I was in a church, I prefixed a word to Jews that I won't repeat here; and meeting Simeon in Piccadilly, on my way home, I had much ado to keep from knocking him down.

I wish I had now. The will to do it and the opportunity never dovetailed so neatly together afterwards.

But it is the story of the diamonds I was to tell, you remind me. Patience, I am coming to that. You have now the main threads of it in your hand. I served the Honourable William Pattingham, who, marrying Miss Smythe-Johnes, promoted me to be butler at Johnesborough.

To Mrs. Pattingham, Lady Dugdale—the Dowager I mean—presented her wonderful diamonds, which Mr. Will sent to Rundell and Bridge to be reset. His wife wanted to wear them on the occasion of her presentation at Court. Thus the diamonds were at the jewellers, I at Johnesborough, and Mr. Will and his wife on their wedding-tour.

It was very kind of Mr. Will, giving me the butler's place at Johnesborough; but I could not help wishing he had arranged that I should learn my duties before going there.

When a stern and stately housekeeper, who had been at Johnesborough in the times of Smythe-Johnes, addressed me, I wished my shoes were big enough to hide in. However, I took heart of grace, after awhile, and gave her my confidence—told her how I had been Mr. Will's own man—how of his goodness he had chosen me to fill the post of butler; how I knew little or nothing of what a butler was expected to do; and, to wind up all, how thankful I should be if she would give me a few hints.

Over her spectacles the old lady looked at me for a minute. Then she said, "Young man, you will do; you are modest and ingenious." (Somehow it seemed to me I was then always running up against people who used long words). "I will instruct you myself. Few persons, male or female, know more of the nature of a butler's duties than I."

Which was quite true. Mrs. Barrett deserved all the praise she was good enough to bestow on herself.

By the time Mr. Will returned, I had learned enough not to disgrace his recommendation. Indeed my Lady herself seemed surprised at my progress, for she said to me one day, "I had no notion, Walters, you had so correct an idea of the duties of your position. Even my dear father could have found no fault with the manner in which you discharge them."

This was high praise from her Ladyship. The doings of Johnes Johnesborough seemed, in those days, right in the sight of his daughter—as right as her own doings do now.

No one ever can tell how a marriage will turn out. I am sure, had any person told me, that day in St. George's church, I should some day consider my master had done a good thing for himself in taking Miss Johnes for better for worse, I must have laughed out in very scorn and bitterness; but the pair had not been long back at Johnesborough before I began to believe she was the very wife for Mr. Will.

If she was fussy and fidgety—and who could doubt her being both?—Mr. Will was too much the other way. She kept things together, she prevented his getting into debt again, she led him into paths of respectability so fenced in by ideas, and traditions, and responsibilities, and proprieties, that I think it would have been next to impossible for any man to break bounds, even had he wished to do so. But Mr. Will did not wish. For the first time he had a chance given him of doing well, and he was not above taking advantage of it. I know he felt his wife had given him all she had in her power to bestow, and that it behoved him to try to make her some return.

When he married her there was not a morsel of love on his side, but it grew. Day by day, month by month, year by year it went on putting out buds and shoots, and now I doubt if there is a man in the county fonder of his wife and the mother of his children than William, Earl of Dugdale.

And as for the Countess, I think she gets younger every week, and she is not half so plain as she was when she relieved Mr. William of his debts, and took it in hand to make a steady, respectable, and respected country gentleman of him.

But I am running ahead too fast. When she came home to Johnesborough I did not much care for her, and I liked her ways still less; fussing here, and fuming there; worrying herself about the merest trifles, and nothing to be put out of the regular course even for a moment.

If she had got hold of any gentleman less easy natured and sweet tempered than Mr. Will, she would have driven him, or he would have driven her, mad in three months.

Even Mrs. Barrett confessed that in some things Mrs. Pattingham was difficult to please.

I tried to please her for Mr. Will's sake, and was making way in her good graces, when one day there came a letter from some place very far away, where old Lady Pattingham, the Dowager, generally spent three parts of the year, saying she was dangerously ill, and summoning Mr. Will and my Lady to her side.

Mr. Will was her favourite of the whole family. She had done a great deal for him, to my knowledge—paid debts for him often, and given him money, together with a large quantity of good advice, and then, finding that nothing did him any permanent good, she tired, like the best of his friends, and returned the letters he sent her unopened.

Still her heart was with him, everybody knew; and her conduct in the matter of the diamonds proved that she was more than ready to forgive, when once she saw a hope of reformation.

I do not think it occurred to Mr. Will that she had any thought of making him her heir; not so, however, with my Lady. She was not mercenary exactly, and yet she was sufficiently worldly-wise to know it would be folly to throw away the chance of a legacy, and accordingly she would hear of no delay on this occasion, but was even more anxious than Mr. Will to start at once.

Anyhow, to make a long story short, they left Johnesborough the same day the news arrived. In a letter Mr. Will wrote to me from London he said neither his uncle nor the Countess was in London, that he would not wait for the Earl's company, but travel on without delay. The period of his return must be uncertain; but he would send instructions home from time to time.

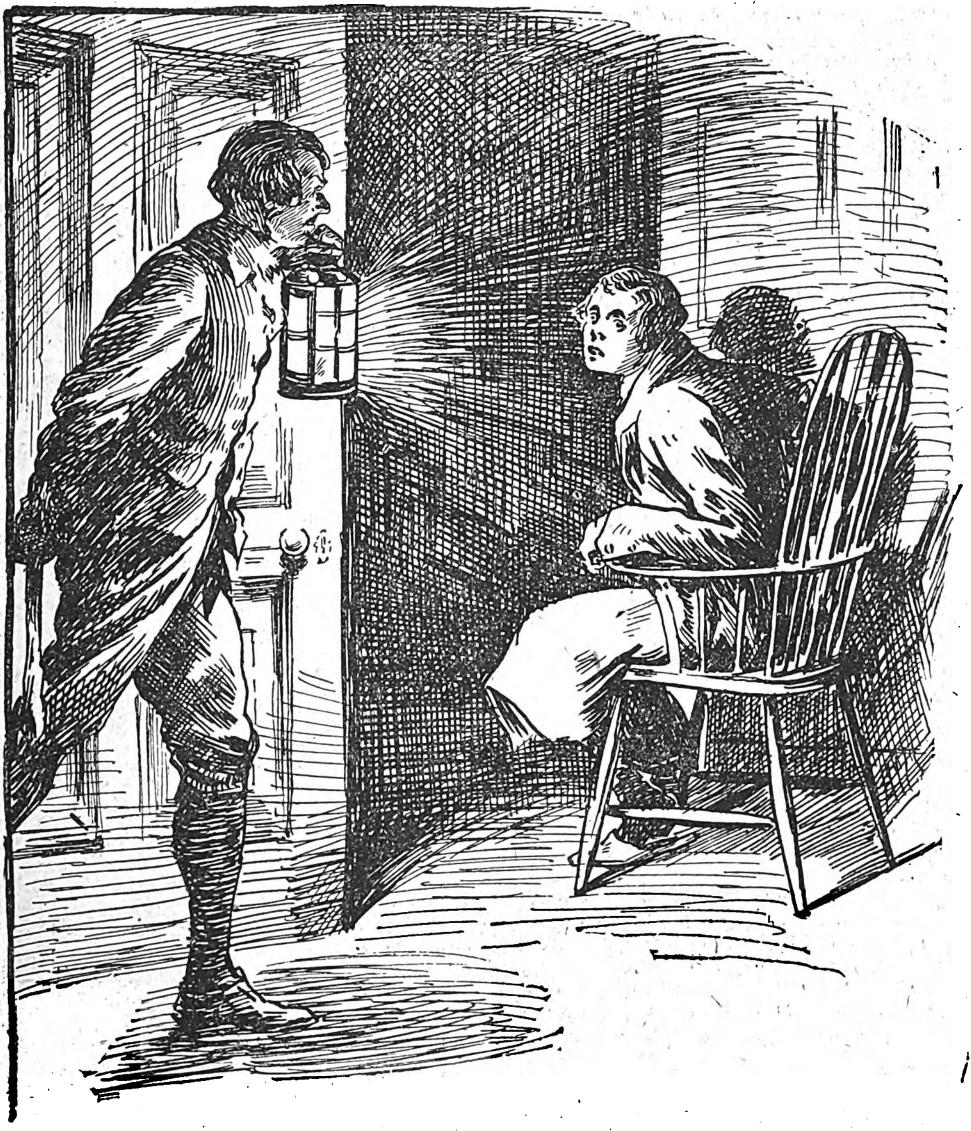
Thus, once again we were all quiet at Johnesborough; and mighty dull I found it, after London.

True, one day we were all flung into a state of excitement by a visit from the Earl. Coming up from the North, where he had been staying, he took Johnesborough in his way, and put the footman, who answered the door, into a state of bewilderment by asking to see me.

"Is Thomas Walters here?" inquired his lordship; "send him to me directly;" and without waiting to be asked, he walked into the library, the door of which chanced to be open.

I found the Earl in one of his tempers.

What was the meaning of Mr. Will being sent for, and he not?



The door opened, and my friend Mr. Sanders appeared, carrying a lantern cautiously.

"Adventures of an Actress" next week.

Was not the dying lady his mother, and who could be nearer to her than he? What had Mr. Will said? Did I know who had sent the letter? Had I heard anything of its contents?

Though I was but a servant still, I had known the Earl all my life, and he spoke to me just as freely and as angrily as Mr. Will might have done, if anything had chanced to put him in a passion.

Careless about his papers as about his other concerns my master had tossed the doctor's letter on his table, and left it there; and as I knew he had no secrets from anybody, I gave it to the Earl to read.

It was written in some foreign language, and his Lordship had trouble to make it out; but he managed to do so at last, and then, throwing it down, broke forth again. What was the meaning of their not sending to him?

"The letter may have gone astray, my lord," I ventured to suggest, and my words fell like oil on troubled waters.

It might—it had, here was the solution of the enigma. Of course his mother would send for him. Thus the Earl ran on, ending by saying I was an honest fellow and attached to the family.

The mercury of his temper fell as rapidly as it had risen. His voice resumed its usual tone, his brow cleared, he threw himself into an easy chair and allowed me to get him some refreshment. He praised the vintages loved by the departed Smyth-Johnes, talked to me about Mr. Will and my new mistress, spoke of his own sons, and, in a word, was as pleasant as any gentleman could be. There were some letters for his nephew and for his nephew's wife, and when I mentioned this fact, he "graciously," to quote Mrs. Barrett, offered to take charge of them. Indeed the whole establishment seemed oppressed by the weight of the honour done to it, and appeared satisfied that Miss Johnes had made an exceedingly good investment when she married Mr. Will.

I was treated with more deference after the Earl's visit, and my fellow servants asked me such lots of questions about the Dugdales and Pattinghams, about Oakhill, and my lord's house in town, and the Dowager's place in the country, that I grew sick and tired of the very name of my master's family.

"After all," I thought one morning, "if our old life was anxious, we had variety, at any rate. I do not believe I can stand this much longer."

An interruption was coming to the monotony for which I was little prepared; it came very soon indeed.

That same evening I was walking down the elm avenue which people came from far and near to see, when I met two well-dressed men, who proceeded quietly on without taking the least notice of me.

I could not tell what made me do it, but when they had traversed some twenty yards, I turned and followed.

By the time they reached the house I was close behind them. The hall door stood open, and on the threshold was Catteron, one of the footmen, lazily contemplating the landscape.

To him the strangers addressed themselves.

"Is Mr. Pattingham within?" asked the elder and stouter of the two.

"No, he is not at home."

"When do you expect him back?"

"Can't say; he's gone abroad. The Dowager Countess of Dugdale is ill, and sent for him."

Catteron added this piece of information not out of any civility towards the strangers, whom, indeed he had treated with scant courtesy, but because he never willingly missed an opportunity of speaking of the Dugdales or their titles.

There was a pause—the men, who did not look like gentlemen, though they were well-dressed, exchanged glances, then the elder one inquired:

"Is Mr. Pattington's servant, Walters, here, or has he gone abroad, too?"

"No, he is standing behind you," and thus indicated, I came forward.

"I would like a minute's private conversation with you, sir," said the spokesman, and seeing that Catteron would not go, and that the stranger would not speak before him, I opened the door of a small cloak-room and followed the visitor in.

Directly I had done so he closed the door, and said confidentially:

"This is a mighty disagreeable business, Walters. Had Mr, Pattingham been at home I feel no doubt the matter might have been settled in two minutes; but as it is, I must leave a man here—yes I must."

"You don't mean to say—" I gasped.

"Yes, I do," he interrupted. "Most of his debts were arranged, no doubt; but this one, at any rate, does not seem to have been settled. No doubt the man felt hurt at being left out in the cold. Anyway, he is very bitter and so I'm here; and being here, I must leave a man."

I certainly was no innocent in such matters. I had seen as many writs, and witnessed as many arrests as most men who were not sheriff's officers; and yet the simplest and most timid woman could not have felt more frightened than did I at sight of the writ he handed to me.

The horror of such a thing happening in that house as a man being left in possession, was more than I could bear. Mrs Barrett—the servants—what should I say to them—what explanation could I give?

We might leave the place and the country, Mr. Will and I, after such a disgrace had befallen us; that was what I thought as the stranger pushed me, trembling in every limb, into a seat.

"Let us talk it over, and see what can be done," he said not unkindly. "Mr. Haman told me to ask to see you if Mr. Pattingham chanced to be out. He knew your master would not mind standing a trifle to keep the matter quiet."

"You are from Haman, then," I murmured.

"Yes, and I'll make it straight with him, so as to give you time to get the debt paid. It would have a bad look to seize here; and your master so lately married, too. You had better represent that your master promised to find my man a berth—that he did Mr. Pattingham a service once."

I groaned aloud.

"Come, come, you were man enough in London; don't pull a long face now."

Well, the upshot of it was that he went away and his man stayed.

"Look here," said the latter, as if I was not looking at him; "I'll make things pleasant for you as far as I can. When Mr. Pattingham comes back, you can say a word in my favour, and I am sure, by what I have heard of him, he won't forget I tried to perform a

Tell your friends of Hazel Harlow the Actress.

disagreeable duty agreeably. Haman gave me a hint of how the land might lie, and I am not a fool."

That he certainly was not. Before three days were over, he was the life of the servants' hall. He won Mrs. Barrett's heart by giving her a specific for corns, and he made love indiscriminately to the housemaids and the cook. They were all expecting him to propose, and I, miserable I, knowing all, had to look on and laugh with the rest.

When I returned one day from the nearest village, Catteron said: "a young gentleman was waiting to see Mr. Walters."

"'Pears to me you have more visitors than Mr. Pattingham hisself," remarked Catteron with a sniff. How it happened I could not tell, but in precise proportion as Mr. Sanders grew in favour, I lost it.

I went into into the library where the young gentleman sat.

"Mr. Thomas Walters?" he said.

"At your service, sir," I answered.

"I have brought Mrs. Pattingham's diamonds, and as my instructions were, in her absence, to deliver them to no one but you, I have waited for your return."

"But," I expostulated, "how does it happen they are sent down here? I understood they were to remain at Messrs. Rundell and Bridge's."

"I know nothing about that," he answered. "My principals had an order to deliver them here, and I have brought them. Be kind enough to sign your name there," and he pushed a paper towards me.

I never told anyone, except Mrs. Barrett, those diamonds had come, they were a weight on my mind.

I slept with the diamonds, and I dreamt of them; what a trouble I had no one suspected; no one unless it might be Mrs. Barrett and Mr. Sanders.

"If I were in your place, Thomas," said the former to me, "I would take the plate and the diamonds over to the bank at Lantree to-morrow."

"I'll take the diamonds at any rate," I answered, groaning inwardly over Mrs. Barrett's want of comprehension.

"If she only knew there was a bailiff in the house it would be a comfort," I considered.

The whole affair was growing too much for me, however; I confessed as much to Mr. Charles Sanders, who was kind and sympathetic as usual.

"I should not sit up late, old fellow, if I were you, to-night; go to bed early, and you will find yourself another man to-morrow."

Which advice I followed.

After only one tumbler of punch, I locked myself in my pantry, where I had latterly slept, resolving that early the next morning I would take my Lady's diamonds to the bank at Lantree.

So great a relief was this resolve to my mind, that I fell into a dreamless sleep, from which I was awakened by a noise as of someone trying my door; then it—the door I had locked—opened, and my friend Mr. Sanders appeared, carrying a lantern cautiously.

"What, Walters, still awake?" he said; then, before I could answer, there came a crashing blow.

When I came to myself the sun was streaming across the pantry, and I could see the strong-room had been broken into and its contents ransacked.

With a groan, I dragged my body into the passage where, a few hours afterwards, Catteron found me.

For days and weeks I lay between life and death, and when I recovered it was to hear from Mr. Will that his grandmother had never been ill; that the whole matter was a preconcerted scheme; that all his debts had been arranged before his marriage; that Mr. Charles Sanders was no bailiff, only a remarkably clever thief, whom the law hoped eventually to catch and punish.

Anything more? Well, yes. Her Ladyship, Mrs. Pattingham, would not believe in my innocence; and, for the sake of peace, I must go.

"Of course, I will do all for you I can. This makes no difference to me, Tom?" my master said, but I turned my head away, sick at heart, wounded to the very quick.

"I might be wrong," so I stated in a note I left for Mr. Will, when I was strong enough to leave Johnesborough, "but I would never knowingly see him again till the diamonds were found."

It seemed a wild goose chase then, but I got on the track of them at last.

There is a story hanging to the finding of the diamonds, too long to tell now.

Suffice it to say, they were found, though not in time for my lady to appear in them at Court.

But she was a just woman, and acknowledged her mistake, and did right by me at last; and so I am fain to confess, gentleman that the Countess of Dugdale is a brave and stately lady, and that she has made Mr. Will a good wife, and that they both installed me landlord of the "Dugdale Arms."

◆

A MAN never gets thoroughly disgusted with love's young dream until he has given a girl a ring, and three days afterwards discovers that she has been to the jeweller's to ascertain its value.

"I DON'T think I shall go abroad on the *Teutonia*," said Mrs. Perkins. "George wants me to, but seems to me they must run her very carelessly. She's always breaking her record."

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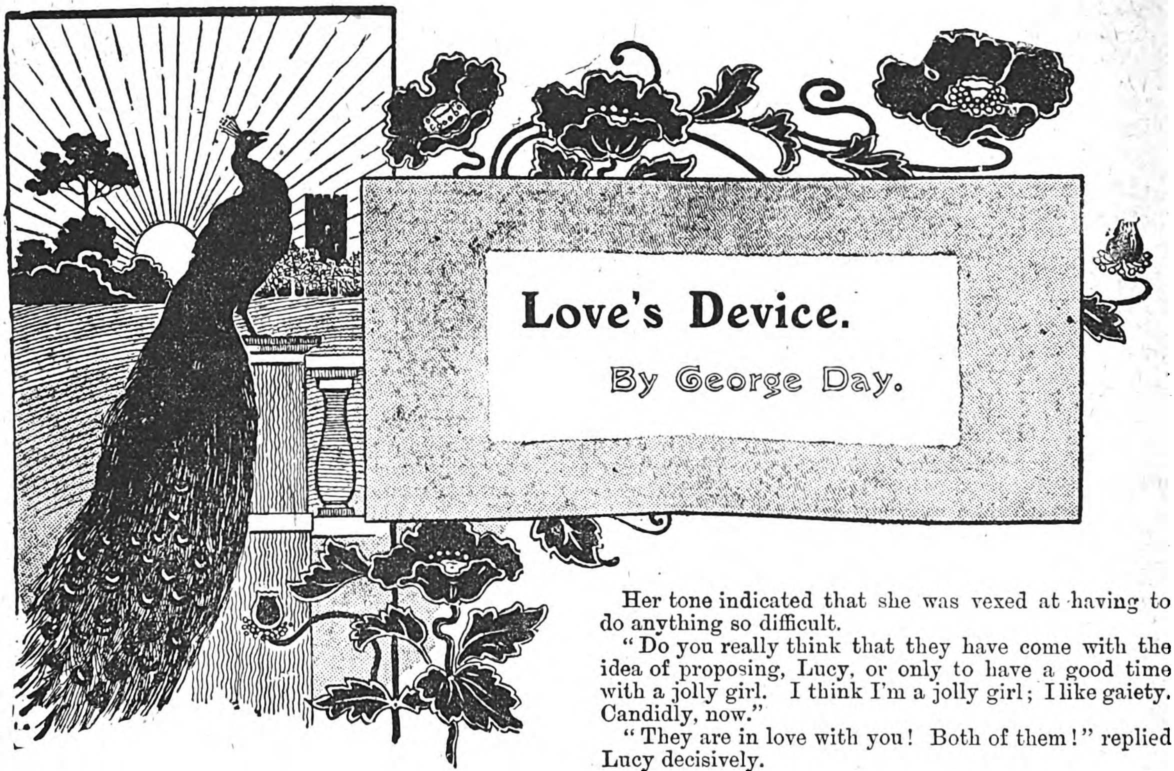

Love's Device.

By George Day.

"I REALLY think I prefer Mr. Reeve. They are both nice and I suppose I must marry some day. I declare it's very horrid of people to talk in that way and say I've been flirting with two men for weeks and spoiling the chance of another girl, or two other girls. Yet that is what Kitty Malins told Julia only the day before yesterday, and it came round to me last night."

Anyone who knew Millie Vince as her cousin Lucy Warren did, would not have accused her of flirting.

She was good-hearted, but shallow and thoughtless; the two men had paid her marked attention for weeks and she had accepted those attentions, and had a most agreeable time, without in the least recognising the significance of the position.

It was her nature to take things lightly; fate had been fairly kind to her, she had an independent income and the opportunity to gratify all reasonable desires. Life was more like a pleasant holiday than a struggle for existence.

Lucy believed that there might be something under the surface, to be awakened by love or sorrow; but certainly there was no indication of it at present.

Millie sat quiet, gazing thoughtfully through the window.

Lucy interrupted the reverie.

"As you say that people are beginning to talk, it is time to come to some decision, Millie—either to stop their attentions or make a choice."

"Yes, I see," murmured Millie.

Her tone indicated that she was vexed at having to do anything so difficult.

"Do you really think that they have come with the idea of proposing, Lucy, or only to have a good time with a jolly girl. I think I'm a jolly girl; I like gaiety. Candidly, now."

"They are in love with you! Both of them!" replied Lucy decisively.

"Oh, dear, I must think it over alone."

This was a hint which Lucy accepted. Millie avoided the young men for nearly a week, and both became nearly distracted; but at the end of that time she had made up her mind that she could not dismiss Albert Reeve, and that if he asked her to be his wife, she would accept.

But her previous behaviour had made both of them uncertain and the proposal did not come, although she endeavoured to show Reeve that she preferred him. Two or three times he had been on the point of expressing his sentiments in the past, but she had always turned it off laughingly, believing he was about to make some jesting pretence. Then she had avoided him for several days.

He was head over heels in love with her, but he was doubtful about her feelings towards him, and concluded that he had better wait a little. Arthur Biron noticed, after a day or two, that Reeve seemed to be favoured and became correspondingly gloomy.

This was the curious situation which Lucy Warren observed and was soon to be called upon to set right.

Lucy occupied the unenviable position of the poor relation. She was Mrs. Vince's niece, the daughter of a sister who had had a hard struggle after her husband's death, and had been comforted on her deathbed by the knowledge that her child would be taken care of by her well-to-do and widowed sister. Mrs. Vince was very kind to her niece, and she was treated in every way as one of the family, but outsiders knew that one girl was

Startling stage revelations next week.

rich and the other poor, and it affected their manner towards the girl probably without their being quite conscious of the fact.

She was quieter and more profound than Millie, and less stylish in appearance, it naturally followed that she was outshone by her voluble and vivacious cousin.

People fell into the habit of patronising her mildly. When you are poor and quiet, you are likely to suffer in that way by those who do not understand human nature and are higher in the social scale.

"What would do, my dear?" asked the perplexed Millie, throwing herself rather petulantly into an easy chair opposite her cousin. "That foolish Bertie—that's what I call him to myself now—won't take the thing seriously. Here have I been showing him as much as I dare that I—well, don't object to him, and that I object to Biron a great deal more, we'll put it that way, and he won't say anything! What would you advise? You always have good advice to give."

"That's complimentary!" laughed Lucy. "But I can only advise you to wait. Mr. Reeve is no doubt waiting till he is sure of his ground."

"Oh!" exclaimed Millie disappointedly. "Have you nothing better to suggest? I think you must be a little dull this morning, dear."

Lucy flushed, but laughed good-humouredly the next instant.

"Are you absolutely certain that you are in love with him?"

"Positive!" responded Millie, more gravely than was her wont, and Lucy felt that she was speaking with knowledge, from her heart.

"Then I would wait," she repeated firmly.

"Then I won't just wait till he comes to his senses!" asserted Millie, vigorously. "I won't wait his time! I'll make him come to me! A woman has no 'go' who waits and does nothing. I'm going to make him jealous and I want you to help me. I shall flirt—no, I mean I shall be more friendly to Arthur Biron and neglect Bertie, and you will manage to say something to Bertie in conversation that will—oh you know! You are just a wee bit dull this morning, aren't you, dear?"

This remark was characteristic, but it was cool in the circumstances.

Lucy looked grave.

"I would not make a fool of Mr. Biron for the purpose of accomplishing your end," she said earnestly. "Suppose he is—er—likes you; is it fair to make him——"

"You always see things in such a dreadful light!" said Millie, kissing her. "Now you are going to help me by saying something to Bertie while I am being nice to Biron. I'll give you the best evening cloak I can find."

Lucy's book lay open in her lap for a long time after Millie had left her, but the subject was quite forgotten.

"She thinks that a woman who loves a man—who thinks that she can make him happy and be happy with him—ought not to sit still and wait till he comes. She ought to do something to prevent the risk of his going away, to be less happy, perhaps. We women usually wait. We think it wrong to move, even though the inactivity may result in a broken heart. Is she right?"

Lucy found it difficult to answer her own question.

"At least, it is wrong if you make others suffer to accomplish your end," she murmured; "and that is what Millie will do."

The opportunities for meeting were fewer during the following fortnight, and the new tactics could not take effect so quickly as Millie desired, but by that time Reeve was aware that his rival was more in favour and Biron's hopes were rising.

There was a little party and a dance at Mrs. Vince's; the hostess' daughter was fairly impartial and Biron was in her favour, but everybody understood that Reeve was the most favoured, and the latter claimed and received more of her attention than the former.

Reeve stood watching Millie and his rival with a savage expression, and he in turn was watched by Lucy, on whose lips was just the trace of a queer smile.

"I think it is time I earned that evening cloak!" she said below her breath, as Reeve turned on his heel as though to make for the door. "This is a climax and may result in Millie saying 'Yes!' to a proposal from Biron. That must not be! She would marry him solely out of pique, and he——"

She intercepted Albert Reeve on his way to the door and spoke to him in a flippant style that was totally at variance with her usual manner and caused him some surprise.

"I declare, Mr. Reeve, you are quite rude! Here am I, a solitary individual, and you do not attempt to say something nice to me."

"I—er—really, Miss Warren, it is quite unintentional," he stammered confusedly. "Er—can I do anything—are you engaged for the next dance—is there another dance?"

"I think I should prefer a seat in a quiet corner," replied Lucy with a smile.

Reeve bowed and conducted her to a seat. He was confounding her under his breath, for, although she was an amiable girl and "all that sort of thing, you know," she was not his style and he was in no mood to entertain her at this juncture. Why had she come up so inopportunely. He wanted to get away from it all.

"Can I get you anything, Miss Warren?" he inquired rather lamely.

"No, thank you. Sit here, I should like to talk to you."

Still wondering at her altered manner, he did as he was requested. He was startled by her next words.

"Mr. Reeve, why don't you take your fortune at the flood and be carried to happiness. If you are in love with my cousin, why don't you propose to her?"

Reeve turned his eyes slowly to her face and started; it was plain speaking, beyond all doubt! The colour overspread his features, and he noticed that she, too, was colouring.

But she met his gaze without flinching and waited for him to speak.

"Take my fortune at the flood!" he repeated bitterly. "Does that indicate fortunate for me?"

He jerked his head in the direction in which they had last seen Millie and Biron.

"Adventures of an Actress" next week.

"You speak plainly, Miss Warren, so I will be open with you. I love your cousin, but she——"

"You men are so blind!" interrupted Lucy passionately. But, recovering her self-possession, she continued: "Take my advice and try!"

"I can't get a chance!" exclaimed Reeve, angrily. "Look how Biron haunts her."

He felt angry with everybody and everything, without being able to explain; that is a common sentiment with us all when we have not made the best of our chances and don't like to take the blame on ourselves.

"Suppose I get you the chance?" queried Lucy boldly.

"If you would!" said Reeve eagerly.

Yet, inwardly, he felt a little contempt for this girl. The thought flashed across him that she was a poor relation and—well, people do strange things for money or finery.

"I shall never forget the service, Miss Warren," he went on, meaningly, "and shall always be happy to repay it."

He was rich.

Lucy laughed constrainedly to hide her embarrassment; she understood the significance of his last words.

They separated a minute later. When Lucy found herself alone in her bedroom that night, she covered her burning cheeks with her hands and longed for tears to moisten the hot eyes, but they would not come. She had lowered herself in the eyes of this man, who had as good as offered to pay her. He had treated her as a mercenary, never dreaming of the real motive. Her scheme was more difficult to accomplish than she had supposed. Should she go on? What else might it not entail? Yes? she would go on; to make happy the man she loved, but who was all unsuspecting of that fact!

It had been arranged between Lucy and Reeve that he should call at eleven o'clock on the following morning, this was unusual, for it was a morning generally set apart by Millie for special purposes and, in addition, she never encouraged morning calls. Lucy was about to make the announcement to Millie that she must be "in" to a visitor this time, when her cousin surprised her by telling her that Biron intended to call.

"I suppose he is coming to learn his fate," remarked Millie, with what Lucy mentally described as callous indifference. "I could not put him off; he said he should call in the sort of voice that means 'so you must agree.' Bertie has lost his chance."

"But I hinted to Mr. Reeve," expostulated Lucy, hot and uncomfortable.

"Never mind, dear," said Millie easily. "He can't say anything to you, and you shall have the cloak all the same. I would rather—— But what matters? Biron will make tolerably good husband."

"I don't want the cloak!" flared Lucy.

"Oh, well, you needn't get out of temper!" returned her cousin. "I shall leave you till you get over it." And she swept out of the room.

What time would Biron call? Would he come before Reeve? What must she do? She must save him! She rapidly revolved a plan in her well-shaped head; there was no time to telegraph to Reeve to come earlier, for the simple reason that the morning was advancing and he would be on his way before the telegram or even a messenger could reach him.

It was a race by two men who did not know that they were racing! Which would win?

A few moments of deep thought, and Lucy had made her plans.

Five minutes to eleven and a ring of the bell! Probably Reeve, a little before his time; if so, the situation was clear. She went into the hall herself to welcome the arrival.

It was Biron!

"Good-morning, Mr. Biron, we are pleased to see you! We are not so fortunate, generally, as to be relieved from the *ennui* that follows the excitement of a dance!"

With a vivacity that was well assumed, Lucy welcomed him and led him to the reception room.

"I am sorry that my cousin is too busy with feminities to make her appearance yet."

Biron replied as cheerfully as his disappointment would permit.

Lucy had to do most of the talking, but she was a good conversationalist. She excused herself for a moment in order "to give an order to a servant." Biron would have been surprised had he heard the order. It was:

"When Mr. Reeve comes, show him into the dining-room and tell Miss Vince that a gentleman wishes to see her in that room. Don't say his name on any account, I wish to surprise her."

Lucy heard the ring that heralded the approach of Reeve, and she kept up a run of talk and laughter so that Biron should not hear the voice. Then she unconsciously allowed the conversation to flag; she was wondering how *they* were getting on.

Half an hour of misery for Lucy, and then Biron arose.

"I suppose that Miss Vince is too much occupied to see me," he observed, striving to hide his irritation. "I was—er—under the impression that it was a kind of—that is, an appointment." He stood irresolute, as if waiting for Lucy to make some move.

"I will see how matters are progressing," said Lucy, feeling that she must do something to make her attitude plausible.

She opened the door and passed out of the room, but before she could close it Biron heard Millie's voice.

"You artful thing! You sent me in there and I did not know it was Bertie. But it's all right, we've both made explanations and amends and all that, and he has gone away quite happy. What a mercy that Mr. Biron didn't come! I absolutely thought I heard him before—five or ten minutes before—the footman gave me the message, your message, I know. I was waiting for poor Biron. Oh, dear! You should have seen the happiness on Bertie's face when I accepted him! Fancy a woman having it in her power to make two men happy!"

Millie rattled on, illogically and gaily, quite careless who might be listening.

Lucy felt paralysed in the hand that held the door-knob and could not shut the door. Biron must have heard all; what would he think?

Millie bounded upstairs like a schoolgirl and Lucy re-entered the reception room.

She raised her eyes for just an instant to note his stern gaze and then dropped them. Her arms hung by her side, her cheeks were flaming.

Tell your friends of Hazel Harlow the Actress.

"It was a pretty piece of work, Miss Warren," he said, so sternly that for once she feared him. "It was a struggle between Reeve and myself as to whom should be made happy. I thought I had won, but I suppose he had a friend at Court who was not above trickery. One can often get such a friend by paying for assistance."

It was severe, but she recognised that it was justified from his point of view; he did not know all! Yet she could not endure that he should think her so mercenary. All three of them were regarding her in the same light.

"I was not bought!" she returned fiercely. "I did it for the best."

"Thank you!"

There was a little sarcasm in the tone.

"But you might have permitted your cousin to judge for herself. I must say that I cannot thank you for the implied suggestion that I am not likely to make a good husband. It wounds my vanity to learn that I am inferior to —— well, we need mention no names."

"I did not imply that!" cried Lucy, forgetting her caution. "You are ever so much better. I did it for your sake!" she went on, oblivious of everything except her own justification.

It stung her to the quick that he should think so ill of her.

"Would you have been happy with her? When you have become collected enough to think it over, you will see. If I played a trick, it was to save you!"

She stopped, panting, and looked defiantly at him. He scrutinised her steadily, then said slowly and very gravely:

"Why did you do it? Why for my sake?"

All the colour fled from Lucy's face; she appeared to be on the point of falling, but as he stepped forward to catch her, she fled blindly from the room. She had betrayed her own secret! He knew that she had saved him from the misery of a marriage with a giddy, utterly unsuitable woman, because—she loved him!

It was two months before Lucy and Arthur Biron met again; she had had an attack of brain fever, not a severe one, but her convalescence was slow. He had sent her flowers and had begged to be allowed to see her from the day she had left her bedroom, but she had steadily refused.

He had written to her, but her answer was that he should devote himself to those scientific studies which, she feared, he had neglected and for which he was so well equipped by Nature and Fate. She could not bear the shame of meeting him; her conduct must seem selfish, yet it was not much selfishness in her scheme. She meant to save him from unhappiness; she would have helped him to marry Millie if she had believed that it would have made him a happy man.

Her love was unselfish to that extent; yet, believing as she did and loving him, she had probably been influenced by Millie's words about a woman taking steps to bring a man to her side. Yes, she had been actuated just a little by that remark, and she would not see Arthur Biron.

But she yielded at last, in response to her easy-going, and not very observant aunt, who did not understand her reluctance.

"You were quite right," were his first words, "and I have longed for the opportunity to tell you so. I was infatuated, I should have been miserable, like many another man who has married in infatuation. You could see more deeply than I, and—I want a far-seeing and deep-thinking woman to help me in my studies."

It was a curious proposal, but it was sincere. Lucy shook her head.

"You may be infatuated with me!"

"I have had time to think," he replied earnestly, "and one mistake makes a man careful. You interested yourself in my happiness," he added more lightly, "and you must continue your good work."

"You must wait. You may change your mind. You must wait six months."

The last words hesitatingly.

"I was afraid you were going to say a year," he said with a smile. "And I believe you were, but you couldn't wait so long yourself! Now confess!"

And she did.

Sound Advice.

If you want to enjoy your Summer Holidays you would be wise to take with you the following sixpenny novels. You cannot have any idea how much pleasure you will derive from reading them, when you are sitting on the beach, or under a shady tree in the country:

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The only word for this book is "charming."

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By Florence Warden.
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Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, August 5th. Postcards only, please. The first prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Miss M. Byers of 24 Farber Street, Crewe, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

*A GENTLEMAN who was spending a month in the Highlands went to hire a carriage for the purpose of taking his family for a drive. He looked at a vehicle and inquired how many it would hold. The hostler scratched his head thoughtfully and replied: "It houds four generally, but six if they're weel acquaint!"

A LITTLE girl came down to dessert at a dinner party, and sat next to her mother. This lady was much occupied in talking to her neighbours, and omitted to give the child anything to eat. After much time the little girl, unable to bear it any longer, with sobs in her throat, held up her plate and said, "does anybody want a clean plate?"

HE: "I wonder what the meaning of that picture is? The youth and the maiden are in a tender attitude." She: "Oh, don't you see? He has just asked her to marry him, and she is accepting him. How sweet! What does the artist call the picture?" He (looking about): "Oh, I see. It's written on a card at the bottom, 'Sold!'"

LADY (to chemist): "I have a corn from which I suffer dreadfully; can you recommmend anything that will cure it?" Chemist: "Certainly, madam. See, here you have an excellent preparation which will make your corn disappear in a very short time. I have a customer who has used this lotion for the last fourteen years, and he never tries anything else."

A MAN with a gleaming eye entered the waterworks office. "I say," he cried addressing one of the clerks, "you can send up to my house and take your old gas-meter out at once." "This is not the gas office." "It isn't?" "No, sir, this is the waterworks office." "Oh, is it? Well, then, send a man up to my house at once and cut the water off. I'm not going to walk a mile and a half this hot weather for nothing!"

GENERAL SIR EVELYN WOOD is a comparatively short man, and, although he does not look the part when dressed in mufti, is one of the bravest men who ever served our country. He is extremely fond of telling the following story against himself: While waiting at Aldershot station recently in plain clothes, and unattended by his aide-de-camp, he noticed a young private pacing the platform without taking the slightest notice of him, and, of course, omitting the customary salute. The general called him, and asked why he did not salute. "Because I don't know who you are," replied the private stiffly. "I am Sir Evelyn Wood." "Get out," was the rejoinder, "if Sir Evelyn Wood heard you say that, he'd punch your head for you," and he continued his stroll.

"I WOULDN'T call the doctor a quack." "Why wouldn't you?" "It suggests a duck, and there are lots of birds with bigger bills than that."

THE following advertisement appeared in one of our daily papers: "Wanted—A gentleman to undertake the sale of a patent medicine. The advertiser guarantees it will be profitable to the undertaker."

"HAVE you anything to say before we eat you?" said the King of the Cannibal Isles to a missionary. "I have," was the reply. "I want to talk to you awhile of the advantages of a vegetable diet."

"DID you deliver that telegram?" a post-office clerk asked his messenger boy. "Oh, yes; but the man does not live in Abingdon Square, but in Charlton Street, and not on the ground floor, but up three flights of stairs, and not in the front room, but in the back one; besides, his name isn't Johnson, but Thomson, and he isn't a man, but a woman."

Two Irishmen got a job to clean some lofty windows. Having no ladder that would reach them, they were rather puzzled what to do. "Pat," said Mike, "I have it! Get a plank and put it through the widow. Oi'll sit on the plank outside, and you sit on the plank insoide." "All right," replied Pat. All went well until Mike, on the outside, cried out: "Oi've let the window-leather fall!" "All right," again replied Pat, "stop where you are, and Oi'll get it." Away went Pat downstairs; but, on getting into the street, he saw a huddled mass on the pavement: "Be jabbers, Mike," he cried, "you're here first! Which way did you come?"

A JOLLY old boy from the Midlands entered into one of the hotels at the seaside, and seeing on the slab on the right a crab dressed on the shell with legs, claws, and parsley ranged round, said to the landlord: "What d'ye call that?" "Crab," was the answer. "Looks good; I'll have 'un, and gie us a pint of ale." Bread-and-butter was added, and the diner left to his dinner. In about an hour the genial landlord entered the dining-saloon to see if his guest was getting on all right; he found him chawing up the last claw, the chawer red in the face, but beaming. "Like the crab, sir?" "Yes; he was capital. I never tasted one afore; but I think you baked 'un a little too long; the crust was hard. Let's have another pint." He had eaten the lot—shell, claws, and all complete.

THE sight of a row of forceps has closed the mouth of many sufferers, even after they had seated themselves in the dentist's chair. Dental surgeons intercept this, and the following amusing instance of how a boisterous Irishman was made to show his tooth may not be amiss. Pat came to the dentist's with his jaw very much swollen, from a tooth he desired to have pulled. But when the suffering son of Erin got into the dentist's chair and saw the gleaming pair of forceps approaching his face, he positively refused to open his mouth. The dentist quietly told his page boy to prick his patient with a pin, and when Pat opened his mouth to yell the dentist seized his tooth and out it came. "It did not hurt so much as you expected it would, did it?" the dentist asked smilingly. "Well no," said Pat, hesitatingly, as if doubting the truthfulness of his admission, "but," he added, placing his hand to the spot where the boy pricked him, "begorra, little did I think the roots would reach down like that."

Startling stage revelations next week.

SEA BATHING AND DEAF PEOPLE.

Should people affected with ear diseases bathe in the sea? The subject at this time of the year is not without interest, and useful hints may be given to many who are unaware of the influence that bathing exercises on the organ of the ear when it is diseased, or when a predisposition to disease exists.

In the first place, it should be remembered that cold water, and especially salt water, must never be allowed to pass into the ear; the neglect of proper precautions to prevent this occurring often causes catarrh or inflammation of the ear. It is therefore advisable for all who had sensitive ears to carefully plug the hole of the ear with cotton-wool before entering the water. A waterproof cap may also be used with advantage. According to the temperature of the water, bathing may be beneficial, or may prove otherwise. As a rule, when a catarrhal condition of the ear exists, it is wise to abstain entirely from river or sea bathing; but baths of warm or tepid salt water, once every two or three days, followed by a vigorous rubbing all over the body, will have favourable effects.

Sea or river bathing protects the system against catarrhal attacks, when there is merely a predisposition to the disease, but it is usually injurious when the catarrhal process has already set in.

As exceptions to the general rule, these baths have been found beneficial in chronic cases of dry catarrh, but as in other similar cases they have aggravated the deafness and increased the noises in the ear, the experiment can hardly be recommended.

Sea bathing is excellent for the scrofulous. When, however, they are suffering from an ear disease, baths are frequently very injurious, and have been found to produce an attack of inflammation in cases where the cure seemed almost complete. People whose ears discharge must totally refrain from bathing; if by any chance salt water, or even ordinary cold water, were to penetrate the ear when a perforation of the drum exists, the result would be most serious.

In short, sea bathing cannot be recommended to persons affected with ear diseases. In the very few cases where no injurious effects would result from it, the benefit derived, as far as deafness is concerned, can only be problematic.

A reason which would also show that the seaside is not quite suitable as a health resort for deaf people, unless due precautions be taken, is, that on account of the strong winds which are nearly always prevalent, the danger of contracting colds or getting into draughts is greater.

On the other hand, a change from town to country will always be beneficial. The impure air breathed in offices, shops, and workrooms favours the development of the affections of the throat, nasal passages, and middle ear. A residence of a few weeks in a part of the country where the atmosphere is pure, fresh, and dry is sure to be of benefit, hilly or upland country being especially recommended.

Dry and warm weather, having a beneficial effect on practically all forms of chronic deafness, summer is obviously the best time for successfully treating the disease. Many people are so ill-advised as not to avail themselves of this opportunity, simply because their infirmity at this time of the year is less troublesome than usual. But a few months will bring back the old condition, when treatment will be rendered all the more difficult for having to contend at once with the disease and the strong influence of cold and damp.

In the "Journal for the Deaf," the description is given of Drouet's system of treatment of chronic ear diseases, of which deafness is the consequence. It is enough to read the report of the cures which have been effected by this treatment to realise the fame which now attaches to the name of the Drouet Institute. For, not only have many cures been obtained in long standing cases after a very short treatment, but the system has also proved entirely successful in completely restoring the hearing of people who had been previously treated without avail, and who, in consequence, had given up the hope of ever being relieved.

Two instances of the curability of ear disease by the Drouet Method, after failure of the ordinary treatment used by aural specialists, are shown in the following cases, and many others will be found in the July number of the paper referred to above.

Mr. R. J. Harris, of Newquay, Cornwall, submitted his case on May 2, 1901, to the Drouet Institute. He had been suffering for about two years with deafness, could hear the tick of a watch only an inch from the left ear, and could not hear it at all with the right ear. He often had painful gatherings in the ears, which broke and discharged. There was a continuous noise in the ears, with nervousness and occasional attacks of dizziness. The nose and throat were affected by catarrhal discharges, and the voice was husky. Altogether a difficult and obstinate case to treat on account of the complications. He further stated that he had been under treatment by an aural specialist, but without receiving the slightest benefit.

On May 7th Mr. Harris began the Drouet treatment, prescribed for him by the consulting surgeon, and continued until June 16th, when he pronounced himself cured, in the following letter:

3 Acland-gardens, Tower-road, Newquay.
Cornwall, June 16, 1901.

I have much pleasure in informing you I can hear perfectly well, the discharges from the ear have stopped, the nose is quite clear, and the throat entirely well. I feel grateful for the relief your treatment has given me, and I will recommend to you anybody who suffers from the same complaint.—Thanking you for your kind attention, I am, yours truly,
R. J. HARRIS.

The second case is the following:

Miss J. P., Newcastle-on-Tyne, was afflicted for thirty years with a chronic inflammation of the middle ear which produced deafness and a continual discharge. Miss P. placed herself under the treatment of a leading ear specialist, who finally dismissed her case as incurable, attributing the failure to obtain relief to constitutional causes. In this condition of poor health and suffering great annoyance from noises in the head, deafness, and a constant discharge from the ears, she began the Drouet treatment, and after a few weeks reported, in the following letter to the Institute, a complete cure had been accomplished:

Newcastle-on-Tyne, June 1, 1901.

I deferred writing for a short time to see if my ears continued in a satisfactory condition. I am satisfied with them, so shall not require any more treatment.

I thank you for much kind attention during treatment, and especially appreciate the results, as my case was chronic, and had been under other treatment formerly without obtaining the benefit I now enjoy.—Yours truly,
J. P.

The full name and address of this person will be gladly given privately by the Drouet Institute to any applicant.

A special feature of the Drouet treatment is that patients who cannot come to London to be examined are enabled, however, to receive advice by filling up a pathological report form, which allows them to state explicitly their case. This form may be had, free of charge, with a copy of the "Journal for the Deaf," by writing to the Secretary, Drouet Institute, 72 Regent's Park-road, London, N.W. In fact, all the persons whose cures have just been reported were treated by means of the pathological form, and never saw the consulting surgeon who prescribed for them.

It is, however, always advisable, when possible, to be personally examined at the Drouet Institute, 72 Regent's Park Road, N.W., where consultations are held daily, except Sunday, from two to four in the afternoon. Special consultations may also be had at any time by previous arrangement. For all personal consultations a fee is charged. Any advice by correspondence is absolutely free, as are also the consultations given by means of the report form.

To place beyond all doubt the authenticity of the testimonial letters to which reference has been made, they have been placed in the autograph-room at the Drouet Institute, where they may be seen, amongst hundreds of others from former patients who have been successfully treated. This room is open to the public every day, except Sunday, from nine a.m. till five p.m.

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

By a slip of the pen I last week said that our new series,

"The Adventures of an Actress,"

would begin in this number. Obviously, as you will have noticed from the other announcements on the subject, it should have been next week's paper—the Bank Holiday number.

I hope you are doing me the kindness of mentioning this series to your friends. Most people are interested in matters connected with the theatre, and these new stories, stripping as they do all the false glamour from the stage, and showing it and its votaries in their true and varying colours, cannot fail to attract the widest attention. And even if you do not care for theatrical matters, you will enjoy the stories for the sweet romance they contain. Each week's story will be complete in itself, and yet once you begin the series you will not rest till you have read the complete set of stories.

Once again I would warn you that to delay ordering your copy may lead to disappointment, for the demand is sure to be immense. Therefore, your wisest course will be to fill in this form and hand it to your newsagent:

Please reserve for me a copy of *Short Stories* dated August 10th.

Name..............................

Address..........................

....

I am pleased to be able to announce that I have just concluded arrangements with a lady of great experience, who will in future advise on this page in matters connected with

Love, Courtship and Marriage.

Here is the first batch of replies to letters which have reached me lately on these subjects:

No, "Annette," I do not think you will regret it, and I cordially support you in your decision. When you became engaged to him three years ago, you knew that he intended to go out to the West Indies as a missionary, and you became a hospital nurse so that you might acquire knowledge that would be useful among the natives. Now the time has arrived, your relatives are trying to persuade you to give him up and stay here. You love him, and are willing to share his lot. My advice under the circumstances is to go with him. I wish you every happiness in your far-away home, and shall be pleased to hear from you again.

It is very hard, "Emily," but he is not the man for you. He paid marked attention to you, and almost declared his affection; then your cousin comes upon the scene; he is captivated by outside show and leaves you for her. He has forsaken one who is homely, domesticated, and would have made him a thoroughly good wife, for a girl who thinks of little but dress and "cutting a dash" at balls and parties, and who is quite unfitted for his humble station. A man with so little discrimination and common-sense would never make a good husband for you; and, later on, you will be glad of the fact that is now causing you pain.

You ask me, "Despairing Jack," whether there are not occasions when suicide is not only justifiable but the right thing to do. Now, read the sad little tale you have told me, just as I repeat it, word for word, and then, having thought it all over and faced the situation like a man, see whether you will not feel with me that it was all for the best. You were engaged to a girl, and for six months saw her daily, and she seemed to love you as much as you loved her. Then one day a young sailor cousin of hers returned from a voyage, and you saw, only too plainly, that her heart and affections were given to him, and not to you. In vain you implored her not to change; one day she disappeared with her cousin, and you have never seen or heard of her again. Can't you see that you are well rid of her? Can't you understand that by her leaving you in that manner she proved herself to be unworthy of your love? Cheer up, and one day you will find the right sort of girl to make you a good wife. Your letter was no trouble. I hope you will get the post you are trying for.

I am so sorry for you in your trouble, "Lonely Lassie." But I do think that, in time, you will feel that he really was unworthy of the love of a nice-minded girl. Anyone who could stoop to such meanness as he has been guilty of would only prove more unsatisfactory as a husband than he has been as your lover. I should advise you to write to him and tell him plainly that, after having discovered him in the act of opening one of your letters, and setting his sister to spy out all your actions during the past two months, you feel that all your respect and love for him is dead, and that you wish to have nothing to do with him in the future. Return all his presents and letters, and cheer up! Happier days are in store for you, I feel sure.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

SHORT STORIES
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The MEDICAL PRESS, including the "LANCET," "BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL," and "MEDICAL ANNUAL," testifies to its

ABSOLUTE PURITY.

IMPORTANT CAUTION.—Sold only in tins with gilt tops.

Mr. GEO. R. SIMS'

HAIR RENEWER

Called by him **"TATCHO"**

(Romany: "Genuine," "Good," "True.")

And why, pray, is the successful poet, playwright, and journalist an eminent authority on hair restorer? Eager for an explanation a *Daily Mail* representative sought out Mr. Sims. . . .

Now Mr. G. R. Sims, as many people know, is one of the busiest men in the kingdom, but hastily affixing his signature to a letter, he looked up and extended a characteristically cordial welcome. Then he said, "I will explain. I found that I was rapidly going bald. Not seriously, you understand, but the thinning out was sufficiently marked to set me thinking out a remedy. I went to two specialists, both of whom cheerfully assured me that I should be absolutely bald in two years.

"Then I discovered the preparation which is now placed upon the market. I found that I had hit upon a remedy capable of working wonders. Look at my hair now, isn't that convincing evidence of the value of my preparation?

"Ladies confirm my good opinion of it as a dressing for daily use. Mrs. Brown-Potter, whose beautiful hair is the admiration of the entire lady world, writes that she uses nothing but 'Tatcho.' There is nothing to prevent every woman from making her hair silken in texture and bountiful in volume, for she can obtain a bottle of 'Tatcho' now in every town or even village."

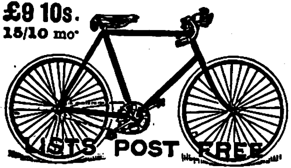
In order that the public may be able to test the superlative value of Mr. George R. Sims' discovery, the Company is issuing large 4/6 size test bottles post free for **1/10**, under plain cover, one of which may be had on application. Please cut off the corner of this advertisement where marked and send with name and address, legibly written to the—

GEO. R. SIMS CO.,
81c Great Queen Street,
LONDON, W.C.

Mr. Geo. R. SIMS'
HAIR RENEWER
4/6 Large Bottle **1/10**
POST FREE.
COUPON S.S., Aug. 3, 1901.

JUNO CYCLES FOR LADIES AND GENTS. FREE OR FIXED WHEELS.

£9 10s.
15/10 mo'



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THE VERY BEST.
Carriage Paid.
Discount for Cash.

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£12 ...	... 20/-
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£14 14s.	... 24/6
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Road Racer ... £9 10s. 15s. 10d. Monthly. Write for New Light Roadster, £10 0s. 16s. 8d. Monthly. Season's List of JUNO Cycles and Accessories, over 100 pages, sent post free. Scorcher Brake, 1/-; Octagon Cyclometer, 10,000 miles, 1/6; Acetelene Lamp, 3/9.

METROPOLITAN MACHINISTS CO. Ltd.
75, 76, Bishopsgate Street Without, E.C., and Piccadilly Circus, London, W.

NOSE **A. LEES RAY** (S.S. Dept.), **South Castle St., Liverpool,** is a Specialist on Ugly and Red Noses. Send stamp for particulars of his Patent Scientific Nose Improver. Medically-approved Red Nose Cure, 3/9. Pamphlet, "Cause and Prevention," 1/-. Machines for Prominent Ears. Blackhead Cure 1/9.

KEATING'S POWDER KILLS
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TINS: 3d. 6d. & 1/- EACH. FILLED BELLOWS: 9d.

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DEVONSHIRE CREAM

ABSOLUTELY PURE.

NO PRESERVATIVES USED.

In Patent Air-tight Tins. ½lb., 1/4; 1lb., 2/4; 2lb., 4/-; including Tin and Postage.

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HOME NOTES

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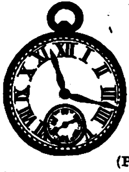
ONE PENNY.

2/9 CHALLENGE TO THE WORLD—OUR WARRANTED **TIMEKEEPER,** **2/9**



With a guarantee to keep correct time for three years, will be sent to any address on receipt of P.O. or stamps value 2/9, and three stamps extra for postage. To every purchaser during this month we give with it ABSOLUTELY FREE a strong Mexican SILVER CHAIN. All we ask of you is to show them to your friends, as by doing so you advertise our business.

GENEVA WATCH IMPORTERS,
148 Old Street, London, E.C.
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DRUNKENNESS

CURED. This can be done with or without patient's knowledge. Send me a stamp and I will tell you how. (Send no money.) Address, in confidence, Mrs. C. H. (Room 8), 195 Oxford Street, London, W.

SEND 6D. and secure one of our Complete **Printing Outfits.** Agents wanted for the above and other novelties.—Apply Dept. Y, 89 Aldersgate Street, London, E.C.

ALL FAT PEOPLE

can safely Reduce Weight and cure Corpulency permanently by taking **TRILENE TABLETS** (Regd.) for a few weeks. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to IMPROVE both HEALTH and FIGURE without Change of Diet. An English Countess writes: *"Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."*

Send 2s. 6d. to **THE TRILENE CO.,** Sole Proprietors,
66 Finsbury Pavement, London.

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 87 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 28lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Comston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

"BY THE SAD SEA WAVES."

Safe Bind—Safe Find.

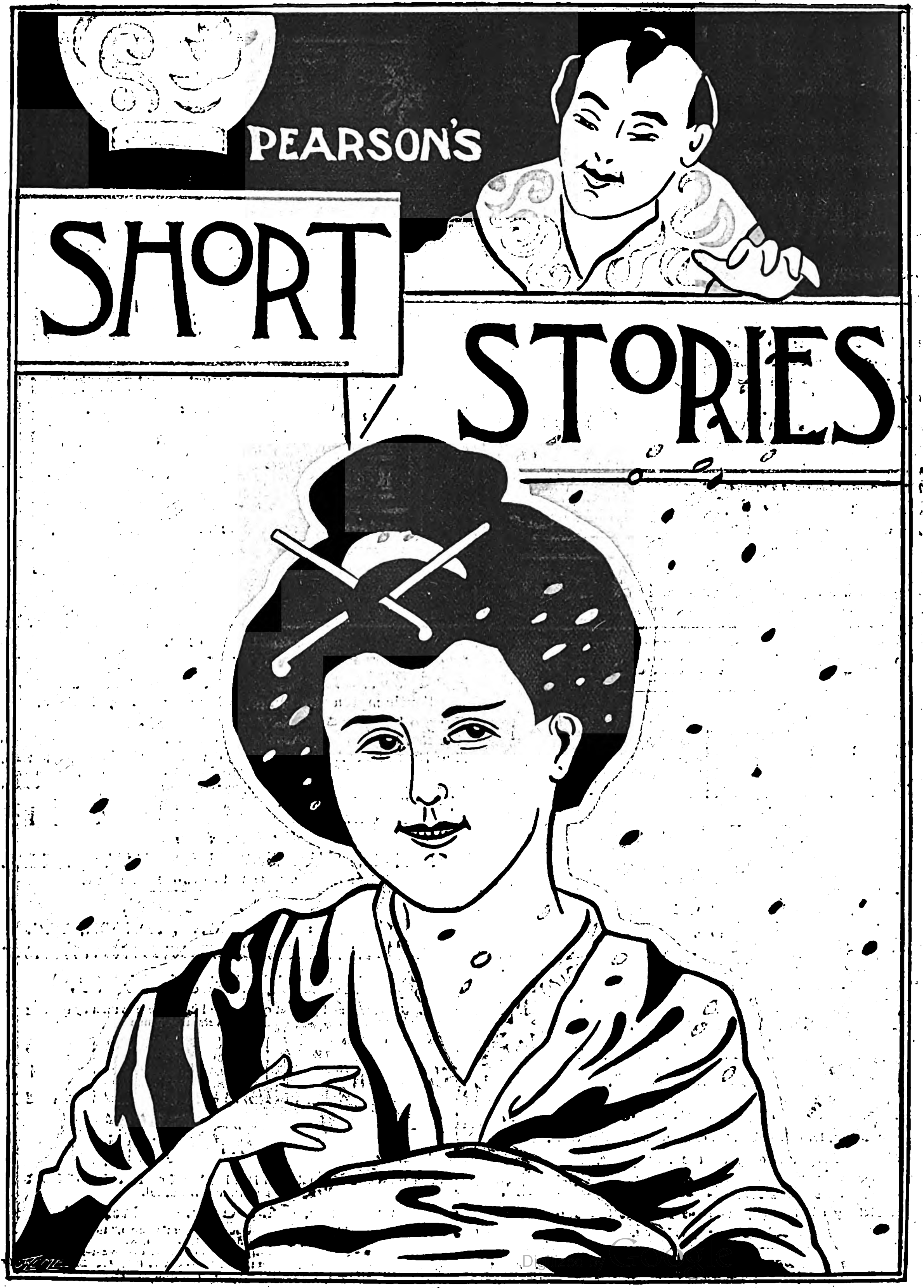
Mr. CHARLES CHARD, of 7 Denne Crescent, New Church St., CAPETOWN, South Africa, under date June 19th, 1901, writes:

> *"My brother, a Farrier in the Army Service "Corps stationed at Greenpoint Camp, whilst "strolling around the beach in the above "vicinity, came across a case of your valuable "Pills washed up from the ill-fated mail liner "'Tantallon Castle,' which stranded on Robben "Island, a distance of 14 miles. Notwithstanding "being submerged for over a month, the pills had "not lost their medicinal properties, and still can "hold their reputation of being 'Worth a Guinea "a Box,' which was evidenced by the numerous "calls from the soldiers on hearing from their "comrades of the lucky find. Your Pills are "considered, amongst the military community, "invaluable for rendering the nerves steady, and "for many of the ailments which poor Tommy on "active service is subjected to."*

NOTE.—BEECHAM'S PILLS for Export are always packed in water-tight lined cases, and to this circumstance is due the fact that their marvellous properties were not impaired.

BEECHAM'S PILLS ARE HERE, THERE, AND EVERYWHERE.

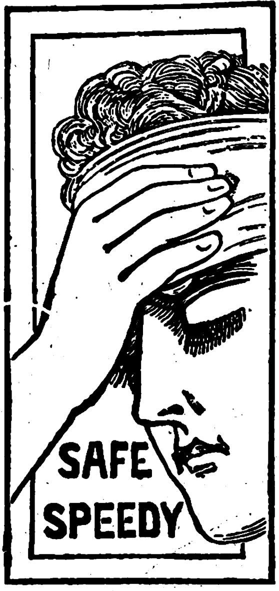
No. 658.) For Week Ending August 10th, 1901. (One Penny.


PEARSON'S
SHORT
STORIES

KAPUTINE

The Best & Safest Remedy for

HEADACHE.



NURSE HILL, of the London Association of Nurses, writes:

"I have seen Kaputine administered to many patients, and can truly say it is a remedy which should have a place in every household."

All Leading Chemists sell KAPUTINE, 1/-. Samples One Penny.

If your Chemist has not KAPUTINE send his name and address to KAPUTINE, HUDDERSFIELD, and we will send you a SHILLING PACKET FREE.

WORTH A CROWN A DOSE.

GOOD! IT'S MASON'S EXTRACT OF HERBS!

A 6D. BOTTLE MAKES 8 GALLONS.

1 GALLON
1 GALLON
1 GALLON
1 GALLON
1 GALLON
1 GALLON
1 GALLON
1 GALLON

This is what you get with

MASON'S EXTRACT OF HERBS

Makes the most delicious and wholesome HERB BEER

There is no PURER
There is no BETTER
There is no STRONGER
and
There is no CHEAPER

Makes MORE BEER and BETTER BEER than any other Extract.

Agents Wanted Everywhere.

Sold everywhere. Bottles, Post Free, 9 Stamps.

NEWBALL & MASON, Nottingham.

"WORTH A GUINEA A BOX."

BEECHAM'S PILLS

FOR ALL

BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS, Sick Headache, Constipation, Wind and Pains in Stomach, Impaired Digestion, Disordered Liver, and Female Ailments.

SALE OVER SIX MILLION BOXES YEARLY.

In Boxes, 1s. 1½d. and 2s. 9d. each, with full directions.

Prepared only by the Proprietor,

THOMAS BEECHAM, St. Helens, Lancashire.

Sold by all Druggists and Patent Medicine Dealers everywhere.

ESTABLISHED 1851.

BIRKBECK BANK,

Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, London.

2½% DEPOSIT ACCOUNTS repayable on demand. 2½%

The Birkbeck Almanack, with full particulars, post free.

FRANCIS RAVENSCROFT, *Manager.*

"ALKAN" Cures in ONE Minute

By Inhalation

TOOTHACHE, FACIAL NEURALGIA, NEURALGIA OF THE EAR.

Price: 1st Size, 2/9; 2nd Size, 4/6 per Bottle.

B. & G. ALKAN,

General Depot: 150 STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

Do your Dyeing at home.

It costs little, and you get quicker and better results than by sending to dyers, if you use

New Style Old Style

MAYPOLE
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MAYPOLE SOAP DYES

which are simple to handle, and Dye BLACK or ANY COLOUR Fast, Permanent, and Beautiful.

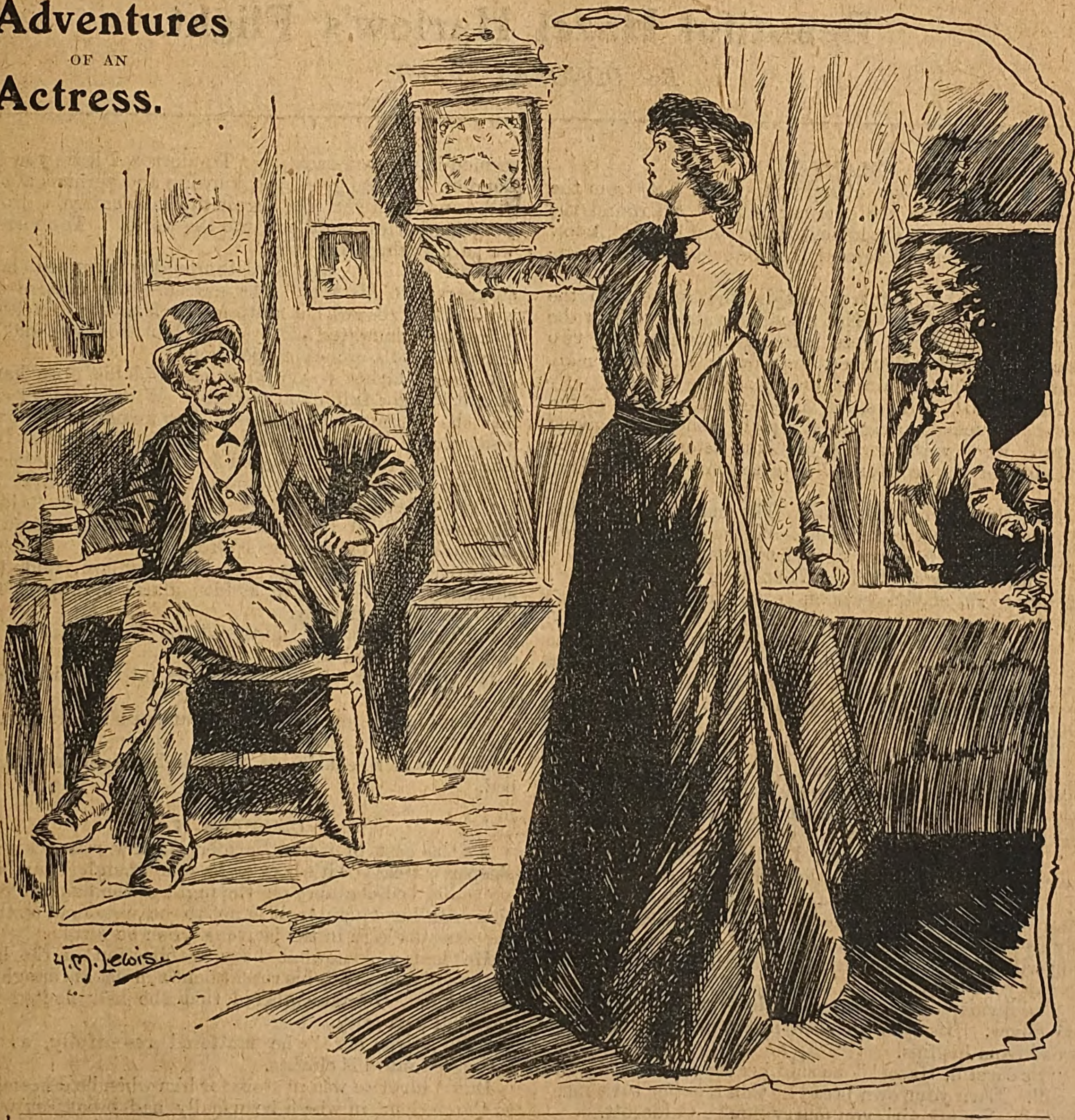
Any Colour, 4d. a Cake. Black 6d.

Send for Free Booklet, "The Perfection of Home Dyeing," to the Maypole Co., Ltd., [illegible] Cumming Street, London, N.

SHORT STORIES

No. 658.] For the Week Ending August 10th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

THE Adventures OF AN Actress.



"Then listen!" All the pent-up scorn of years seemed in the girl's voice.

(See thrilling story on next page.)

STARTLING REVELATIONS OF THE STAGE

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

Beautiful Hazel Harlow's Flight.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

A MELLOW ribbon of light straggled out from the open window into the summer night. All round the panes the roses and honey-suckle clambered. A low rampart of shrubs screened the lower half of the casement.

Voices floated out from inside the room into the peaceful country air. Not a soul was about to hear the bitter words that were passing between the two occupants of the chamber, an elderly, red-faced man, and a young girl of almost unsurpassable beauty.

Not a soul! Ah yes, for beneath the shadow of the shrubs crouched the figure of a man, a silent, strenuous figure, who, with nerves a-quiver listened to every syllable of the conversation meant for no stranger's ear.

And this is what he heard. The man was speaking, his coarse voice coarser still from the effects of liquor, anger insistent in every tone of his unstudied speech.

"And I say you shall! What have I reared ye for? Merely to sit at your ease and eat of my bread, while I toil. No, my wench, no! I'm not to be played with! Hear me once and for all. Either you marry Horace Caldecott and live at The Hall, in riches, or——" a horrid expletive broke from his lips and finished his sentence far more eloquently than any words could have done.

The girl had risen and, with a wondrous unstudied grace, stood before the enraged farmer, the splendid outline of her figure and the clear-cut, noble purity of her profile silhouetted against the light of the lamp on the table at her side.

"And I tell you, father, I will not marry Horace Caldecott, not if he were a thousand times richer than he is. I will never sell my hand and heart to such a man. Sooner than that I will go out into the world and earn my own bread. You can beat me, starve me, do what you will to me, but you cannot make me sell my honour to pay your debts."

The farmer took a long draught from a beer-mug at his elbow. His eyes gleamed like a beast's. A laugh broke from his lips.

"Be careful, Hazel!" he said hoarsely, "or whip you I will. Earn your own bread! Can a heifer turn race-horse? No, my girl, you marry Squire Caldecott."

"Then listen!" All the pent-up scorn of years seemed in the girl's voice. "To-morrow I leave you for London. I have given you warning and perhaps a day will come when you will regret the moment you drove your motherless child out into the world. To-morrow we part, perhaps for ever."

With an oath the now thoroughly drunken man staggered to his feet. The eavesdropper outside the window half rose with a muttered exclamation. Neither father nor daughter had eyes for him, however, and he fell back into a crouching position.

Farmer Harlow's arm shot out, and his open hand caught the girl full upon the face. With a faint cry of fear she staggered backwards. Her involuntary movement proved Harlow's undoing. He fell forward at full length upon the stone-flagged floor of the farm kitchen.

When he dragged himself up again he was alone.

"The jade's gone!" he hiccupped with an oath. "Good riddance! She'll talk sense in the morning. And if she don't, well I'll call the squire."

He stumbled towards the open window, and the silent listener without, in sudden alarm sprang to his feet, and scurried away.

"What was that?" muttered the farmer, trying to collect his fuddled senses.

He peered out, blinking owl-wise into the darkness. All was still.

"Must have been a dog!" he murmured. "Hang the cur!"

With which charitable remark he stumbled off to bed.

CHAPTER II.

AT the best of times Farmer Harlow was a sound sleeper. Heavy with beer as he was when he shambled up to his bed-chamber on the night of the final altercation with his daughter, it is not to be wondered at that the sun was high in the heavens when he awoke.

He had a somewhat hazy recollection of the last night's dispute. But his resentment against his daughter ran high. He remembered that she had flouted his parental authority.

"I'll learn her!" he muttered resentfully, as he struggled into his clothes.

But a surprise was in store for him when he descended to the parlour, in which he usually had breakfast with his daughter. In place of Hazel's queen-like figure and

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beautiful face, he was confronted by old Martha, the factotum of Harlow Farm, on whose face was an expression of the blankest terror and consternation.

He glared resentfully in her wrinkled, careworn face.

"Hullo!" he growled. "What's amiss? Where's Hazel?"

For a moment or so the woman struggled with speech. Then she covered her face with her apron, and sinking down into a chair, burst into a passion of weeping.

To a man of the farmer's rough, uncouth mind—it was always a marvel to the village folk that he could have been the father of such a peerless girl as Hazel—tears in women were an especial abomination.

"Stop your snivelling!" he roared, "and speak like a sane woman!"

With an effort the old woman checked her sobs. "Hazel's gone!" she faltered out.

"Gone! What d'ye mean?" a livid flush overspread the farmer's bucolic face.

"Her room's empty! She's nowhere about the farm, and—she left this piece of paper on her pincushion."

Harlow snatched the note out of the woman's hand. It was unaddressed and ran as follows:

> I have gone. After what you said and did last night Harlow Farm is no home for me. Do not try to find me. Good-bye. I forgive you.—Hazel.

It was some few moments before the farmer could take in the full purport of the note.

Then enlightenment came to him.

"It's a trick!" he cried, "a — trick! I forgive you! Did ever man read the like. But I've not done with her yet. I'll find her. Squire Caldecott will help me!" And without pausing to put a hat on his head, or take bite or sup, he dashed out of the farm-house and down the dusty lane like a man possessed.

In the meanwhile what had become of Hazel? Sick at heart the girl had crept up to her bedroom, and locking the door had thrown herself down upon the bed, her whole being afire with the abuse to which she had been subjected.

If ever she had felt her lonely, motherless condition she felt it then. What could she do? How could she shake off the hated shackles that bound her to the farm and the hateful lover that her father would sell her to.

Her brain began to work quickly. What could she do? Then she remembered an incident long forgotten, how a girl, the daughter of a neighbouring farmer had gone to London and become an actress. What the girl had done or how she had got on she knew not.

But her mind, once set upon a certain train of thought, began to build upon that one foundation. What another had done she would do. She was beautiful—she could not help knowing that—young, strong, untainted by the world. She had had a good education, had always lived in a world of her own. London! Yes that was to be her goal. But where to go? Then she remembered that her father had a brother living in London, a man she had not seen since childhood, but whose address she knew. She would go to him and ask his help; would tell him her sad story, how her father had got into debt, how to retrieve his fortunes he had determined his daughter should marry a rich *roué*—Squire Caldecott. She had about twenty pounds of her own. That would surely be enough to maintain her for a while. There was a train to London at nine. Her father would sleep long after his potations. She would pack a hand-bag with her necessaries and be off.

In such hurried sequence did her thoughts bear her on, until at last her mind was made up, and she only longed for the morning when she could embark upon her new resolution.

She was up at six. Noiselessly she dressed and packed her hand-bag. Then she stole downstairs, safe in the assurance that her father was sound asleep, and that old Martha would not be down before seven.

A hurried breakfast in the larder, and nothing more remained but to be off.

Good-bye old farmstead! The tears gathered in the girl's blue eyes.

It was a glorious summer morning. The station was nearly three miles away, so that there was no need for hurry, yet Hazel almost ran down the little lane that led from the farm-house to the high road beyond.

The farm was nearly a mile away from the village of Honeycote.

No one was in sight as the girl turned into the road, and hurried on to where a path struck off from the highway across the fields, a short cut to the railway station.

It was almost eight o'clock when the station buildings became visible through the trees that fringed them. The girl sat down for a while to rest, for she had an hour before the train was due.

Half an hour passed away, and the girl rose to her feet. She was safe from pursuit and she felt that she might just as well wait the remaining time before the train started in the station.

The sound of wheels along the road caused her to pause where she was. She could see through the hedge, that fringed the meadow, that a trap was driving smartly along the highway and coming from the station.

"Squire Caldecott's dog-cart," she murmured to herself. "What does that mean? The groom's driving. The Squire's not in the trap."

A sudden fear caught at her heart. Supposing that the man she feared and hated most on earth was going to London by the nine o'clock train!

She lingered no longer, but hastened onwards to the station, determined to know the worst.

But her fears seemed groundless. No one was in the station save a sleepy porter who was taking the duties of ticket-clerk as well. He gave Hazel her ticket without comment. Evidently she was to be the only passenger.

The train steamed slowly into the wayside station and drew up with many protesting snorts. Hazel sprang into an empty third class compartment, and shrank back against the cushions with a beating heart.

The train puffed off again almost immediately. A great sigh of relief fell from the girl's lips; not one thought did she give to what lay before her, to all the unknown dangers and difficulties that might lie in her path in the metropolis. She had shaken off the shackles of her old life, of the father who had treated her so shamefully, of the unwelcome lover whose affection was only a sordid passion kindled into being by her beauty; and an unplumbed abyss of Fate stretched out before her mental vision.

It was a three hours' run to Paddington. Before the terminus the train filled up somewhat, and Hazel was not permitted to retain the compartment vacant for herself. Yet her thoughts were too varied to allow her to bestow more than a passing glance upon her fellow passengers. Yet the girl's beauty did not fail to impress itself upon her travelling-companions.

The rich colouring of her cheeks and lips, the ivory whiteness of her even teeth, the soft peach-like bloom that the country air had painted on her face, her blue eyes and wavy chestnut hair were some of the components that lent an added charm to the queen-like figure and indisputable beauty of Hazel Harlow.

At last the terminus was reached, and the second stage of the young girl's battle with the unknown was accomplished. The platform was crowded with porters and the usual crowd of expectant people, all intent in finding the particular travellers they had come to welcome to London.

Hazel stepped out of the carriage, and for a moment stood nerveless upon the crowded platform, overwhelmed by the din and bustle, such a contrast to the quiet peacefulness of Harlow Farm.

A porter recalled her to her senses. "Shall I get a cab, miss?" the fellow said.

"Oh, yes, please," answered the girl, "and will you ask him to drive to Mr. Joseph Harlow's, 46 Chester Street, Bayswater."

The man beckoned to a four-wheeler. Hazel was so intent upon making sure of the cab that was to carry her to her unknown relative that she did not notice that a tall stranger had drawn close to her side, a well-dressed man with a slouch hat drawn over his eyes, who had listened intently to the words that passed between her and the porter.

The cab drew up against the kerb, and the girl entered the vehicle. The stranger hurriedly slipped round in front of the horse, and muttered a few words to the jehu who hesitated for a moment, and then slipped off his box. Thrusting his head inside the cab window—Hazel having settled herself back against the cushions—he said:

"Just a minute, miss, I've got to give a message to a mate of mine."

The unsuspecting girl smiled sweetly into the man's face.

"All right, cabman," she said and then her eyes gazed listlessly out upon the stream of vehicles and people that thronged the station.

This then was London. How noisy it seemed. For a few seconds a great despondency crept over her. She felt her loneliness acutely.

Then her natural buoyancy, coupled with the self-confidence that all pure-minded women feel, came to her aid. She shook off the feeling of depression, and gave herself up to dreams about the future.

In the meanwhile the stranger and the cabman were engaged in an earnest confabulation.

Then the unknown slipped a piece of money into the other man's hand and smiled. The cabby nodded with a somewhat dubious expression, pocketed the coin, and turned away.

Immediately the stranger leapt into a neighbouring hansom, and rattled away at full speed.

Hazel's driver clambered ponderously on to the box of his "growler," cracked his whip and urged his somewhat jaded steed forward. In a few minutes the station was left behind and Hazel found herself amid all the roar of the London streets, a din that made her pulses quicken, and the young blood within her to dance.

"I wonder what my uncle is like," ran her thoughts as the cab rattled onwards. "Suppose that he refuses to see me! Or suppose that he has changed his address! I shall be absolutely friendless and alone then. How does one set about getting on the stage I wonder! Perhaps he will tell me all that. Anyhow I have said good-bye to father's cruelty and to the horrid fate of being Horace Caldecott's wife."

Poor girl! Well was it that a merciful Providence hid the future from her glorious blue eyes. Had she only had an inkling of the dangers and difficulties that beset her path, she would in all probability rather have sought the refuge of the noisy streets through which she was passing, than have pressed onwards to the unknown!

Suddenly the cab drew up before an imposing portico, There was no number visible on the street door. "'Ere's 46 Chester Street, miss," said the cabman alighting from his box and opening the carriage door. "Five shillings please miss."

Hazel paid the exorbitant fare from her little store without even a suspicion that she had been basely overcharged. Her heart was beating fiercely within her. She mounted the steps that led up to the entrance door as though in a dream, and rang the bell.

A youth in buttons answered the summons. "Does Mr. Harlow live here?" the girl asked in her sweet voice.

The boy seemed staggered, as well he might, by such a vision of loveliness.

"Yes, miss," he answered. "Please to step in."

Hazel gave vent to a great sigh of thankfulness. Her fears seemed quite allayed by the calm assurance.

She found herself in a spacious entrance-hall, leading to a broad flight of stairs that evidently led direct to the upper part of the mansion.

The page opened a door to the left of the vestibule.

"Will you step in here miss," he said; and walking through the chamber, a sort of ante room, he opened a door that led to yet another apartment beyond, evidently a study, to judge from the well-filled book-shelves and roll-top desk in the corner.

"Who shall I say, miss?" said the boy, and Hazel noticed that he spoke with evidently suppressed mirth.

"Miss Hazel Harlow, his niece from Harlow Farm," answered the girl eagerly.

The page retired, and she was left alone.

She had not seen her uncle since childhood, and her recollections of him were rather hazy. She knew that her father and he did not get on together, but the cause of their feud she had never known. She pictured him as a venerable, grey-haired gentleman, with ruddy visage and kindly blue eyes.

Five minutes went by. Then a hand was placed on the knob of the door that opened into the room, and by which she had just entered.

The next moment and the door swung open, and a man entered hastily.

Hazel sprang up from the chair in which she had seated herself, and a cry of horror left her lips.

The colour ebbed away from her face, and for a moment she could scarcely believe the evidence of her own eyes.

For in place of the venerable face she had pictured in her dreams, she found herself gazing into the face of the one man she had more reason to detest and fear than any other in the world—Squire Horace Caldecott!

Beautiful Hazel Harlow will interest you deeply.

With a smile that rendered his saturnine, dissipated face more repellent than it usually was to the girl's eyes, Caldecott advanced towards her.

"Welcome to London, my dear!" he said with cruel pleasantry.

Hazel uttered a cry, like a stricken animal. Then it was true! It was no vision! It was for this she had fled away so stealthily from Harlow Farm, to fall straight into a cunning, a diabolical trap!

"Squire Caldecott!" she murmured brokenly. "You here! What does it mean? Where is my uncle?"

Caldecott laughed, a devil's laugh.

"Listen, my beautiful one," he said, mockingly, "and I will tell you what love can do!"

The girl drew herself up to the full height of her queenly figure. All the latent force that lay behind her sweet maidenhood seemed to blaze out of her eyes.

"Love from your lips is only a base profanation of the word, Mr. Caldecott!" she said coldly.

Instinctively Caldecott quailed before her words and gesture.

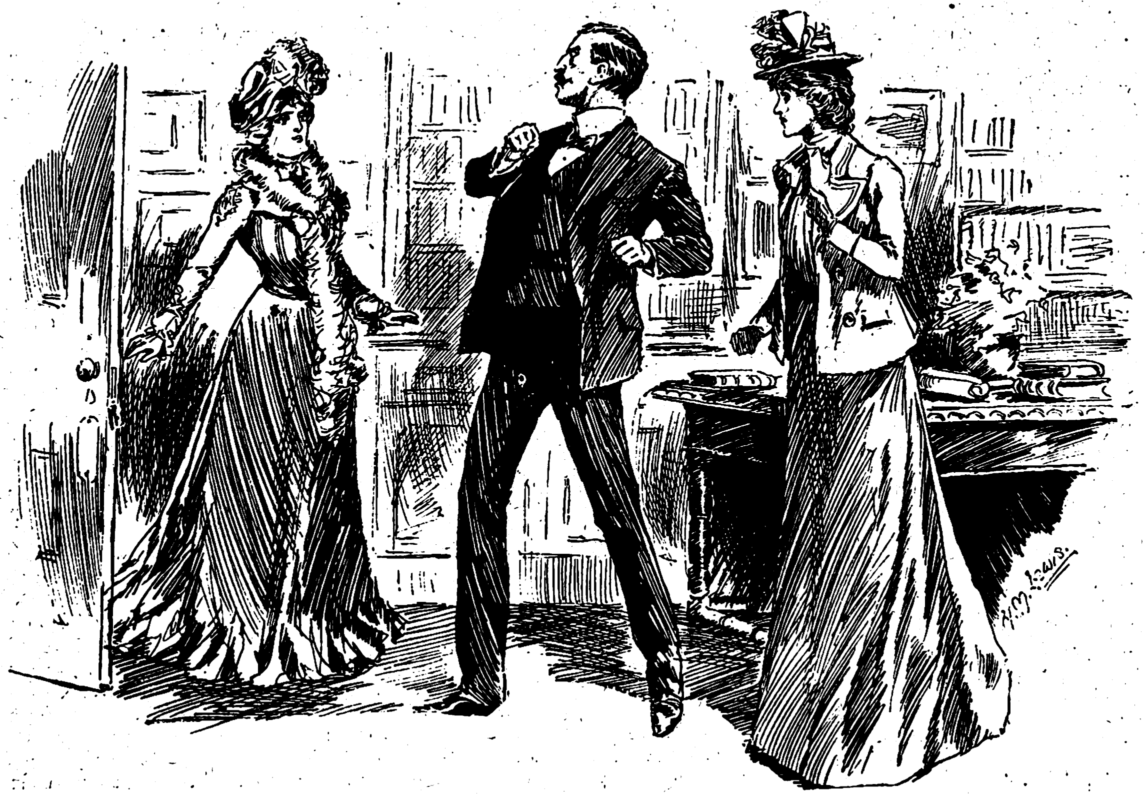
"Yet you shall hear me!" he answered raspingly. Then he went on, in quick, hurried speech: "Last night I overheard the conversation between your father and you. I was beneath the open window. I heard you say that you would never marry me, that you would go out into the world and seek your own bread. I saw your father strike you. I knew that was the climax. You said decisively—your father was too deep in his cups to note your words—that you would leave 'on the morrow,' would go to London. I knew well you would go by the earliest train. I travelled by that train, too. You did not see me"—like a flash Hazel remembered the mysterious appearance of Caldecott's dog-cart—"you were too much wrapped up in your own thoughts. It was I who directed your cabman to drive here. There you have the whole story. And now I have you my wilful darling. For Love finds out the way, in spite of all you may say."

Suppressed passion gleamed out from the man's dark eyes. His whole frame quivered. Never had the girl upon whom his desires were centred seemed more beautiful, more alluring than at that moment, when helpless, alone, unfriended she stood before her hated lover, like a dove in the grip of a falcon.

With a despairing gesture, that must assuredly have turned the heart of a man less unprincipled than Horace Caldecott, the girl looked about her, in vain seeking for some escape from her persecutor.

The squire noted her actions. Again he smiled.

"No, no, sweetheart!" he said, "have no misapprehensions. You are here in my own house. All the servants here are in my employ. If you scream no one will hear you, and if they do"—he shrugged his shoulders meaningly—"Horace Caldecott is well known, rich, influential, respected. While you"—then his voice



"Valerie!" he muttered hoarsely. "What do you want here?"

changed—"come, I do not wish to harm you. I love you too well for that. Only consent to be my wife, and we will return to Harlow Farm in an hour, and no one need know that you sought my protection, unattended, alone"—there was a horrid significance in his voice—"here in the heart of London."

His words stung the girl to hot resentment. All the purity of her unspotted womanhood leapt up in her voice, as she answered him:

"Vile I knew to be, Squire Caldecott, but now your villainy is absolutely unmasked. I see the trap into which you have led me. Well, do your worst. Sooner than marry you I would kill myself; and that I assuredly will do unless you release me immediately."

A half-veiled oath escaped from Caldecott's lips. He took a step forward. His voice was thick with passion and thwarted intent as he said:

"So that's your answer to my offer, is it. Very well then," his sentence was never finished, for at that moment the door of the room suddenly opened to admit a woman, a stylishly dressed figure, clad in all the extravagant finery of excessive female vanity.

Caldecott swung round as the new comer entered, with an exclamation of mingled rage and apprehension. His cheeks went pale as he saw who it was.

"Valerie!" he muttered, hoarsely, "what do you want here?"

The woman laughed aloud. Her eyes, filled with a sudden jealousy, fixed themselves on Hazel's queenly figure and lovely face.

"Who is this, Horace?" she said peremptorily. In a moment Hazel darted forward.

"Save me!" she cried imploringly, "save me if you are a woman with a woman's heart."

But Caldecott interposed, and thrust himself almost roughly between the two women.

"No melodrama here," he said savagely, "this lady"—indicating Hazel with a wave of the hand—"and I have business to transact. I will explain all to you, Valerie, in ten minutes."

He almost pushed the woman towards the door in his anxiety to spare himself a further scene.

"Business!" sneered Valerie, who showed no inclination to be thus cavalierly dismissed. "The lady seems wonderfully anxious to transact it! You did not expect to see me, Horace. You never said you were coming to town. What does it all mean?"

"It means," cried Hazel, "that this villain has trapped me here, that——"

But again Caldecott cut her short almost brutally.

"Come with me, Valerie," he said persuasively, "and I will explain everything. Surely you know me well enough by this time to believe what I say." He took hold of the woman's arm and led her towards the door.

The black eyes of the unknown woman gleamed resentfully at the young girl. Then they turned towards Caldecott's handsome face.

"I will come with you," she muttered, "and hear what you have to say. But if you play me false, look out for yourself. I am not a child to be played with, understand that!"

"Yes, yes," answered Caldecott, "I know. Come!"

He threw open the door of the room and the woman slipped out before him. Hazel darted forward with a cry. Too late! The door clashed to in her face, and she heard the sound of a key shooting back the wards of the lock into their socket, as Caldecott sprang out close on the heels of his comrade.

For a moment she stood motionless, as though turned to stone. What could she do? She was trapped indeed, and beyond help.

For a few seconds the idea came to her to scream for help. Then she remembered Caldecott's words, and realised that such a course of action would be futile. Her eager eyes darted round the room. Was there no way of escape.

She darted towards the window, her hand instinctively catching hold of the little hand-bag that contained her few belongings.

Then she made a discovery. The window proved to be the upper part of a door that opened out on to an iron verandah, with creeper-covered railings, from which a short flight of steps led into a small dreary London garden. At the far end of the garden, which consisted of a grass plot and a few stunted shrubs, was a low brick wall that formed the boundary between the enclosure and a similar piece of ground backing a house of corresponding dimensions to Caldecott's.

All this Hazel's quick, country-trained eyes grasped in a fraction of the time taken in the telling. She saw furthermore that the house opposite her line of vision had a corresponding iron verandah and steps, also leading to a glass-paned door.

In a moment a wild idea came to her. She tried the door. To her joy it was unlocked. Noiselessly she opened it and slipped out on to the verandah. The next moment she had bounded down the steps and was speeding, deer-footed, across the tiny grass plot.

CHAPTER III.

Concealing his chagrin at thus being interrupted in his fell scheme, Caldecott—somewhat uneasy as to the advisability of leaving Hazel alone in her prison, yet never dreaming that she would make any successful endeavour to escape—conducted Valerie to a room not far from the one in which Hazel had been locked.

"And now," said the woman, when they were alone, "for an explanation. Who is that girl?"

"My dear Valerie," said Caldecott in honeyed tones, "the story is soon told. She is the daughter of one of my tenants in the country, who has run away from home. I found her, and was in the act of trying to persuade her to return to her father when you interrupted me. Naturally she was annoyed and tried to kick up a fuss. There, my jealous little darling, you have the whole story," and drawing the woman to him he kissed her with apparent warmth upon the cheeks.

"Is that all Horace?" cried Valerie. "Will you swear to me that's all? You have not been enamoured of her girlish beauty?—for beautiful she is. You have not been endeavouring to find a substitute for Valerie Bellairs?"

"What a jealous little woman it is!" came the answer with seductive tenderness. "How can you, Valerie, the Queen of the London Stage, believe that Horace Caldecott can be torn from his allegiance by the airs and graces of a country bumpkin's daughter? Have you known me for so long to doubt my sincerity?" with wonderful cunning Caldecott hid the impatience that in reality consumed his being.

The actress flung her arms round the man's neck, and pressed her burning lips to his.

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"You mean it, Horace?" she cried, passionately. "Your heart is still mine?"

"Yes, yes, you know it! And now, dearest, let me go and try and persuade this girl to return to her anxious father. Do you leave me now. I will come and see you to-morrow."

Slowly Valerie drew herself apart from the man, who, with all his villainy, she loved with an intentness worthy of a better cause.

"I will go," she said almost resentfully, "and I will trust you."

Caldecott breathed a sigh of heartfelt relief.

"There speaks my sensible little Valerie," he said fondly. "And now let me see you to the street-door. This unpalatable business before me must be settled. Then my mind will be easy and I shall be yours, heart and soul again."

He drew her to him, and kissed her with a great show of tenderness, the plaything of an idle hour, the woman he had tricked and cheated into a belief of his unalterable love.

And Valerie, like many another woman who had fixed her affections upon an idol, was blind to the fact that her idol had feet of clay. The hour of her awakening had not yet come.

She suffered the plausible villain to escort her to the door.

"*Au revoir!*" she murmured, with one last glance from her brilliant eyes. "*Au revoir* till to-morrow."

The next moment she had gone.

An evil smile played round the corners of the Squire's lips.

"And now for my caged bird," he muttered. "Curse Valerie and her meddlesomeness! There will be complications ahead! Bah, I'm sick to death of the woman! It's Hazel I want, Hazel with the damask cheek, the turquoise eye, the figure of a nymph. And she's in my power."

He hurried back to the room in which he had left his prisoner, and pausing outside the door, listened intently for a few moments before turning the key. Supposing that the girl, grown desperate, had determined on springing upon him as he entered. She was vigorous, strong and lithe as a panther. Instinctively his hand went to his hip-pocket to draw forth a tiny revolver, a wicked little weapon, the polished barrel of which glinted brightly in the half-light.

Not a sound could he hear from within the room. Softly he turned the key in the well-oiled wards. The next moment he had thrown open the door, and bounded into the room.

For a moment he could hardly believe the unimpeachable evidence of his eyes. The room was empty!

A cry escaped his lips! She must be hiding in some corner of the room. Yet there was no hiding place for such a queenly figure. Only a cat could have hidden behind the desk. His eyes went to the glass-door. It was ajar!

He dashed across the apartment and peered out into the tiny garden. Something caught his eye on the grass-plot, just beneath the boundary wall at the extreme end. In a momemt he was down the iron steps and across the grass. The "something" was a woman's glove! In a moment he realised how his victim had escaped.

For a few seconds he stood irresolute, murder in his heart. Should he leap the wall into the next garden and forcibly procure an entry into the house beyond. He placed a hand upon the low wall.

Then a new idea struck him. He dashed back the way he had come like the wind.

The girl had given him the slip—he realised that. But she had not seen the last of him yet. No, no, a thousand times no. He had not schemed so deeply for naught. All his plans should not fall to the ground like a house of cards. There was still time to retrieve the ground that had been so suddenly cut from beneath his feet by the unlucky advent of Valerie Bellairs.

CHAPTER IV.

In the meanwhile we must return to Hazel.

To a girl of her country training, with all her muscles rendered supple and strong by open air life she had hitherto led, the low four-foot wall before her presented but few obstacles.

Without casting a look behind her—and had she done so she would have seen the tell tale glove she had dropped in her haste—without pausing for one instant she swung herself up and over the wall, casting her hand-bag before her. Another moment and she was in the other garden.

Fear of the man she fled from leant her wings and gave her courage. Without slackening she swung the bag up again, and flew across the intervening space between the iron steps that led up to the unknown house.

She could not stop to wonder what lay behind that glass door. Her one idea was escape from Caldecott's toils. The next moment her hand was on the door knob.

The door was unlocked. With a sob of thankfulness she dashed inside the room and closed the door behind her.

Her unceremonious entry caused the only occupant of the room, a young man seated at a table reading, to spring from his chair with a cry of the blankest amazement.

The beautiful apparition that had so mysteriously broken in upon his privacy was assuredly ground enough for his consternation.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "who are you? And where do you come from?"

Hazel tottered forward with a blanched face. She had just time to take in the fact that the young man before her was tall and good-looking, and then her harassed brain, added to the fact that no food had passed her lips since the hurried meal of the morning, gave way.

An inarticulate cry came from her lips. The next moment she fell forward, in a dead faint, right into the arms of the dumfounded young man.

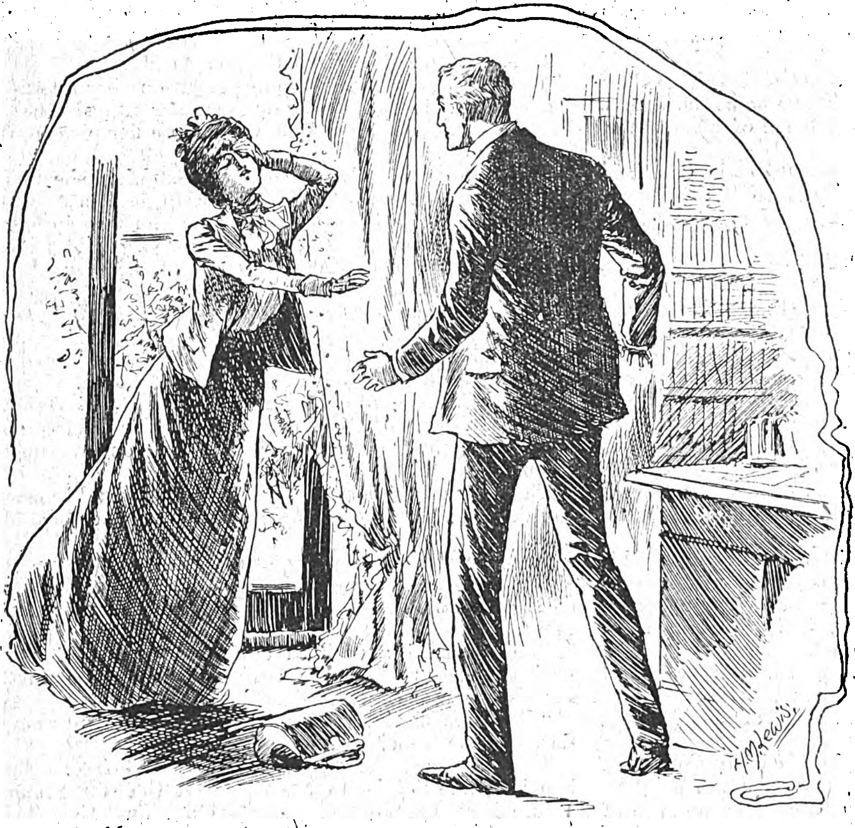
When she came to her senses again she was lying upon a sofa, and the unknown youth was bending over her with evident solicitude apparent in his open grey eyes. In his hand was a glass of water, with which apparently he had been vigorously besprinkling her face.

The colour ebbed back to the girl's face. She sat up and gazing piteously into her unknown protector's face at once began her story.

Without reserve she told him everything, how she had been treated at home, how she had determined to seek refuge in flight, how she had been tricked by Caldecott, how she had escaped from the villain's clutches.

"There, sir, is my story," she said in conclusion. "I can only ask of you forgiveness and indulgence. I am friendless, alone, in your hands. I only did what I have just done because my case was so desperate. And yet something in your face tells me that you are not the man to betray the confidence of an absolutely helpless girl."

The young man drew in a long breath. How beautiful the girl was! And what a sad, terrible story was hers! All the romance in his nature leapt up within him.



The next moment she fell forward in a dead faint.

"Miss——"

"Harlow," put in the girl.

"Miss Harlow, I don't know what to say I——" but here came a new interruption. The door opened and a young girl, clad in walking costume and a smart "picture" hat, entered the room.

The young man sprang to meet her.

"Alice!" he cried, with flaming cheeks. "Miss Harlow! My sister!"

The newcomer's astonishment can well be imagined. Her eyes went from her brother to the strange maiden and from her back to the young man again.

"Eric," she said, in a musical, cultured voice, "what is the meaning of this?"

The young man, with eager haste, blurted out the story he had just heard.

With ever-growing astonishment his sister listened. When he had finished she went over to Hazel's side and took her hand.

"We live here alone, my brother and I," she said, "Monteith is our name. You look tired and worn. Will you come and have lunch with us? Then we can talk."

Tears of gratitude and unexpected joy dimmed the lustre of Hazel's blue eyes.

"Oh, if you only knew all that your words mean to me, Miss Monteith," she said with heartfelt gratitude. "I am tired and hungry. A few moments ago I was without hope as well. But now——" words failed her, and Alice Monteith, taking her by the hand led her from the room.

Eric Monteith went to the glass door and gazed out at the house opposite.

"The cur!" he muttered. "I've a good mind to go round with a horsewhip! How beautiful she is! And what a tragic, wonderful story." He turned away, taking the precaution to lock the door leading to the garden. His one desire was to see once more the girl whom fate had so miraculously thrown in his path.

During lunch Alice and her brother drew fuller details of her history from Hazel's confiding lips.

"And you mean to go on the stage?" queried Alice.

"Yes, to earn my own living. I must, I will! I cannot be a drag to anyone, and I feel that if I am given a chance I can become a good actress." So answered Hazel.

"But this uncle of yours, will you not try to find him out?" queried Eric.

The girl hesitated.

"I do not want to throw myself on anyone's bounty," she answered. "And now I have found so kind and noble a pair of benefactors—I—well perhaps you will advise me instead what I had best do."

Silence followed this speech for a few moments. Then Eric, looking across at his sister's face and reading encouragement there, said:

"We are orphans, Miss Harlow, and possessed of private means. If we can help you——"

"Not with money," broke in Hazel with sudden pleading, "I have enough for my present wants. If only you can recommend me a good, cheap lodging, and show me how I am to set about going on the stage, that is all I want."

"But you have no experience, Miss Harlow!" cried Eric. "How can you hope for any encouragement from a manager."

"I can begin at the bottom of the ladder," answered Hazel bravely. "I have youth and strength in my favour. I am not afraid of work."

Eric was silent. He could not tell this pure minded, innocent girl what was in his heart, of all the terrible trials and dangers that lay before her even were she to begin at "the bottom of the ladder."

He knew, as did his sister, all the sordid pettinesses and tribulations that must lie in the path of such a *débutante* as Hazel.

To think of this lovely girl tempting fortune upon the thorny road that led to theatrical pre-eminence almost made him give voice to the tumult of apprehension that surged up in his brain.

Yet a glance at the strong, pure face told him how futile would any argument of his against her plans be.

In the fancied security of that spacious London dining-room — and to look at Hazel was to believe that she must somehow, notwithstanding her early environment, have been born for higher things than the obscurity of Harlow Farm—she seemed to have already forgotten Horace Caldecott. Little did she know, poor girl, of the depth of that villain's resources.

"I cannot trespass on your hospitality for long," she said at last. "If only you will add to the debt of gratitude I already owe you, and put me in the way of finding a reliable lodging, and how then to set about embarking in theatrical life, well—I can't say all that my heart would have of thankfulness."

"If your mind is made up, Miss Harlow," answered Eric impetuously, "and nothing that we can say will dissuade you from your purpose, we shall be only too proud to help you. We will this afternoon take you to reliable and cheap lodgings. To-morrow I will, if you will allow me, wait upon you and escort you to one of the best known of the theatrical agents, Mark Danvers. He will enter your name on his books, for a fee, and will let you know whether he hears of a *rôle* for you. But I warn you, your inexperience will be a great hindrance to you. And at the best you will have to content yourself with a subordinate position in a travelling company." He hesitated, unwilling to betray more of the repugnance he felt in thus giving her advice.

But Hazel's face was radiant.

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" she cried, and the look she gave the young man, only fired his impressionable heart the more. As for Alice her heart grew sad within her. It was impossible to gaze upon the lovely countenance of the girl, and not say: "Oh, the pity of it, the pity of it!"

After lunch the would-be actress was all impatience to be gone. So unsophisticated, so artless was she that her one idea now was to show these two young Samaritans her gratitude by ridding them of the fancied encumbrance—herself.

At last Eric realised that further procrastination was rendered impossible.

With something like a sigh he rose from his seat.

"Shall we accompany Miss Harlow to Mrs. Bryant's?" he said to his sister.

Alice nodded.

"But first," Eric said warningly, "let me see if the coast is clear. Describe this man, Caldecott, to me, Miss Harlow, please," he asked

A shadow crossed Hazel's face, and something like a shudder ran through her frame. In short, succinct terms she painted her hated lover's picture.

Eric went across to the door. "Stay here," he urged, "and I will go and look in the street to see whether the coast be clear."

He turned and as he did so he realised that the girl who had flown to his house for refuge from the villain who had entrapped her, had stolen his heart.

If ever there was a case of "love at first sight," it was his. And instead of being able to tell her his love, he must let her go from him without a word, out into the cruel world to face heaven alone knew what terrible dangers and ordeals.

Could he do that? No never. It could never be that she had flashed meteor-like in all her radiant beauty across his path, merely to disappear into the unknown. No, that should never be, while strength and money were his.

So thinking he opened the street door and gazed down and up the practically deserted street, only a few people were about; no one to answer the description of Horace Caldecott, only an unkempt tramp limping along the pavement, a ragged unkempt mortal who gazed furtively up into the young man's face with hungry eyes.

Eric went back.

"The coast is clear!" he said somewhat gloomily, "Let us go."

And so the three set out to seek a haven with Mrs. Bryant, a motherly soul, and at one time a servant to the Monteiths.

Neither of the trio cast another glance at the unkempt tramp that Eric's careless eyes had lighted upon a few moments before.

They didn't see the wolfish gleam that came from his black eyes, or notice the fact that he shambled along some twenty or thirty paces in their wake.

Thus ends Hazel Harlow's first adventure in her desire for emancipation from her cruel home ties. She is now about to embark on the first stage of becoming an actress. A thrilling adventure was to be hers in this first plunge into the unknown. What this was will be related in next week's *Short Stories*, under the name of: "A Devil's Lure."

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The Disappearance of Mr. Mortimer Howard.

THE little town of Lidford was shaken by the news.

It created a profound sensation there. The war, the election of a Board of Guardian for the district, and every other topic, local and general, was thrust into the background for the time being.

Nothing else was talked about but the disappearance of Mr. Mortimer Howard, a prominent figure in those parts, and a man who was at the head and tail of everything that went on in the place.

The local journals were full of this all-absorbing affair, and in the next few days brief reports of the case found their way into the London papers.

From the meagre details published I learned that Mr. Howard and two companions had gone out duck-shooting on the fatal afternoon.

Lidford is situated near the mouth of a tidal river, and the party had crossed in a small boat to the marshy flats on the opposite shore, where wild fowl of all sorts are plentiful.

In coming back, late in the evening, the boat was upset in some unaccountable manner and the whole three thrown into the water.

Mr. Howard's two companions managed to save themselves by clinging on to the little craft, as it floated bottom upwards, but nothing more was seen of the unfortunate gentleman himself.

That was all I knew of the case so far; and it was taken for granted, of course, that Mr. Mortimer Howard, not having succeeded in getting a hold on the boat, had gone under while his companions were still struggling for their lives.

I was destined, however, to hear more of the affair very soon, and to put this theory to test.

Some few weeks later a friend of mine named Hallowes, who was connected with one of the big insurance companies in the city, called upon me late in the evening.

He was an uncommonly smart fellow in his own particular line, and though rather young for the post his directors had recently made him an inspector. I found that he had some very interesting things to tell me.

"You've heard of this boating accident up north?" he said, as he sat down.

"Which one was that?" I asked.

"Why the one in which Mr. Mortimer Howard was supposed to have lost his life."

"Supposed?" I questioned. "I thought there was no doubt about it, one way or the other."

"Ah, but there is, and a very considerable doubt too," he answered. "That is precisely what has brought me here."

"Your people are interested in this matter, then?"

"They are; to the tune of three thousands or so."

"His life was insured for that amount?"

"With us—yes."

"Recently."

"Within the past twelve months."

This was getting interesting. On the face of it, it looked a bit fishy that a man who had effected a heavy insurance upon his life should meet with a fatal accident so soon afterwards.

"We are not the only office likely to suffer," Hallowes went on. "Between ourselves, several of the smaller companies have been rather hard hit, for it turns out that Mr. Mortimer Howard had taken out policies—accident and otherwise—in every direction. Most of the other offices have paid up already and tried to look pleasant over it, but our directors are inclined to kick."

"On what grounds?"

"Well, we have been looking into matters a bit, and making careful inquiries on our own account. This Mr. Howard, you must understand, had the reputation of being wealthy, which, at first sight, seems to be borne out by actual facts. But there are ugly rumours afloat as to money-lender's claims, gambling debts, and goodness knows what. It is said that he was given to dabbling in stocks and shares, and with outside brokers too. You know what leeches they are. When once a man gets into their hands, you may be sure they will drain him pretty dry before they are done with him."

"You think, then——?" I began.

"I think nothing," Hallowes hastened to interpose. "I have no facts to go upon yet. The whole circumstances of the case, however, justify our people in holding back payment for the present, until the matter is thoroughly sifted."

"There were two others with Mr. Howard at the time, I understand. Do you know who they were?"

"One was a relative of his, a certain Mr. Henshaw, who had been staying with him for some time past. This Henshaw is an American, or at least he has spent a good many years out there, quite long enough to pick up all the Yankee ways. It was from him we got an account of the accident. He states that they were making for a point some distance below Lidford, for the tide was running out like a mill-race at the time, and they found that they could make little headway against it. Just as they were within a stone's-throw of the shore, the other man, a young fellow called Goddard, jumped up to take a shot at something overhead. In doing so he lost his balance and upset the boat. Henshaw and Goddard, as you may have heard, saved

"Adventures of an Actress" begin to-day.

themselves by clinging on to the keel. When they succeeded in righting the boat, which they did with very great difficulty, Howard had disappeared. The only trace they could find of him was his hat, which was drifting down with the tide."

"And this man Goddard?" I asked.

"Ah, that's exactly where the rub comes in," replied Hallowes. "If there is any trickery in this business, I could well understand that Howard and Henshaw were acting in collusion. But with Goddard the case is entirely different. It seems that he was quite a casual acquaintance of theirs. He came to Lidford a few weeks before as a total stranger, and put up at one of the smaller hotels. Being fond of sport, he spent most of his time prowling about the flats with his gun. It was there the other two first ran across him. They got into conversation with him and took him in tow for the rest of the day. It was arranged that he should accompany them on the afternoon in question, and he confirms Henshaw's story as to what happened on the way back in every particular. Altogether, I foresee that Goddard is the rock upon which our case will spit."

"And what steps do you propose to take?"

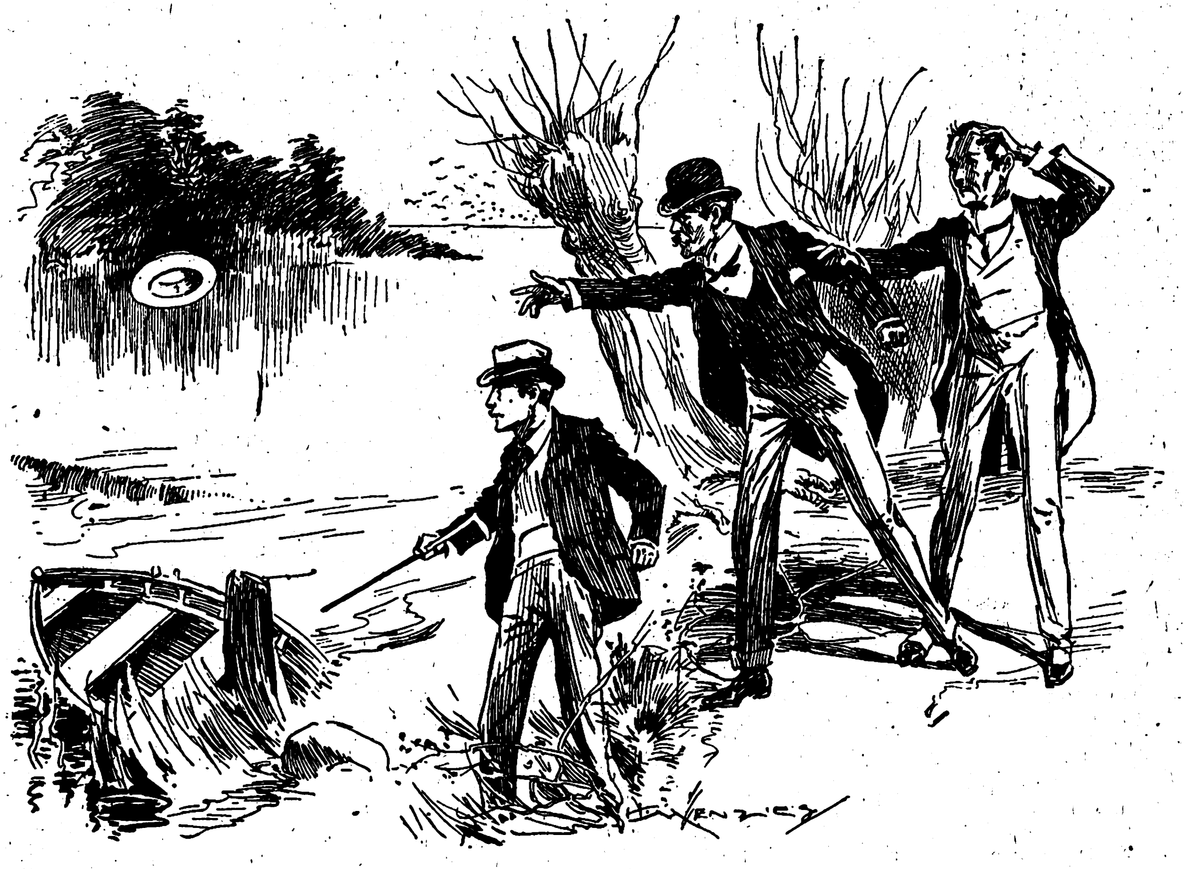
"The directors have put the whole thing into my hands. I am to go down and look into the matter carefully on the spot. Now, as I have never tackled an investigation of this kind before, I feel I might possibly miss some little vital point, which anyone with more experience would see the importance of and pounce upon at once. That's what brought me to you. If you could accompany me——"

"I'm your man," I said, cutting him short, for a nice little problem of this kind didn't often come my way.

"You see," he continued, "it's a rare chance for me, and I want to make the most of it. Our people wouldn't mind stumping up in the least if all was plain and straight sailing. It's the thought of being possibly swindled that sticks in them. And if it should really prove to be a case of fraud, and I prevent them from being fleeced of these few thousands, they'd think more of it than if I saved them three times the amount in any other way."

Early next morning we set out for Lidford together, and arrived there late in the afternoon.

Our first step was to seek an interview with Henshaw, who, it appears, was one of Mr. Howard's executors, and



I stepped forward quickly, plucked the hat from his head, and sent it skimming out into the water.

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as such had been entrusted with the winding-up of the estate.

We found him an uncommonly hard nut to crack.

A shrewd, wide-awake Yankee, he was not at all the kind of man to make a slip or to give himself away. He seemed to take it quite as a matter of course that the insurance company should wish to satisfy themselves on all points, but evidently regarded it as a foregone conclusion that they would have to pay out in the end.

Though ready enough to answer any questions put to him, he stopped short at that. He did not appear to consider that he was called upon to volunteer any information of his own accord. It was for us to find out all the particulars we wished to know; his part was merely to reply to our inquiries. That was the attitude he took.

At Hallowes' request he accompanied us down the Strand, and pointed out the exact spot where the accident had occurred. The tide was on the ebb at the time. In near the shore the water was very deep and sluggish, but a little further out I could see that the current was exceptionally powerful. It raced past us with the speed of a galloping horse.

"A strong tide, that," remarked Hallowes, as we stood looking out over the broad river.

"You might well say so," Henshaw returned, in his dry way, "if you were pitched head-foremost into it."

"You had not reached the slack water, then, when the accident happened?" I put in.

"Not quite," he replied. "Almost, but not quite."

"And you saw nothing of Mr. Howard after the boat was upset?"

"Not a trace."

"The body was never recovered, I believe?"

"It was not," he admitted.

"But you had the river dragged, hadn't you?" I asked.

"For days," he answered.

"With no success?"

"None."

I was silent for a moment; and then tackled him again on the same point.

"How do you account for that?" I asked.

For answer he simply raised his hand and pointed with his fore-finger towards the rushing, foaming current.

"If you were dropped in there, my friend," he said, turning to me in rather a grim manner, "with such a tide as that running at the time, the best place to look for you next morning would be a dozen miles or so out to sea."

This seemed reasonable, although I did not at all like his way of putting it. Still, there was one other point.

"And the hat?" I asked.

"The hat," he replied, selecting a cigar from his case and coolly nipping off the end with his teeth, "was tossed out of the current a little lower down."

"Would you mind pointing out the exact point?"

He looked as if he thought he had had quite enough of this cross-examination; but still he complied.

We strolled along until we came to a big round boulder close to the water's edge, on reaching which Henshaw paused and proceeded to light his cigar in a very leisurely manner.

"There," he said, as he jerked the stump of the match into the water, "we found the hat floating down there, not twenty yards from where we're standing at the moment."

I had my eyes on him at the time, and, slight as it was, I saw him give a palpable start. A very odd look came into his face for a moment; he took the cigar from his mouth, whisked right round, and glanced up at the sky.

"I guess," he said, "it looks like rain, gentleman. If you've no more questions to ask, I think I'll be getting back."

"Yes, it certainly does seem as if we were in for a smart shower," replied Hallowes, cocking his eye towards the sky, and utterly thrown off the scent by the cuteness of the Yankee.

But, clever as he was, our friend Henshaw hadn't taken me in quite so easily.

"Oh, no, my fine sir," I said to myself, "it isn't the thought of rain that troubles you. That's not what made you start just now. You're playing a deep game; but like many another in your place you've made some little mistake and suddenly become aware of it in the last minute or so."

Though now thoroughly convinced that there was trickery at the bottom of Mr. Mortimer Howard's disappearance, I didn't want Henshaw to see that I suspected anything of the kind, and so turned away from the spot with the most careless and most indifferent air I could assume.

But my mind was hard at work as we strolled back along the beach. I felt that I was on the brink of some startling and amazing discovery.

It was with the greatest reluctance that I moved away. Something seemed to be dragging me back to that boulder.

What had made Henshaw start as we stood there together? What had been revealed to him, which was as yet hidden from us?

My two companions were now chatting in the most friendly manner, and Henshaw seemed to have lost all apprehensions regarding the rain. As for me, I was chafing inwardly, fuming with impatience to return to that spot alone. At last I could stand it no longer; and trumping up some excuse about having to write an important letter, I told Hallowes that I would hurry on ahead.

"Oh, hold hard!" he cried out, as he saw me start off. "There's no great hurry. You'll have plenty of time when we get back."

The blind dolt! I could have punched his head. But I took no notice of his bawling and hurried away, until I got round a corner out of sight. The moment I did so I scrambled up the bank to the high ground above, and bending low down so that the two others should not catch a glimpse of me, doubled back for all I was worth.

When I reached the boulder, I sat down on the beach close to it, took my head in my hands, and did some hard thinking. I went over the whole ground again, weighed every point, tried to put myself in Henshaw's place and to imagine what had caused him to start in that manner. That it had something to do with the hat I felt convinced. But what?

Beautiful Hazel Harlow will interest you deeply.

For the best part of an hour I suppose I sat there racking my brains. But nothing came of it. I was baffled!

Very sore at finding myself foiled in this manner, I felt the necessity of relieving my feelings in some way. Stretching out my hand I picked up a splinter of wood which was lying beside me.

"Dash it!" I muttered, with pure vexation, and I hurled the splinter into the water as if I had a personal grudge against the river and all belonging to it.

My eyes followed the piece of wood as it fell upon the surface, and drifted slowly away.

And then—and then—well, the next second I had bounded to my feet with a regular whoop of triumph. I had made a most singular, a most interesting discovery. Oh, yes, I saw it all now! I knew why Henshaw had started when he chucked the stump of his match into the water!

I hurried back to our hotel, where I found Hallowes hunting high and low for me.

"Where on earth have you been?" he asked as I entered.

"Never mind now," I answered. "We've got something else to think of. You must contrive to cajole our friend Henshaw into accompanying us to the same spot to-morrow afternoon."

"Do you think we are likely to get anything more out of him?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

When Hallowes approached him next day, however, Henshaw's mood had quite changed. He had turned uncommonly rusty since we last saw him.

He was inclined to bluster a bit, said that he had no time to waste in fooling around in this way; but as he couldn't very well get out of it, he came along with us in the end.

On reaching the boulder I let Hallowes smooth him down a bit by putting a few trivial and unimportant questions, and then quietly chipped in myself.

"By the way, Mr. Henshaw," I said, "I understood you to say it was just here you picked up the hat?"

"Yes, right here," he returned.

"And it was floating down with the tide, wasn't it?"

He shot a keen, searching glance at me, but I bore it well.

"Yes," he answered, boldly.

I stepped forward quickly, plucked the hat from his head, and sent it skimming out into the water.

"Look!" I cried, pointing to it as it settled on the surface and began to drift away—not *down* the stream but *up*.

He did look; and his jaw dropped. One glance was enough to show him that the game was up. With a fierce oath he turned upon me and his hand went like a flash towards his hip pocket. But I was too quick for him, and let him have my fist between the eyes before he could draw his six-shooter. As he went down I sprang upon him and soon had him unarmed.

All this time Hallowes stood stock still, gazing stupidly at the hat as if he could scarcely believe his eyes.

"What—what does it mean?" he gasped, when I had finished with Henshaw.

"Why," I said, "the explanation of it is simple enough. Just here, as is often the case in tidal rivers, there is a strong counter current close to the shore, so that things drift in the opposite directions to which the tide is running at the time. Our friend here became aware of this interesting fact when he threw the stump of a match into the water yesterday. A little later on I discovered it by pure accident in much the same way."

* * * * *

Well, as I had suspected from the moment I laid eyes on Henshaw, the whole thing turned out to be a very clever attempt at fraud. Mr. Mortimer Howard was no more dead than Henshaw himself or any of the rest of us.

It came out afterwards that he was miles away at the time the boat was supposed to be upset.

It appears that, finding himself heavily involved, and knowing that a crash was bound to come sooner or later, he made known the state of the case to the wily Henshaw.

The latter immediately suggested that he should disappear in some manner which would afford strong presumptive evidence of his having met with a fatal accident.

Then, when the insurance money had been raked in, he could start afresh in some other part of the world. Between them they hit upon the idea of a bogus boating accident. But there was one little drawback. They wanted an independent witness, and didn't know exactly where to find one.

Chance very soon threw the very man in their way. One day, when they were out shooting together, they ran across Goddard.

This young gentleman was a sporting character, who had lost pretty heavily on the turf, and got himself into a bit of a pickle in consequence. Henshaw had known him in former years, and had some sort of hold over him.

But apart from that, Goddard was quite ready to assist them in their plans if he could fill his pockets by doing so.

Fifty pounds down, with the promise of a few hundred when the insurance money was all paid, squared him quickly enough.

When they rowed across the river that afternoon, on pretence of going duck-shooting, the missing man was landed on the opposite shore. It was arranged that he should make his way to the nearest seaport in disguise, embark for America, and lie low there until Henshaw joined him with the insurance money.

The two others waited about till the evening and then rowed back, with Howard's hat lying in the bottom of the boat. The rest was easy enough to manage.

Henshaw, even though he had given himself away when he tried to draw upon me, did his best to brazen the thing out afterwards. When he was arrested, he was full of bluff and bluster, and kept up the farce right to the end.

Goddard, however, who was laid by the heels in a different part of the country, proved to be a very poor-spirited sort of individual, and caved in at once. He wasn't an hour in custody before he had disclosed the whole plot!

Detectives were sent out to the States, and Mr. Mortimer Howard was eventually landed once more in his native land. The whole three subsequently met with their deserts at the hands of a judge and jury.

Oblige the Editor by passing "Short Stories" on to somebody else.

IN SOUTH AFRICA.

A True Story of the War.

THERE was a pit-a-pat of footsteps outside the ramshackle farmhouse. A child flung himself through the open door, sank into a chair, and began to beat his little fists upon the clothless table in an ecstasy of fear.

"The yellow men, granny, the yellow men," he wailed. "I have looked through the long glass, and I have seen them all coming, thousands and thousands of them, and they will kill us all, and burn the house. Jan's farm by the river is all burning; and the yellow men have crossed the water. Oh, granny what shall we do?"

And the boy's voice died away in a falsetto shriek.

It was a square, bare room, rather large, but very low ceilinged. The tattered blinds were drawn down, to keep out the fierce glare of the South African sun, and the atmosphere in the room was very heavy and hard to breathe.

On a hard, shiny surfaced sofa, of the sort common in poor houses in London, lay another child, half covered with a rug. Her cheeks were wofully drawn, and she was obviously in a state of high fever. An old woman with a hungry face sat motionless by the side of the little girl and stared across the room at the wailing boy. In her hand was a Bible, kept open by a bony finger between the leaves, and the book was open at the story of the rout of the Philistines by Joshua.

For a month, save for a visit of the mercenaries, the old woman in the tumble-down farm had been quite cut off from the outside world. All the men had long since gone from the district, and the rumours of the oncoming English, whom report credited with killing all they found, had sent those women and children who stayed behind flying to the east.

But the old woman had nowhere to fly to. Her only son was fighting; she had no friends or relations, and there was nothing to do but to wait on with the children and trust blindly to Providence.

In the morning there had been loud firing not far from the house, and dull firing that seemed to come from miles away. Then, about midday, the nearer firing had ceased, and presently a great rust-bitten gun, its snout jerking spasmodically heavenwards as it lumbered behind a team of oxen, had been dragged past.

All through the afternoon unkempt, haggard men had hurried past on stumbling ponies, and hour after hour the old woman had watched the flying army, praising Heaven, as band after band disappeared over the edge of the hill, that they did not stop to take the few morsels of biscuit that were left for the children.

For the last hour or two there had been no more fugitives, and the old woman had gone back to sit with her bible by the dying child.

She was not quite sure of what was likely to happen till the boy had run in with the news of the yellow men's approach, but she felt quite certain that somewhere in the region of the firing had been her son.

It never crossed her mind that he might have been in this particular fight. All that she knew of war she had got from her bible, and as in those days one nation had always gone up against another, so now she imagined that the present fighting was being conducted on the same lines.

So she was racked with doubt as the ragged army of burghers trailed past the farm. Would not her son, if he had been flying among them, have stopped and sought shelter with her?

There was the cellar dug out beneath the living room, and he knew of that, for had he not dug it out himself? Or would he have been compelled to rush on with the others to fight again somewhere else?

The old woman could not conceive that that was possible, for her bible knowledge of fighting told her that when one side was made to fly all was over with that side, and it was best to hide, for the conquerors had set themselves to the killing of the conquered. It must be, then, that he was wounded or perhaps dead somewhere, where the cannons had been firing all day. She decided that presently she would go out and look for him. She would take with her the little bottle of gin that had been saved after the party given to the field cornet.

The little boy at the table wailed on, and the hungry old woman felt the burning fingers of the fever-stricken little girl on her wrists. She could not bring herself to feel much sympathy for the children, for her heart was all with her son, who was fighting, and after all, she had given them the biscuits and gone hungry herself.

There was no noise outside now, save the industrious hum of the bees. She held her hand to ear, hoping against hope that she would not hear the oncoming of the victorious army. At last she made out the sound of a horse's hoofs—one horse only it seemed. They came nearer quickly, and then the figure of a mounted man rushed into the view that the open door commanded.

She saw the man scramble from his steaming horse and strike it heavily with the butt of his rifle, so that it flung up its head and galloped away. Then he staggered in through the door, wiping the dust from his eyes with his ragged sleeve.

"My son my son!" screamed the old woman tottering to her feet. "Oh, I was sure you would come; I was sure of it."

The man stopped her speech with a gesture.

"Quick, the crowbar," he whispered hoarsely. "I must get down into the cellar; they're close after me, mother, very close."

He snatched the heavy bar that she had brought laboriously from a corner, and began to prise the thin end into a broad crevice at the side of the hearthstone.

"Keep the children quiet," he muttered, elbowing away the excited little boy at his coat tails; "if they catch me, mother, it's certain death—certain death."

When the stone had been raised a few inches it turned back easily on hinges, and he scrambled down a ladder.

"Remember, mother, it's death if I'm found; push the table over the trap, sit by it, and keep the children's mouths closed."

Then he disappeared.

The table was only just pushed into place in time. The old woman sat down by it and took up her Bible again. She stared vacantly at the troopers in dirty khaki who stalked into the room.

"The yellow men, the yellow men!" screamed the little boy, running behind the shelter of the table.

The manner of the sergeant was sharp and harsh.

"Now, then, old woman, you've got a man hiding here; it's no use lying; we saw him come in. Out with him."

He spoke in excellent Dutch; he was, in fact, a Volunteer from the Cape, and owned a grandfather who hailed from Amsterdam.

"There is no one here, sir," she answered quietly; "no one here but myself and the children, and one of them, you see, is very ill; and you would not wish to make her worse, surely?"

The man's voice softened a little.

"Of course not, my good woman; but you've a man hiding here who fired under a white flag, and we've got to have him. Search the house, men, as quietly as you can."

The sergeant sat down nursing an arm that was roughly strapped to him with a piece sacking. As his eye roved round the room he noticed the boy, and stared at him curiously, as if trying to recall some memory.

The search did not last long. The men were colonials who knew the ways of the country, and the fissure at the side of the hearthstone was soon noted.

"He's down there, sergeant," said a young man pointing with the but of his Lee-Enfield beneath the table: "we'll have to be careful, though; he'll be armed."

There was a parley of ten minutes, while the nozzles of half a dozen rifles were poked into the aperture beneath the slightly raised hearthstone.

At last an unseen hand thrust out a Mauser, and in another moment the Boer stood before them.

"Why, it's you, Williams, is it?" he said in hesitating English, staring at the sergeant. "If I'd known I wouldn't have fired."

"Why, who are you?" The sergeant's eyes were puzzled, and he faltered.

Then the little boy ran from behind the table and gripped his father's knee.

"You won't kill my father, I know," he said, pleadingly, and at the voice the sergeant turned pale. "Nelly's voice and Nelly's eyes!" he murmured.

"Yes, and Nelly's boy," said the Boer. "I'm your brother-in-law, Williams, and I wouldn't have fired on you if I'd known, as I say. Your sister's dead, you know."

Then the sergeant's men displayed a tact that was hardly to be expected from mere troopers. They made hurriedly for the door, and in a moment the sergeant was alone with his relations.

* * * * *

"I hope that you will agree with me that I did right, boys," said the sergeant fastening the Mauser that he had taken from his brother-in-law across the saddle bow. "After all, 'twas me that he hit, and the kiddies are my own sister's kiddies. Besides I don't believe that he quite knew what he was doing. I've given 'em that tin of bully beef I had. They were nigh starving; d'you mind that?"

As an answer the troopers swung into their saddles, and in five minutes the little band had disappeared over the crest of the hill.

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THE DIAMOND SERPENT.

THE ordeal was over.

He had proposed, and she had said "yes," and now she nestled against his heart folded in his strong arms, looking into his eyes with a face radiant with happiness.

"You think you will never regret this day, Hortense?" he asked softly, "you know that I am credited with possessing a brute of a temper, dearie; I know myself that it is short, that I am stern determined and unrelenting, though it is so, believe me, only when wrong has been done me or mine."

She said she never should regret that day, and catching his face between her small hands looked right into his eyes.

"Your temper, my Louis, shall never be aroused by me," she went on. "I believe it is strong; an outburst would scare me almost to death."

"Poor little girl," he said, "I am afraid of it myself sometimes. But I will keep a strong hand on it, for your sake."

They kissed again, and then she kissed with joy and many times the diamond band he had just placed on her finger.

"You love diamonds," he remarked, watching her.

"Not more than I love you, Louis," colouring deeply. "It is not because they are diamonds that I hug them to me, but because you gave me this ring, because it means so much to us. I suppose every woman likes diamonds, all jewels in fact, more or less, and after all, diamonds are so beautiful it would seem strange if they did not. And they make woman look still more beautiful herself, don't you think so, Louis?"

He did; and she sighed.

"Now, look at Mrs. Gordon West," she continued, "I don't think she would be half so fascinating stripped of her diamonds—and particularly of her diamond serpent—that lovely brooch! I almost envy her for that alone."

"I did not know she was at all fascinating either with or without her jewels," Louis said.

"You never thought so, once? Why, do you know, people said, and maybe are saying now, they were certain you were in love with her. They have told me so and I——"

He held her more tightly in his arms.

"People say many silly things," he answered; "I should no more dream of marrying Mrs. Gordon West, than flying to the moon. She is rich, she may be good-looking, from the world's point of view it might have been a splendid match for me. I have been told so; but then, I am not absolutely poverty-stricken, and beyond, well, I just simply loved you."

Hortense sighed contentedly, as only a woman sighs when she is perfectly happy. She felt a great pity in her heart for Mrs. Gordon West, who had even confided to her her admiration for the rising young Doctor Louis Kellner, together with all her hopes and aspirations.

* * * * *

The news of the engagement between Louis Kellner and Hortense Maydew travelled quickly, and Mrs. Gordon West was among the first to learn it. How she deported herself in the privacy of her boudoir is a secret well-guarded from the world at large. Certainly no effects were apparent when she appeared in her box at the Opera in the evening. Youthful and radiantly happy as ever she looked, and the extra brilliancy of her eyes almost counterbalanced the absence of the famous serpent brooch from her breast.

"I hope she will be happy," she confided to her dear friend, Mrs. Ethel Graveson. "She ought to be, it's a brilliant match for her. They are very poor, you know, the Maydews and she had nothing but a lengthy lineage to recommend her."

"Some think her beautiful," Mrs. Graveson remarked.

"Yes," the other drawled. "Personally I, too, am with them, and I can only suppose it is for that Mr. Kellner is marrying her."

"Yet he has told me that he looks beyond the skin for qualities in a woman."

"Few men look so far when they fall in love," said Mrs. Gordon West. "But I am afraid she won't be all so happy as I would wish every married couple to be," she continued, "he is young, clever, handsome, by no means poor, but——"

"You would say he has a temper?"

"Just so. At least, I have heard so, how the report originated though I don't know. Still, looking at his face in repose he is hard and cruel, and determined. In his wrath he must be terrible to encounter."

"And yet I heard you were—well not impartial to him."

Mrs. Gordon West laughed lightly.

"It is strange how these reports gain ground," she remarked.

* * * * *

"A diamond serpent brooch?" said the shopman. "Certainly, we can make it and to any price you like. Something like this £250, or this £5. I need not explain thereon, or difference in value."

Louis Kellner chose the £250 article.

"It will take some time to make," the man explained.

"Ah, that is sold?"

"Well, it belongs to Mrs. Gordon West, she sent it to have a facsimile made in paste. This is the facsimile."

The doctor took them and examined the pair curiously.

"Well, one could hardly tell the real from the unreal," he remarked, handing them back. "By the bye, the tail here turns down from the head; in mine you will make it turn up."

* * * * *

Wentworth House was a blaze of light and life. All fashionable London was there, for not to be in town and not recorded in the newspaper chatter as being amongst the guests of Mrs. Gordon West's functions was to be indeed counted out of society.

This was one of the balls of the season and naturally amongst those invited were Hortense Maydew and Dr. Kellner.

Beautiful Hazel Harlow will interest you deeply.

The Doctor was to have called for his *fiancée* and take her on to the dance, but as the time passed and he came not, Hortense set out alone with her Aunt.

"I suppose," she said with a sigh of regret; "some unexpected professional call has detained him."

She was however, mistaken in her surmise. Louis Kellner had failed to keep the appointment for quite a different reason.

This was the day for which the diamond brooch had been faithfully promised. It had not however, been delivered in the afternoon; and the Doctor's servant calling at the jewellers to learn the cause of the delay was informed that the diamond setter especially engaged on this piece of work, had at the eleventh hour, been taken suddenly ill. But another workman was now busy on the brooch, and it would certainly be ready in the evening.

The Doctor was annoyed. He had particularly set his heart upon presenting the brooch to Hortense to wear at the ball that night, and as the time sped by beyond the hour for which it was promised and approached the moment when he should set out to call for Hortense, he grew the more impatient.

And it was not till well past the moment that the messenger arrived with it, to incur in the final few seconds the righteous wrath of the doctor, which was however, delivered at the firm and not the individual.

Consequently he arrived late at Wentworth House—a full half hour after the dancing had begun, and it was not until they were sitting out the sixth dance that he had an opportunity of explaining to Hortense the reason of the delay and pinning the diamond serpent in the neck of her dress.

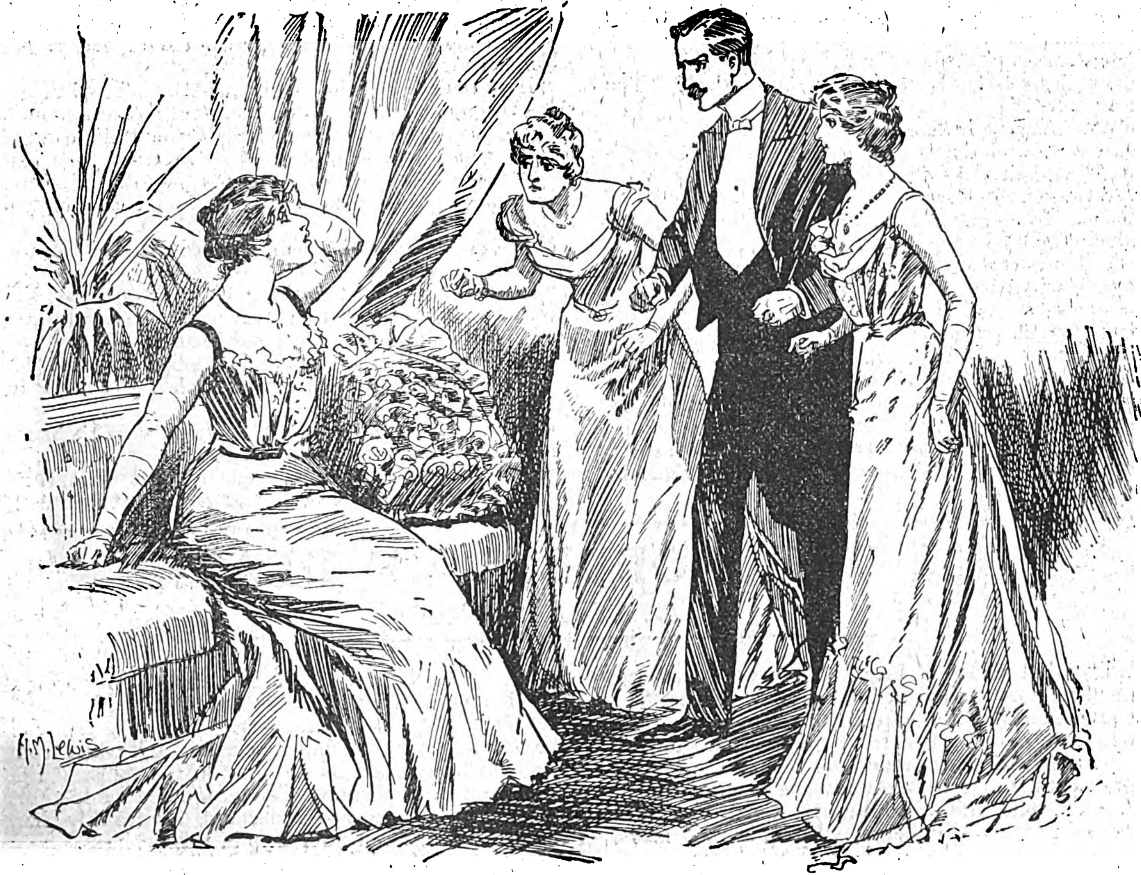
They were in the conservatory at the time, and the plashing of the fountain mingled with the sweet softness of the music from the ball-room, combined to increase the delight and happiness of Hortense engendered by the unexpected gift of so beautiful a present.

She thanked her lover with a kiss, and he drew her head on to his shoulder.

As he did so his eye caught sight of the glitter of something in the dark coils of her coiffure, but he concluded that it came from a deftly hidden comb and therefore remarked not thereon.

It was just as they had risen to return to the ball-room that Mrs. Graveson approached them. She was agitated and flushed with excitement.

"What do you think has happened?" she asked breathlessly. "Mrs. Gordon West has lost her diamond



With a cry of mingled rage and pain she sank on the seat.

brooch—the famous serpent you know. She forgot to pin it in when she came down and left it on the table in her boudoir. She tells me she saw it there when you went up to her Miss Maydew, and since you came down together it has disappeared. Her maid declares that no one has since entered the room."

Hortense clutched at the brooch at her throat and went deadly pale.

"This," she said, "is a present from Louis, from Dr. Kellner," she exclaimed; "he has just given it to me," for Mrs. Graveson was regarding the brooch with suspicion.

"Has Mrs. West told anyone but you of her loss?" the Doctor asked coolly, speaking to Mrs. Graveson.

"Yes, she is very much upset. You know how impetuous she is. Of course, all her guests are alert and suspicious, but she has communicated with the police."

"Ask her quietly to come to me," the Doctor said, "if you will be so kind."

Mrs. Graveson went in search of her hostess, and the Doctor turned to his *fiancée*.

"Tell me why you went to Mrs. West's boudoir," he said.

"It was her wish. She did not come down until many of the guests had arrived. She had a headache and wished particularly for my salts—the ones you make me up, you know. And——"

"While you were sitting there, she said your hair was slightly disarranged, and rose to restore it?" Doctor Kellner continued.

The girl was agitated.

'Good heavens! How do you know that? You were not here!"

"Just bend your head a moment, dear."

She did so and the Doctor put his fingers into the coils of her hair. As she raised her eyes Mrs. West entered the conservatory.

She was full of her loss, and in a temper. She examined the brooch the Doctor had just given Hortense and in her first breath declared it was hers, but when he pointed out that the serpent's tail twisted up from the head she was satisfied.

"But how did you know the tail of my brooch turned the other way?" she inquired.

"I have observed it very closely," the Doctor answered, "on occasions when it has bedecked your throat. I am sincerely sorry at your loss," he went on, "I understand you have communicated with the police. What do you propose to do? Is there anyone amongst your guests whom you suspect?"

Mrs. Gordon West refused to say.

"But no doubt everyone would rather you did," he asserted.

"They would all be willing to be searched." There was a ring of sarcasm in his voice.

"That is impossible," Mrs. Gorden West exclaimed. "I could not ask them."

"If you will permit me I will suggest it," he continued, "that is, if you think it necessary."

Mrs Gordon West trembled and hesitated.

"Still," he pursued, "I do not think it will be necessary. Miss Maydew was the last person with you in your boudoir she informs me, and you can I suppose rely upon the word of your maid that since you left no one has entered?"

"Implicitly."

"Then it remains only for Miss Maydew to be searched," his lips were tightly pressed and his eyes blazed.

"It shall be done in that ball room if you prefer, or here. Still, ere we submit her to this degradation let me ask you to search first and make sure you have lost your brooch; let me suggest that you search first in your coiffure there," and he touched her hair with his hand.

Her hand flew to her head. The pin or diamond brooch scratched her fingers, and with a cry of mingled rage and pain she sank on the seat, with the brooch in her hand, her face deathly white.

"If you had lost it, it would not have mattered much, since the gems are but paste. You were not sure enough even of so foolish and so dastardly a trick coming out as you would have desired it, to trust your real gems for a few moments in my *fiancée's* coiffure. They might have been lost, eh?" and he laughed bitterly.

Hortense clung to his arm and stared at Mrs. Gordon West in amazement.

"Into the motive of this thing it is unnecessary to go here," he said, "only you in your heart know why you would have publicly degraded my affianced wife."

Mrs. Gordon West gasped and clutched his hand.

"You will not?" she breathed with a great fear in her eyes.

He shook off her hold, wiped his hand with his handkerchief and passed into the ball-room.

And the guests were relieved to learn that their hostess had found her brooch, had never lost it in fact.

KALI, THE GODDESS OF DEATH.

By TRISTAM K. MONKE.

The little hill village of Begra, as everyone is aware, is a small military station midway between Naince Tol, in the Oude, and Khatmandoo in the Nepaul.

It was there I met Cyril Vere, a captain in the Punjaub Infantry, and with him, undertook one of the rashest expeditions it has ever been my fortune to enter upon.

Tall, handsome almost to beauty, Cyril Vere was counted a lucky man in Begra, where his good looks, wealth, the possession of a simple iron cross "for valour" and his rich baritone voice, carried the day with the European ladies.

"Tristam," he exclaimed one evening, as he and I sat together in his bungalow, "I have decided to go on a somewhat peculiar expedition—care to come?"

"Tigers?" I queried tentatively.

"No!" he replied laughing, selecting a Havana from a box which lay open beside him, on the table. "I'm sick to death of the brutes. The mess dared me to-night to do what I am about to undertake, and frankly Tris, I should be obliged for your help in this business."

"And what is it?"

"Didn't you hear what Chrichton said. Oh, of course, you were not at mess to-night! With the Stavens for tea weren't you, this afternoon? Lucky dog, no wonder you missed our feed. Wish I had the chance," he cried gaily. "Well the fact of the matter is, that I am going to Thum, Mungr, my bahadur is going to guide—"

"Thum?" I echoed. "What the deuce do you want to climb higher up these fiendish Himalayas for."

"Well, you see," he replied merrily, "I've staked five hundred pounds that I shall pay a visit to the Goddess Kali."

"Are you crazy, Cy?" I cried starting from my chair. "Are you aware what your fate will be, if those cursed fanatics catch you in their fane?"

"Kill me as a peace offering to their deity," he replied, cutting the end off his cigar, then he added thoughtfully. "But you see they won't get hold of me."

I paced the room nervously. Knowing Indian affairs better than Cyril did, I was able to appreciate the risk he was about to incur to a nicety.

"I suppose you'll come old man," he remarked tentatively, looking up, "or is the adventure too spicy a one to tempt you?"

"Oh I'm not afraid, if that is what you mean," I replied shortly. "But mind, Cyril, you are an ass to attempt it."

"Thanks awfully! Are you ready?" he queried rising.

"Ready," I echoed, "for what?"

"To see the Divinity!"

"To-night," I gasped. "Are you going to-night?"

"Your perception is excellent," he replied gaily. "Thum is only two thousand feet above the plains, and from here it is only a couple of hours walk. It's nine now, so we ought to get there by midnight—I expect Mungr every moment."

The words had barely left his lips, before the being in question entered and with a low salaam inquired:

"Are the Sahibs ready?"

"Perfectly," replied Cyril, as going to an escritoire he took a revolver from a drawer and examined its charges. "Are you ready?" I nodded surlily; the expedition did not appear very seductive to me.

"Is the Sahib armed?" inquired the Nepaulese servant, addressing me.

"I am," I replied. "You anticipate the necessity of using weapons?"

"I am the Sahib's servant," he replied evasively. "I obey and know nothing."

"Have you a rope?" queried Cyril.

"Yes, Sahib, one of sixty fathoms, and a torch."

"Good," replied my chum; then turning up his collar and striding on to the verandah, was lost in the gloom of the night.

We followed, I soon imitating his example, in turning up my collar.

If Begra was hot in the day, it was, like most hill stations, chilly in the evenings.

For two hours we walked on in silence, till Mungr stopped in front of a large stone temple, almost concealed from view by weeds and low-growing bushes, and, placing his finger to his lips, conjured us not to utter a sound.

"Be as silent as if death had set a seal upon your lips, Sahibs," he whispered impressively. "For ere many minutes have elapsed you will be in the presence of Kali, the destroyer of men!"

He shuddered, bowing low, almost to the ground, as though to propitiate the deity he feared, then cautiously pushing his way with furtive tread through the overhanging shrubs, he reached the portal of the fane.

He paused a second ere attempting to push open the rotting teakwood door, then he flung it from him, the rusty hinges screeching weirdly as the massive portal swung inwards.

We remained stationary in fear, straining our ears to catch any sound which would prove that the hinges had given the alarm of our proximity to the villagers of Thum.

Silence, broken only by the strident cry of a distant night bird, reassuring us on that score, we entered.

Mungr whispered prayers to Buddah between his chattering teeth, as he lighted his torch. Cyril remained grimly silent, whilst I, despite all my endeavours to the contrary, shivered like an aspen.

A mouldy odour, as of an opened tomb, greeted my nostrils as I walked along the gloomy fane, hordes of rats, startled by our advent, scurried across the flagged floor to their holes; then, a silence, awful in its intensity, reigned supreme.

By dint of alternate blowing and coaxing Mungr induced his torch to blaze merrily, my courage returning somewhat when the Nepaulese's brand illumined our surroundings with its lurid glow, dispelling the shadows, and displaying the whitewashed walls of a temple, carved out of a mountain's side for the most part.

"Come, Sahibs," cried the Nepaulese, "follow me, and now may Buddah preserve us!"

We followed him for some distance along the temple, our steps echoing weirdly through the myriad arches of the fane, till our guide stopped in front of a gigantic stone, having a ring on its upper surface, then fixing his spluttering torch in a crack between two flags, cried hoarsely:

"Your help, Sahibs. The stone is heavy."

We lent him a hand, and, raising the flag, saw a yawning aperture before us, impenetrable darkness veiling its profundity.

"This is the hole you told me about, eh, Mungr?—the one leading to the lower temple," exclaimed Cyril, peering into the depths. "There are no steps, you say?"

"No, Sahib, this rope must answer their purpose."

"Go down hand over hand? How jolly. How deep down is it?" Cyril queried, "thirty feet?"

"A hundred and sixty, Sahib. Do not fear, the rope is sixty fathoms; therefore we have twenty feet to the good. Will you descend first to the home of Kali?" queried the Nepaulese, securing one end of the rope to an adjacent pillar.

"Yes," replied Cyril shortly.

Mungr approached him, and tying the rope beneath his armpits, announced that he was ready to lower him into the depths beneath.

Cyril let himself over the edge, and, catching hold of one of the sides of the aperture, cried gaily:

"Say, Tris, old man, wouldn't it be lively for me if I dropped into the arms of an expectant priest, eh? Slack away, Mungr."

Yard by yard the sturdy Nepaulese paid out the rope till the strain on his arm relaxed; then hauling up the rope, he let me down, carrying the torch.

"I will keep guard, Sahib," he whispered, as I dropped over the edge. "Be quick and return ere dawns the day."

I closed my eyes during the descent, till Cyril's cheery voice announced at the same time as did the slackening rope that I was at the end of my journey.

Raising the torch I held high above my head, I was able to note my surroundings.

We were in a natural cavern, the walls of which were hewn out roughly in the shape of pillars. The rocky ceiling was lost to view in the impenetrable gloom, as was the furtherest end of the cave.

Before us rose a rude rock-hewn altar, from behind which loomed the outline of a gigantic idol, some sixty feet in height.

It was the roughly carved figure of a seated woman, naked to the waist. Its face, revolting in its hideousness, was rendered more repulsive by its protruding fangs being dyed a deep crimson, the brow and cheeks being liberally smeared with red and yellow ochre, as were its abnormally long arms which rested on its knees. A string of small bones and dried lizards depended from its neck, reaching to the breasts of this terrible idol, the nipples of which were represented by sharp steel spikes.

Such was Kali, the Goddess of Death, as seen only by the priests and the victims doomed to be immolated in her honour.

"She is not beautiful," exclaimed Cyril, after surveying the idol for some short while.

"It is a stupendous piece of sculpture," I replied. "But come, let us go back now we've seen it; any moment we may be discovered, and I am not anxious to have Thum about my ears like a hornet's nest."

"Neither do I, my dear boy, only none of the fellows at Begra would believe I'd been in the temple unless I carried off some trophy," he cried gaily; "therefore I mean to sneak a bone or two off her necklace."

"Don't act the fool, Cyril," I retorted irritably; "there is not a man of 'Ours' who would doubt your word, and every moment is precious."

"All right," he replied laughingly; "it's only a thirty-foot climb, and then we'll trot. I shan't be five minutes."

Before I could answer he had approached the gigantic idol and commenced to clamber up. It was a comparatively easy task, the creases in the idol's skirt affording facile footholds; therefore, ere many moments had passed, he stood flushed and excited on one of the hands of the Goddess of Death.

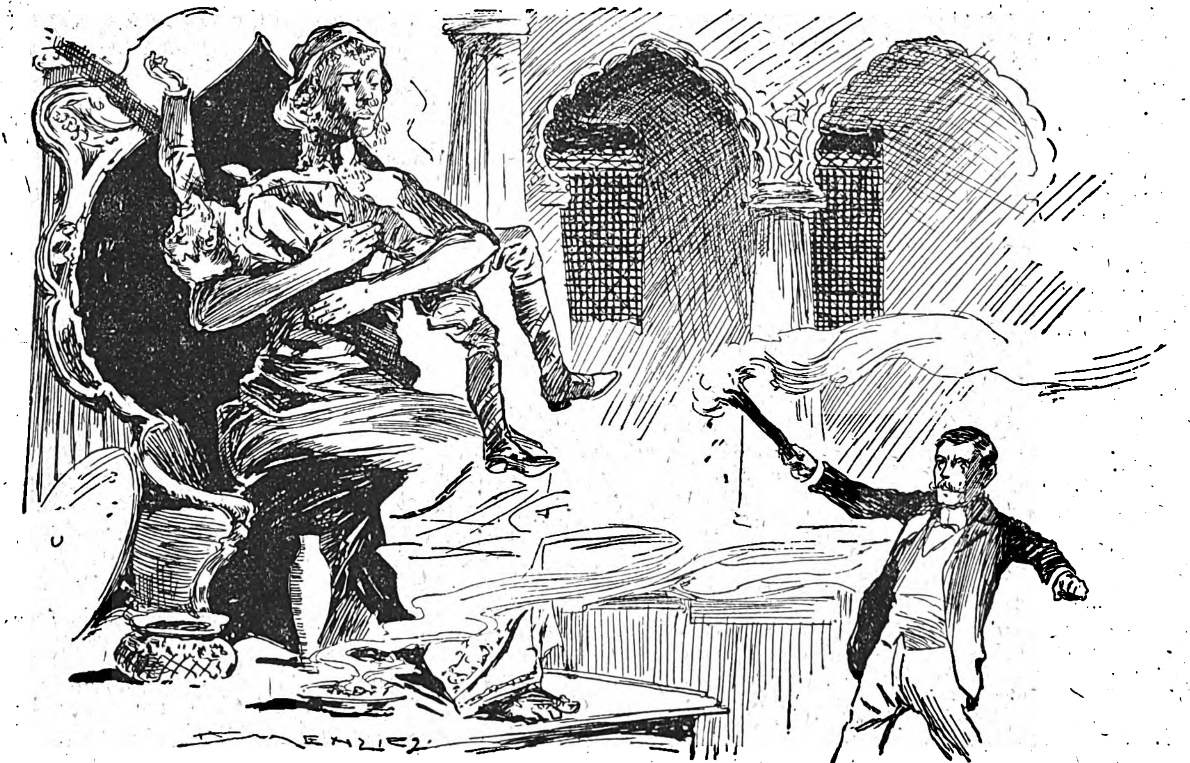
"Rather hot work, that climb!" he cried, mopping his brow with his handkerchief. "But the worst is yet to come; but——"

The sentence for ever remained unfinished. A wild cry of terror, which reverberated throughout the temple, replaced the last word; then the loud rumble of machinery awoke the echoes of the fane.

I glanced upwards in fright to see Cyril in the grip of the idol's hands. Foot by foot he was lifted upwards, struggling frantically to release himself from the figure's retentive grasp.

As a flash of light his fate dawned on me. It must have been the same with him, for a wild, piercing shriek of anguish burst from his lips—a shriek which died away in a palsied moan of bitterest agony as the idol's arms pressed him to its breast, the iron nipple transfixing the wretched man from chest to back.

For a moment it stayed thus; then, the mighty arms relaxing, allowed the mangled form they held to fall with a dull thud to the pavement.



Foot by foot he was lifted upwards, struggling frantically.

Beautiful Hazel Harlow will interest you deeply.

Horror-struck by the grim tragedy which had just been enacted, I approached the mutilated form of Cyril to see if he were quite dead. One look at the staring eyeballs, betraying the intensity of his death agony sufficed; then, losing nerve, I let my blazing, resinous torch fall on the body, and fled from the corpse towards the rope I dimly saw in the distance.

A lurid glare lit up the fane, causing me to turn even as I had my hand on the rope.

The brand had set the clothes of Cyril on fire.

I was about to return and extinguish it, when the glare enabled me to discern the outlines of some white-robed priests enter the cavern. A wild yell showed that they had perceived me.

"Pull up, for Heaven's sake, Mungr!" I yelled, emptying the barrels of my revolver amid the oncoming priests.

To my horror the rope remained slack; the running priests were only forty feet away.

Holding my revolver between my teeth, I commenced to climb wildly upwards. Luckily I was a good slack-rope climber, and fear made me shin up the rope quicker than I had ever deemed it possible.

I had fourteen feet start when the first priest reached the rope; with a cry of anger he commenced to climb after me.

Merciful Heaven, shall I ever forget the agony of that hundred and sixty feet climb; my muscles seemed bursting, yet I stuck gamely to it and so did the priest.

In the first sixty feet I gained twenty on the priest; at a hundred he had gained twenty on me. I remember I felt a savage joy possess me as for a single moment I noted that the white vestments of a priest in passing the flaming corpse of Cyril catch fire and blaze merrily. That glance downwards nearly cost me my life; a giddiness seized hold of me, and ere I recovered my self-possession the priest had gained four feet on me.

But eight now separated me from my pursuer.

Nerved by despair I climbed frenziedly upwards; but thirty feet separated me from the top, when I heard the welcome voice ofMungr.

"Climb, Sahib, climb! He gains on you!"

Once more I spurted upwards, my arms almost refusing to bear me.

Ten feet more to safety, and I could hear the hard breathing of the pursuing priest beneath me—could feel his hand touch my heel. What thews and muscles of iron he had.

"Now for it, Sahib!" cried Mungr; "I daren't fire, the report would bring the Thum on us."

Blindly I obeyed him, till I felt his muscular hand seize my collar. "Let go!" he cried commandingly, raising his sabre above his head.

I obeyed him, and as I relaxed my hold, the weapon came down with a ringing thud on the stone, severing the rope in its passage.

A loud shriek burst from the lips of the priest as, clutching the empty air, he fell with a sickening thud on the pavement beneath.

"I was on guard at the door," Mungr said apologetically, as he lifted me into safety; "and only heard the report of firearms. Where is Vere Sahib?"

"Dead," I replied shortly.

"Dead?" he echoed. "Then let us guard the living. Sahib, we must run now for our lives!"

I needed no urging, and together we tore out of the temple through the shrubs, and out on to the mountain road, not a moment too soon either, for Thum had received the alarm, and turned out *en masse* to avenge their desecrated temple.

A shout of triumph greeted our appearance, but having some five hundred yards start, we pegged it like path racers.

They had waited for us at the *further door of the temple*, leaving the one choked up by the bushes totally unguarded. Had it not been for this omission, I should not have been here to-day to tell the tale.

Loading my revolver as I ran, I managed to keep some distance between the pursuing villagers and ourselves, though the pace was killing, as was plainly manifested by Mungr's laboured breathing.

For three quarters of an hour we continued thus, till the roofs of Begra coming into sight in the dim light of dawn, I fired three barrels of my revolver in the air, not daring to lose ground by aiming at the pursuing hordes of infuriated villagers.

The noise of the shooting brought out the little garrison of Begra.

Like madmen Mungr and I tore through the amazed soldiers, I shouting as I ran:

"Fire on that rabble."

In an instant my men fell into line, and received the oncoming villagers with a brisk ,well-directed fire, which, cooling their ardour, sent them howling up the mountain towards Thum. Then I fainted away.

The affair nearly provoked a religious revolt, which luckily was suppressed before it came to a head by the ringleaders being hanged.

The British Government censured me for my part in the affair, and not deeming my life safe in India after the little episode, intimated that I had better exchange into a home-coming regiment—which I did.

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The GOLDEN DWARF

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"It is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Felix in vain protests his innocence.

But the cloud of suspicion gathers around him. Meantime, the child Brian has been kidnapped, and Felix is suspected of this too. He discovers a riding whip with some peculiar marks upon it.

CHAPTER XVIII. (*continued*).

Amid a mass of jumbled bruises and adherent sand—for the whip had evidently been trodden on and scraped against the gravel—he deciphered some scattered yet electrical words. They ran:

"Expect Get Out of . . . Alive . . . If Not Death is Due to . . ."

There was more, but the astounded reader paused over the fatal hieroglyphic that had checked him. It was battered and dirty, the symbols which followed it indistinguishable. Felix wetted a finger-tip and wiped the surface of the cane. The character must be—yes, it must be 'F.' Horror! he himself was suspected, and his christian name began with that initial. Who else at Wyresdale boasted the fatal letter?

Forester! The Inspector had mentioned Caleb Forester in a grim and suggestive fashion. Felix reeled from the idea—the gentle old man who was Connie's father! It was absurd.

While he wrestled with his thoughts, amazed by the problem set him so suddenly, a servant tapped at the door. Felix acknowledged the summons.

"Please, sir," he was told, "a man would be glad if he might see you a moment—a person of the name of Foley."

Felix Dering gazed at the whip in his hand. "Death is due to F." spelled its scratched characters. F—Foley; was it a coincidence?

CHAPTER XIX.

"The Child's Face Seems Familiar."

"Ach, my good Keturah, you do not look pleased to see me. And yet I have come a long distance for the purpose of meeting once more the lady who, less than a fortnight ago, had me tracked from London to Derbyshire—by Mr. Neal Garland. So anxious was I not to be disappointed, I would not even let your excellent domestic announce me."

With these words, uttered in a tone as smooth as it was malicious, Dr. Joseph Kraft crossed the threshold of Mrs. Schwartz's parlour and stepped towards its astounded tenant. A yard or so off, he paused and deposited his powerful frame upon a chair opposite the bewildered Keturah's.

Mrs. Schwartz gasped, drew a deep breath and rallied her native courage.

"Drop the sarcastic dodge, Doctor," she advised him and folded her plump arms; "I don't like it and I won't stand it. You had your thumb on poor Carl, but I'm not the mean-spirited foreigner my husband was. I'll own you bluffed Neal the other day, yet we've not spoken our last on that subject. What's brought you here now?"

Joseph Kraft relinquished his limp straw hat and rubbed his soft palms together. Behind his delicate spectacles the German's yellow orbs gazed keenly at the moist red countenance of the lodging-house keeper.

"I will answer the question, Keturah," he said, "if you will imform me why you chose this Garland to be your bloodhound. You are not Mrs. Garland, I presume?"

Keturah Schwartz grinned.

"Perhaps I might be if I wished," she retorted, "but my business is my business. Anyhow, Neal Garland's precious smart and I happened to have him handy when I spotted you at Victoria last week. So I put him on your trail and he ran you to earth fast enough. Old fox that you are, you stalled him off, and as the lad had spent all his cash on the fare, he was obliged to sleep out and nearly had to tramp back to town. He owes you a nice grudge for that, Doctor, does Neal, and he isn't the sort to forget it."

Kraft dismounted his spectacles and polished the lenses—his odd saffron-tinted pupils had the veiled scorn of a cat's.

"Adventures of an Actress" begin to-day.

"Mr. Garland," said the German, "is not quite a fool, Keturah, but he bullies—he tried to bully me. I allowed him five minutes to get out or be arrested. He got out. Nevertheless, I bear Mr. Garland no ill-will; I desire, on the contrary, to do him a service. Can you direct me to his—his residence?"

Keturah Schwartz scrutinized the sleek visage of the inquirer.

"You're clever, Joseph Kraft," she replied, "but you can't persuade me you've turned philanthropist. What do you want with Neal?"

Kraft bowed.

"I must reserve that, Keturah," he objected; "for Mr. Garland's ear."

Mrs. Schwartz abandoned her seat—her gross proportions stiffened into decision.

"Then," declared the irate lodging-house keeper, "you can discover his address for yourself—you won't learn it from me."

The German pondered a few seconds and concluded by lifting his loose shoulders.

"Make an appointment with Garland," was his suggestion, "and you shall witness our interview."

Keturah Schwartz moved to the battered bell-pull by the fire-place.

"Glad to see that you can be sensible, occasionally," she said; "on those conditions, Doctor, I will produce him, which isn't difficult, since he digs in my top front suite and owes me a month's rent of it. He's somewhere round I know."

She delivered a husky order to the maid, gained her padded chair and subsided upon its cushions, almost suffocated with the August heat and the burden of her superfluous avoirdupois.

Meanwhile her caller was observing, by a series of quick, shrewd glances, the apartment and its furniture. Nothing escaped his swift perceptions, from the gin-bottle at Mrs. Schwartz's elbow to the grey dust of the cigarette-ash upon the faded carpet.

Suddenly Joseph Kraft's interest was enchained by a little figure that, crouched on the worn hearth-rug beside a tortoiseshell kitten, had intimated its presence with an abrupt outburst of childish tears.

"I want to go home," it wept; "I want to go home to mother!"

The German wrinkled his brows.

"I was not aware we had a witness—of however tender age, to our conversation, Keturah," he said.

Mrs. Schwartz frowned.

"I hate brats," she declared; "but I've had him left on my hands, worse luck!" She flushed athwart the room a gaze of fierce malevolence.

"Jack," she cried; "you remember what I promised you if you were disobedient!"

The boy winced and choked down his sobs.

Kraft smiled—a smile that laid his white teeth bare to the gums.

"Tell me," he said and leant over, his elbows on his knees, "about this famous punishment. Would Mrs. Schwartz do something very terrible to you?"

The child's lip trembled and a tear overflowed the fair lashes.

"She will whip me," came the clear yet terrified response, "till I bleed."

Keturah Schwartz laughed harshly.

"He's right," assented the lodging-housekeeper; "it's the best road with kids; hardens them and warns them to do as they're bid."

Joseph Kraft put his large fingers on the small head and touched the tiny chest and limbs.

"Four years or so," he muttered; "and well-bred—wonderfully well-bred for Pimlico. Strange, the child's face seems familiar."

He sat apparently absorbed by reflection. The creak of the china knob on the door in the rear roused him and he sprang up to twist on his heel and encounter the astonished stare of Neal Garland.

"You are surprised at this visit, Mr. Garland," began the German. "You recollect, no doubt, the nature of our previous, and, hitherto, our only meeting. Tut, people must grow to appreciate one another. You tried to harass me on the strength of a cock-and-bull story told you by the widow of my dead friend, Carl Schwartz. I taught you to respect me; let us consider the incident as closed."

"Curse your long tongue," growled Neal, emboldened by a telegraphic wink from Mrs. Schwartz; "I don't suppose you've hunted me out for nothing. Let's have it plain; I hate soft sawder."

Joseph Kraft adjusted his glasses; the trick delayed his response. "You were at Wyresdale on the evening of Wednesday, July the twenty-third," he said. "I assume Mr. Garland, that, as you went from Wyresdale Park after seeing me, you chanced to observe a certain person, whom, in a moment, I will describe minutely."

Neal Garland settled his lean body on the round table beside Mrs. Schwartz's chair. Neither of them perceived the child, who, still with the kitten clasped to his bosom, had left the hearth-rug and was listening to the German's slow speech.

"I cannot disguise," continued Kraft, in his perfect English, "the importance to certain plans of mine of this person having been noticed by you. It is not a matter for publicity, but an affair of private negotiations. I would, however, rather lose a hundred pounds than hear you say you were not fortunate enough to see the gentleman in question on the evening of the twenty-third of July."

"Go on," urged Neal. "I take you, my noble diplomatist; and the beggar I may have twigged. What was he like?"

"Young," said the German; "tall, grey eyes, brown hair and moustache, dressed in a tweed suit and cap, with tan riding boots. He was mounted on a chestnut horse, and you should have seen him near the cross-roads outside the village of Wyresdale, the night of Sir Christopher Dering's murder."

There was a slight noise—the tortoiseshell kitten had fallen from the relaxed embrace of the child. It arched its back and stretched itself. Mrs. Schwartz, attracted by the event, looked at the boy she had called "Jack." His face was drawn and startled and the baby lips quivered.

With unexpected agility the landlady leapt to her feet, caught up the child and bore him out of the room. On the narrow landing she released him.

"Open your mouth to cry or make a sound of any sort," she whispered; "and I'll burn you all over with a red-hot poker. Stay where you are and don't dare to budge."

She clenched her huge fist, shook it menacingly, and hastened back to the apartment, reluctant to lose a syllable of the conversation between Kraft and Neal. Mrs. Schwartz found herself just in time to behold the transfer of a crisp piece of paper from the German to her lodger.

"I'm on," Neal was remarking; "and this'll do to bind the bargain. But, understand me, Doctor Joseph Kraft, if it theatens to be a police case, I'm off, for reasons of my own."

"For reasons of my own," said the German; "I will not permit it to become any such thing, Mr. Garland. I am obliged to you: your visit to Wyresdale has proved useful, after all." Joseph Kraft reached his hat, clapped it on his straight locks, and bowed to Mrs. Schwartz. "Au revoir, Keturah!" he added; "do not trouble to show me downstairs."

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He strode to the door, opened it, saluted again, and closed it. Mrs. Schwartz stole to the keyhole on tip-toe and peered through. The German had paused on the mat beyond and was studying, by the half light, the vague figure of the child. A second he stood thus, then passed down the rickety flight.

Keturah Schwartz spun about; Neal had fallen into her chair and was shaking with merriment. His spare limbs swayed under the extravagance of his laughter, his legs were thrust out helplessly.

"Stop, you idiot," cried the stout woman, as she planted her hands on her hips; "stop, or I'll throttle you."

Her lodger struggled for utterance. "The Dutchman thinks—" was Neal's stifled confession, "he—he's bribed me to swear privately that I saw Felix Dering in Wyresdale on the night of his uncle's murder. And all the while I had seen him—oh, isn't it funny? Did you watch how I nodded and smirked and pretended to be acting on his hints like the perjurer he believes me."

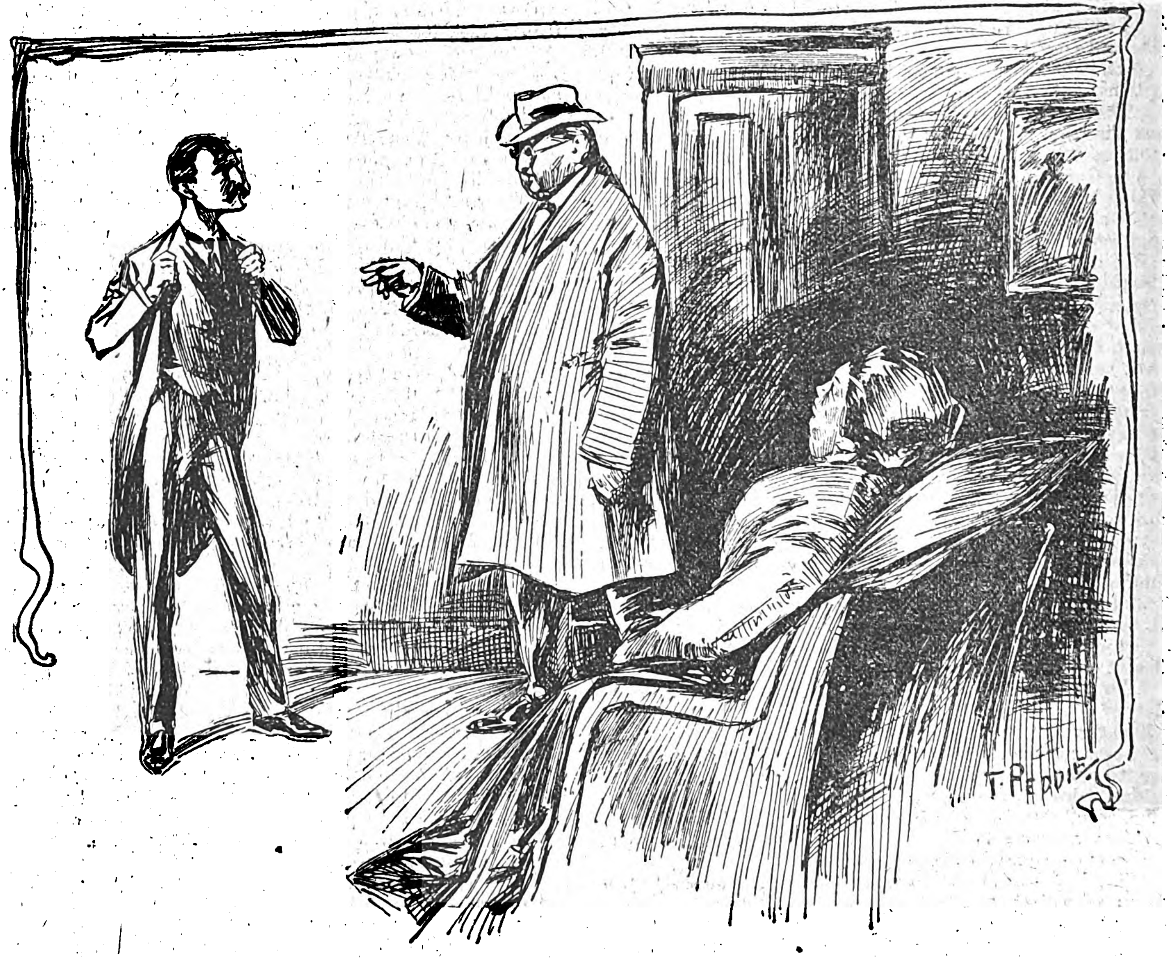
Keturah Schwartz smote the table, anger distorting her crimson features.

"Triple ass!" she cried; "Joseph Kraft's wits would fill a dozen skulls like yours. He came to track the child. Couldn't you see the brat's face when he mentioned its father. He knows it for what it is—Brian Dering."

CHAPTER XX.

Mr. Geddes Is Inquisitive.

"Another crumpet, Mr. Geddes? And do let me give you some fresh tea."


T. REDDIE

"I cannot disguise the importance of this person having been seen by you."

Archibald Geddes passed his cup to the end of the small table, casting as he did so, a vigilant glance through the particoloured glass of the casement which overlooked the shop. The chemist's assistant sat upon a springless sofa, upholstered with glazed American cloth. To the young Scotchman that gaunt couch was a luxurious divan; it brought him opposite Connie Forester and her tray.

In the further corner of the dark sitting-room behind Caleb Forester's neat pharmacy, a cramped window commanded a strip of cloudless blue. The village of Wyresdale —a picturesque corner of Britain—slept under a glorious

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afternoon. But Archibald Geddes would not have exchanged the gloomy apartment where he lounged at his four o'clock meal for all the scenery in Europe.

Connie had donned a new blouse, pink silk and little frills of lace. Her waist was clasped by a band of lizard-skin boasting silver buckles. A ray of sunshine from the shop twinkled on them as she reached a hot muffineer to her companion.

The Scotchman heaved a profound sigh.

"I'm glad you like your belt, Miss Connie," he said, accepting the proffered delicacy, "I'm no judge of such ornaments myself and a gift one doesn't care for is a dismal affair. It's cost me hours wondering what to get you for your birthday."

"I'm sorry for that, Mr. Geddes," intimated Constance Forester crisply, and set the replenished cup by the assistant's plate.

"You needn't be," declared Archibald Geddes, "it was a pleasant occupation—I'm afraid I'll miss it."

Connie smiled, the smile became her brown orbs and mischievous mouth. The Scotchman comtemplated in silence their charming owner.

"I suspect, Miss Connie," he said at length, "you'd be offended if you knew how often I think of you—not that I mean to take a liberty."

"I don't mind, I'm sure," retorted Connie; "it doesn't hurt me."

She rubbed the gleaming buckles at her waist as she spoke, as if to enhance the brightness of the silver.

Archibald Geddes leaned across the table. "I wouldn't have it hurt you," he murmured; "but maybe it's hurt me already, past cure."

Connie picked at the crumbs on the white cloth; the assistant imprisoned her soft fingers.

"I've had a sweet ache in my heart," faltered Geddes, "for many a month now. I'm a fool to run the risk of vexing you, but it seems as if I couldn't hold my tongue. Connie, you're twenty to-day and a woman—a woman any man should be proud to woo whether he won her or not. Connie, I——"

What more Mr. Geddes desired to say must remain a matter of conjecture, since at this precise juncture the door of the sitting-room swung ajar, and a thin voice announced timidly:

"Please, Inspector Brasher would be glad if he might have a word with Miss Forester."

Archibald Geddes started to his feet, muttering a fierce anathema upon the inspector and his desires. But Connie turned a deaf ear to the Scotchman's wrath.

"Ask Mr. Brasher to step in," she ordered the messenger, a shambling, knock-kneed lad, who carried the pharmacy parcels and swept the pharmacy floor. Then she shot a pleading glance towards Geddes.

"I must see him," she whispered; "I—I as good as begged him to keep father out of trouble, if he could, in any of dad's foolish fits. He told me duty was duty, and I snapped him up and left him. But I was certain he'd not hold out long."

Geddes rubbed his chin and coughed. "I suppose," he grumbled, "if Brasher could guarantee to protect Mr. Forester from the legitimate consequences of his confirmed drunkenness, you'd marry him at once?"

Connie stared and then tossed her head. "Well, Mr. Geddes," she cried, "you are polite, both to me and dad. Please understand that you've not the least right to interfere. I wish I hadn't explained now."

The Scotchman would have spoken in his own defence, but Michael Brasher had mounted the steps from the shop and was shaking hands with the indignant Connie. Archibald Geddes nodded to the Inspector and descended grimly to his place at the counter.

Mr. Brasher drummed on the top of his stiff cap and twisted its oil-cloth strap round his wrist.

"I—I beg your pardon, Miss Forester," he stammered, "if I have called at an inconvenient time, but I wanted to drop you a—a hint about your father."

Connie's face grew pale, and she laid a palm on her throbbing bosom.

"I'm going against my own interests," confessed Michael Brasher, "when I recommend you to keep him away from the Wheatsheaf Hotel. He drinks a lot, Miss Forester, and talks of a great service he's done Mr. Felix Dering, and of the trouble his being able to hold his tongue, save the mark, has kept off Mr. Dering."

Constance Forester started and looked down to hide her dismay from the Inspector's shrewd gaze.

"It's wrong of me to mention this, Miss Forester," owned Mr. Brasher; "it's a breach of duty, but even a police-officer has his weaknesses, and you're mine. You weren't over pleased the other morning. Perhaps you'll forgive me now."

The girl shivered to hear the strong passion that vibrated in Michael Brasher's tones. "Thank you very, very much," she said embarrassed. "I don't deserve you to be so kind, Mr. Brasher, and I am ashamed to feel I have made you do wrong."

The Inspector squeezed the delicate fingers held out to him. "It's not worth regretting," he said; "if the worst came to the worst I couldn't help him or you. But in the meanwhile, don't let him challenge our attention—that's all. Good-day, Miss Forester, good-day, I'm your friend—to the best of my power."

And after regarding her tenderly for the space of some seconds, Mr. Brasher departed. He favoured Archibald Geddes with a dignified salute as he strode through the shop and vanished into the High Street.

Hardly had he crossed the threshold than a massive form shadowed the entrance, and, still huge, pink, and amiable, Joseph Kraft appeared.

"A fine afternoon, Mr. Geddes," said the German, blandly.

Mr. Geddes grunted, as though to retort that happiness was not to be estimated by the barometer. Kraft dived into his breast pocket, produced a flat case and touched the hasp. The lid gaped to show a glass barrel, nickel-mounted and possessing a nickel piston. It was the principal portion of a hypodermic syringe.

"I have broken the needle of this little toy," explained Joseph Kraft; "can you replace it or must I send it to town?"

The Scotchman considered the appliance. "It is quite the ordinary type," he said; "I believe so." And he brought a couple of new syringes to experiment on.

As he fitted a needle to the German's instrument, Geddes recollected the enormous purchase of cocaine made by Joseph Kraft some fortnight earlier and recorded in the poison-book at his side. Was it, then, Kraft who consumed the drug by subcutaneous administrations? The Scotchman was seized with desperate curiosity.

Joseph Kraft leant upon the counter, his chin propped, was surveying the completion of his scientific tool. His shirt-cuffs fitted too tightly to permit Geddes that casual but prying glance which might otherwise have revealed on his customer's left fore-arm the tell-tale scars of the needle-point, where it is invariably inserted by the male user.

An idea came to the Scotchman. He allowed his hand, occupied with twisting the screw of the syringe, to slip and hit sharply the starched cuff of the Professor. It shot the linen clear of the wrist and Geddes saw the plump flesh almost to the elbow. The skin was whole and healthful; the German's hypodermic syringe was not for his own behoof. For whose, then?—Kraft had gained, to the persistent brain of the Scotchman, an additional element of mystery.

Geddes apologised, fitted the fresh needle, and received payment. His customer bade him a beaming adieu and strolled out of the shop. In the High Street the German's features underwent a sudden change.

"Deuce take the fellow," he snarled, "that was done on purpose. Mr. Geddes is inquisitive. Henceforth I do not patronise the Wyresdale Pharmacy, I am not sure I was wise ever to patronise it."

Walking at a smart, but awkward pace, Kraft cleared the principal thoroughfare of Wyresdale and soon was in the neighbourhood of the white villa near the cross-roads.

"Otto said five o'clock," muttered the German and glanced at his watch, "I have just timed myself beautifully, there are fifteen minutes for my diplomatic performance, provided the fair maiden is at home. At five o'clock the iron must be hot for the Golden Dwarf to strike. *Donnerwetter*, his latest caprice has caused me sufficient trouble."

Joseph Kraft, thus soliloquising, marched up the Rosery path and rang at the bell in the porch. Barbara, the pretty parlour-maid, answered the summons. The German presented his card.

"My visit is to Miss Carew," he murmured, slipping a florin into Barbara's palm. The maid rejected the gift.

"I will take your card to Miss Carew," said Barbara, curtly, "will you step into the sitting-room, sir." She piloted him to the cool, flower-scented apartment and went away. Kraft pulled at a large red ear.

"Singular," commented the German, "an independent domestic. Doubtless of the faithful servant variety and dangerous."

He beguiled his wait by a tour of the chamber and its surroundings.

"Artistic, but cheap," he decided, "Otto will be a great catch for Mamma Carew. It is Esther we must bend. And," he added, pausing in his stride, "I think I have found the way."

Another inspection of his fine "hunter" interrupted this monologue.

"Miss Esther is tardy," fretted the German. "I should have postponed my call on that impudent Scotch chemist; Otto will be here before the iron is heated."

A slight sound checked his communings, and he advanced to greet Esther herself. She had entered with hesitation, her blue eyes troubled, her colour heightened.

"Dr. Kraft," she faltered; "I—I am afraid I do not remember you."

The German bowed low.

"You see in me a sincere well-wisher, Miss Carew," he said; "yet I own we have not met before. But will you not be seated—I must discharge my errand quickly or it will be too late."

Esther sank upon a lounge, startled and anxious.

"In a few moments," pursued Kraft, standing by her, his huge bulk hugher than ever, "an acquaintance of mine, Mr. Otto Hare, will arrive to seek from you a definite response to his overtures. Pardon my freedom, Miss Carew." He broke off, for the girl had risen proudly. "When I say that I speak for Mr. Felix Dering's advantage I know you will hear me out."

Horrified, Esther Carew fell back in the wide settee.

"Mr. Dering," added Joseph Kraft, "is menaced with a frightful danger. Mr. Hare has secretly obtained proof that on the night of Sir Christopher's murder, his nephew—despite all statements to the contrary—was in Wyresdale. If you were to harden yourself against Mr. Hare's suit I would not take a bad half-crown for Mr. Dering's life."

Esther gazed at the author of this estimate, pallid and tremulous. Kraft glanced from the long French windows of the apartment.

"Heavens!" he cried, theatrically; "Mr. Hare's carriage has stopped at the gate. He must not see me or he will guess that I have been trying to serve his rival. I can escape on to the lawn. Remember, Miss Carew, Felix Dering's fate is in your charge."

The German slipped out of the room by a curtained window as Otto Hare, piloted by Barbara, gained the door. Helpless and unnerved, Esther beheld approach her the tiny form of the Golden Dwarf. Diminutive as it was, she noticed anew its masculine strength and elegance. Otto Hare's black pupils were regarding her with a kind of merciless admiration.

CHAPTER XXI.

A Fresh Card is Played.

"You don't know me, Mr. Dering, and yet I calculate we ought to be better acquainted."

Nicholas Foley lolled in one of the antique chairs that helped to furnish the great library at Dering House. His slouch hat was deposited on the polished floor, his feet were stretched out in their thick boots, his single hand beat a tattoo against his thigh.

Felix Dering had descended from his private room to encounter this remarkable caller, and was gazing with a certain amazement at the uncouth form of the speaker.

"I thought," continued Nicholas, as he groped in a vest-pocket to produce a clay pipe and fill it deftly, "as I've heard such a lot about you, I'd have a look at the cut of your jib. Yours aren't the lines I'd have expected in a buccaneering craft. Blowed if I can fancy the black flag at your fore."

Felix leaned on the tall mantel which bore the Dering escutcheon in carved oak relief. "My good fellow," he said cheerfully; "I like the nautical flavour of your talk, but I'm afraid I don't quite follow its purport."

Foley lit his pipe and waved it.

"Don't you try and weather-bow me, my hearty," was his advice; "I'm a better seamen than you any day of the week, and I've got you logged right enough for a darned piratical son of a gun, and if I don't put the King's ships on you—otherwise the police—it's for reasons of my own."

Felix rang the bell.

"You are insolent, Mr. Foley," he said, "and if you have the slightest cause to communicate with the authorities respecting me or my conduct, Inspector Brasher is a shrewd and intelligent officer, and you will find him at the station in Wyresdale High Street. At all events, leave Dering House forthwith."

The sailor rose and moved towards his rebuker. "Serve you right," he hissed, "if I went to this Brasher and told him you was in Wyresdale the evening of the Squire's death. Ay, and offered to prove it, too. But I won't, I'll act fair by my pals, our game's to stand off and on till you come into the shiners, and then we'll have a word to say."

The blood surged up in Felix Dering's veins, and he seized Nicholas's ragged collar.

"You low bully," he cried, "where were you that night? My uncle was killed by a man whose name begins with 'F.,' as yours does. Can you prove your innocence?"

Nicholas Foley recoiled and drew his tanned fingers over his brow; a dazed expression had crossed his face—he might have been seeking to recollect something long forgotten. At this crisis the door opened—a servant had entered the apartment.

Foley stepped mechanically to the exit. Once he turned and glanced at Felix Dering. But his braggadocio had deserted him—he walked like a beaten hound. Felix made

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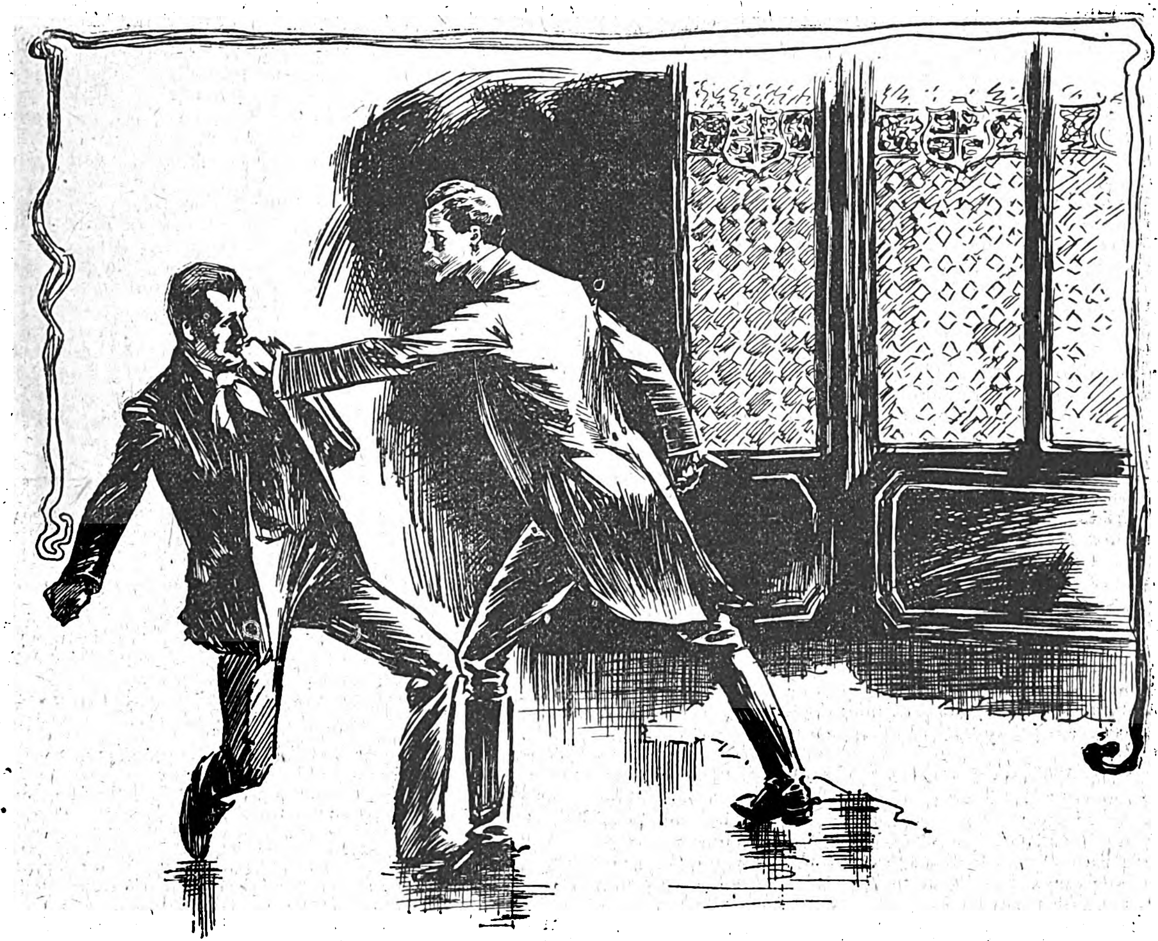
no attempt to check his visitor's departure, and Nicholas Foley slank out into the corridor.

Dazed by the unconventional interview that had just taken place, Felix went back to his room, his mind filled with momentous, yet incoherent, thoughts. He had seen the change his extraordinary visitor's demeanour had suffered under the reference to that person's whereabouts on the fatal evening which had been full of fatal issues.



"You low bully, where were you that night? Can you prove your innocence?"

In his own chamber Felix took from a cabinet the scratched hunting-crop. He had laid it in security when he was summoned downstairs to his strange caller. Again he pored upon the imperfect lettering, which betrayed so much and yet so little. Slowly he deciphered a few more words. The shattered sentence now read:

"... N't expect get out of . . . alive if not . . . death is due to F . . . . hangs back but . . . . . . oath or death I will nev . . . . be so vile."

The enigma seemed to deepen on all sides. The sailor had mentioned his pals—could it be they who had offered the "oath or death" of which the scratched inscription spoke? Who was it that had "hung back"—perhaps in pity; what could it be from which the dead Sir Christopher had shrunk with the protest, "I will never be so vile"?

Felix Dering's brain reeled before the problem presented to it. He locked the strip of Malacca away, took his hat and went out, bent upon seeing Inspector Brasher. It might be wise, he reflected, to take that astute person into his confidence. At least he could be advised to place a watch on Foley.

As he crossed the terrace, bright with its trailing blooms and August sun, Felix became aware of a dark figure, which clad in the pathetic garments of a new-made widow, sat despondently on the stone bench, where, a few days earlier, she had played with her little son.

Seeing Felix, she recoiled; the unconscious gesture wounded deeply her young kinsman. Driven to speech, he sank into a seat by her.

"Aunt," he said—the formal address was the only one he could use—"will you not let me talk to you sometimes. Dering House is desolate to both of us. You—you do not believe the slanderous gossip of the village? Must I swear to you also my innocence of my uncle's death and Brian's disappearance ? "

Lady Dering bowed her head. "I believe nothing," she faltered; "my heart is broken. Yet my wretchedness is your profit, I cannot forget that."

Her nephew clasped a white weak hand in his brown palm. "Make no mistake," he said, "until the fate of Brian and the real story of Sir Christopher's murder are cleared up and my honour vindicated, I will not accept a sovereign out of the estate, not even my salary as steward. I will never ask for Brian's death to be presumed, nor will I ever use the title unless I can prove myself free from any responsibility for his abduction. Would I sacrifice my ends thus if I had planned to bring myself into the succession by violence ? Be just to me—I do not wish for mercy."

Lady Dering groaned.

"I can't understand," she murmured; "who else could have done it? You are either the most ill-starred of men, Felix, or you are—what people say you are."

She rose and glided along the terrace; soon, a bend in it screened her from observation.

Felix hid his face—the blow inflicted on him by her sorrowful utterance had been bitter. He was indeed ill-starred, for he knew himself guiltless.

Perplexed and miserable, he left the terrace and hurried down the avenue that led to the lodge-gates. He had resolved, without delay, to seek Inspector Brasher's counsel and assistance. But as he strode out between the tall iron leaves he encountered the grey locks, velvet coat, and unsteady progression of Caleb Forrester.

The old chemist started from his reverie to intercept the rapid course of Felix Dering.

"A moment, sir," he said. Felix noticed the thickness of his voice, and the spirituous odour of his breath. "One moment, I was about to pre—to presume so far as to wait upon you personally."

Felix sighed.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Forrester," he asked, and wondered if, after all, there was a basis for Brasher's grim allusion to the old man's folly in permitting his lips to be unlocked by liquor—Caleb's anxious, hunted aspect did suggest the bearer of a mental load.

The chemist gripped at the speaker's wrist.

Caleb quivered from crown to toe and his tongue boggled over it's syllables; he was intoxicated to some little extent.

"You did me a good turn once, Mr. Dering," he stammered, "and I want to say you can trust me—when I'm moderately sober. But hadn't you better get away while there's time. Brasher's dogged me around for days and I may—I may have dropped a hint in my cups. I am a curse to myself and Connie, Mr. Dering, but I wouldn't like to think I betrayed you. Why did you ever do it, sir; why did you?"

Felix shook off the nerveless grip. "You are delirious, Forrester," he said; "I have no secrets for you to keep."

Caleb nodded pertinaciously.

"Yes, you have, sir," retorted the chemist; "I saw you at the cross roads that night—when I was coming from the Wheatsheaf—late. But you can trust me not to blab, sir, on purpose, I mean."

The listener staggered. How many others, then, knew the dangerous fact he had endeavoured to suppress? Twice in an hour, it had been stated to him and by mouths he dared not hope could preserve it from repetition.

"Do as you choose, Forrester," he said sternly; "yet do not imagine I admit the ridiculous imputation you have directed against me. I regret, however, you should entertain such an idea of an innocent man."

The chemist blew his nose with a large red bandanna. "Innocent or guilty, sir," he muttered, "you were kind to me and I'll not split if I can but stay half sober. But get out of England while you can, Mr. Dering; it's madness to remain. Others may have seen you that night; put the sea between Wyresdale and you, sir, while you may."

He stepped aside.

The patter of ponies' hoofs neared them down the lane.

Felix looked up—it was Judith Garland, in Lady Dering's basket-phæton.

The parcels on the front seat showed that she had been to the High Street.

Opposite Felix she halted and motioned him to enter. He did so, automatically, it seemed to him, as if he alone had no control over his will or his destiny. The ponies pattered on towards the avenue, leaving Caleb Forrester on the earthen kerb.

Judith studied the handsome features of her companion. Then she said:

"You know that I have just returned from town."

Felix assented.

"While there," pursued Judith, lowering her tone, "I was audacious enough to make some inquiries as to the possible fate of little Brian. To my horror, Mr. Dering, I discovered, in a roundabout manner, a terrible fact. You recollect the cheque you gave me—for—for my brother? the one made out to bearer for twenty pounds?"

"Yes," answered Felix, drily.

Judith whispered the rest of her information, her full red lips almost touching his cheeks and her black eyes lit by an odd excitement.

"The person who took away Brian," she said, "carried that cheque with him."

(To be continued.)

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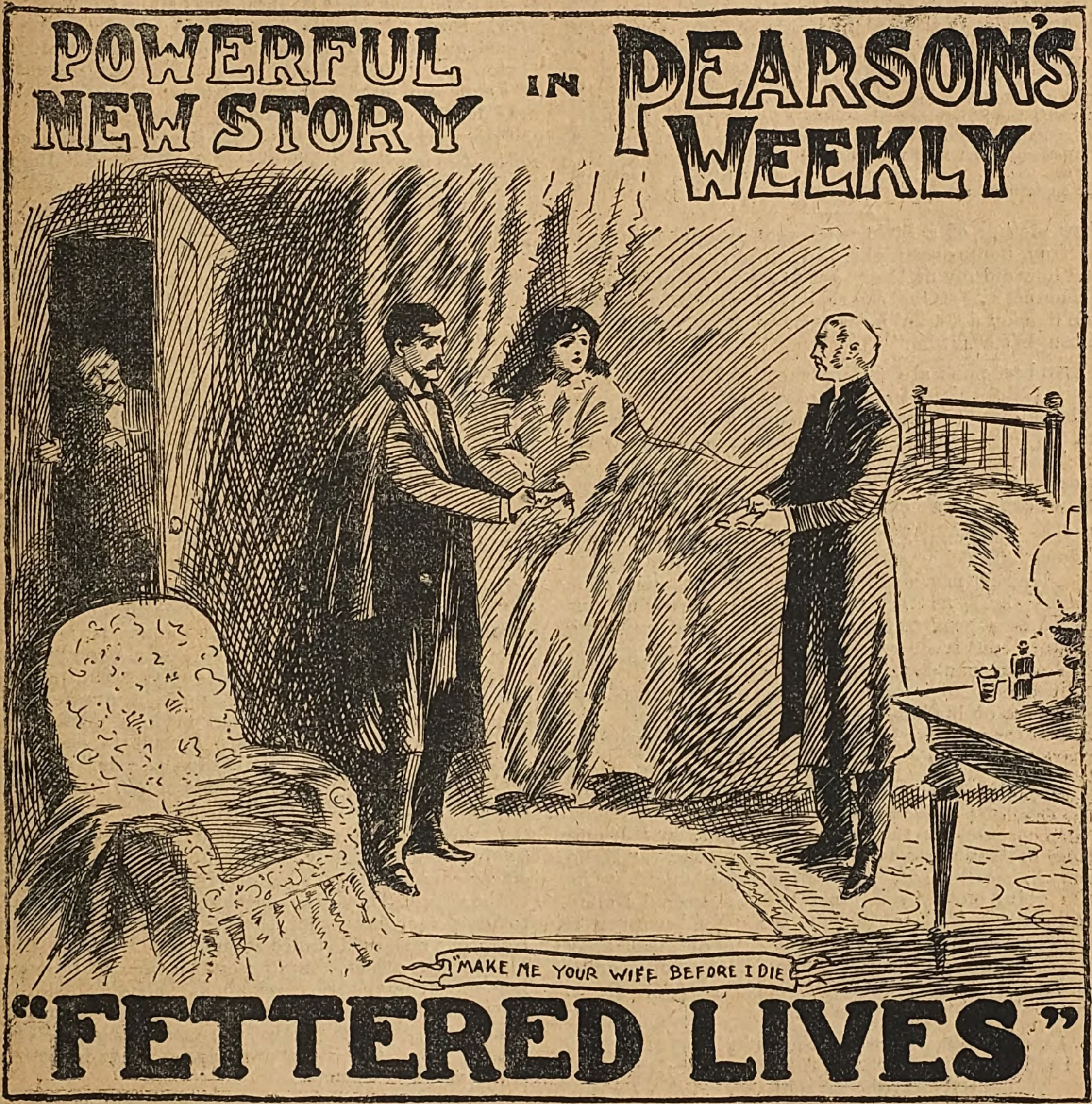
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Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, August 12th. Postcards only, please. The first prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. J. G. Bennett, 8 Sidney Street, Grantham, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

THE mother of a little three-year-old girl had been away from home over night, and on her return asked: "And how did my little girl get to sleep last night without mamma?" "Oh," she replied, "papa twied to sing to me like 'ou does, an' I des went to sleep weal twick, so I touldn't hear him."

*THE best puns are unintentional. Thus, the well-known Californian tomato-grower, Mr. Perry, was walking about his garden in company with his brother from the city. "You raise an enormous lot of tomatoes, John," said the city dweller. "What in the world do you do with them?" "Well," said Mr. Perry, "we eat what we can, and we can what we can't."

A FEW years ago in Parliament a London member sat down, after his maiden speech, on a new silk hat which he had provided in honour of the auspicious occasion, and as he was ruefully surveying his battered head-gear, to the amusement of the unfeeling spectators, an Irish representative rose, and gravely said: "Mr. Speaker, permit me to congratulate the honourable member on the happy circumstance that when he sat on his hat his head was not in it." The call of "Order! order!" from the Speaker was drowned in roars of laughter.

A MAN who worked in a mill near Burnley went out of his mind, and was removed to the asylum. A fellow-worker, on passing the asylum one day, saw Jimmy sitting in the grounds, smoking his pipe. "Hallo, Jimmy," he called out, "how are you goin' on?" "Oh! Aw'm going on first rate, thank yo'," answered Jimmy. "Ah'm varry glad to hear it, lad. Yo'll happen be cumming back to wark soon, eh?" "Wot!" exclaimed Jimmy, in great surprise, "leave a big house and a grand garden like this, and cum back to wark! Do yo' think Aw'm wrang in my head?"

AN old couple living in Gloucester
Had a beautiful girl, but they loucester;
She fell from a yacht,
And never the spacht
Could be found where the cold waves had toucester.

An old lady living in Worcester
Had a gift of a handsome young rorcester,
But the way that it crough,
As 'twould never get through,
Was more than the lady was uorcester.

At the bar in the old inn at Leicester,
Was a beautiful barmaid named Heicester,
She gave to each guest
Only what was the buest
And they all, with one accord, bleicester.

"WHAT is the meaning of the word 'luke-warm'?" asked the teacher. "Johnny Cumso, you may answer." "Water is luke-warm when it looks warm and isn't."

"GAZE upon the pure, beautiful evening star, and swear to be true while its light shall shine! Swear, my love! Swear by Venus!" exclaimed a youth in impassioned accents. "How stupid you are!" answered the Girton girl. "That is not Venus. The right ascension of Venus this month is 15hrs. 9 mins.; her declination is 17 deg. 25 mins. south, and her diameter is 10.2."

FIRST DETECTIVE: "I've got the two men who committed the murder. Their names are Muggs and Juggs." Second detective: "You don't say so! How did you discover them?" "I ran across Muggs one day and boldly charged him with the crime." "How did he take it?" "He changed colour—a sure sign that he is guilty." "True, and the other?" "I saw Juggs soon after and boldly charged him with the crime." "Good! How did he act?" "He did not change colour at all—a sure sign that he is a hardened criminal."

A STORY is told concerning a wee girl of five years who had so large a number of dolls that she became a fair judge of the necessary requisites of a good doll. One day a baby came to the house. When it was put into her arms, this real live baby, the five-year-old surveyed it with a critical eye. "Isn't that a nice baby?" cried the nurse, with the joyous pride with which a nurse always regards a new baby, in which she feels that she has a proprietary interest. "Yes," replied the little girl hesitatingly, "it's nice, but its head's loose."

DURING a lesson in a medical college the other day one of the students, who was by no means a dullard, was asked by the professor: "How much is a dose of ——?" (giving the technical name of a strong poison). "A teaspoonful," was the ready reply. The professor made no comment, but the student, a quarter of an hour later realised that he had made a mistake, and straightway said: "Professor, I want to change my answer to that question." "It's too late, sir," responded the professor, curtly, looking at his watch, "your patient has been dead fourteen minutes."

IN a sham fight which was held in connection with a a volunteer camp lately, the invading force was led by an officer whose hand was better suited to the plough than to the sword. They were marching down a road, and, on turning a sharp corner, they came across the enemy, lying but a short distance from them, "Charge!" commanded the officer. Away went his men at full speed, and when they had covered about half the distance to the enemy they heard their officer shout—"Come back, come back, the hale pack o' ye; come back to where ye started from, and start owre again. I've forgotten to order ye to fix bayonets."

A WELL-KNOWN sportsman was lately entertaining some friends previous to a drive, when he happened to mention the wonderful equanimity of a certain servant of his whom nothing could confuse or upset. "I bet you a fiver I do," said a wag who was present. "Done!" returned the host, "I expect him in every minute." Just then the door opened, and the individual in question entered the room; addressing his master he announced solemnly: "The carriage waits without, sir." "Without?" queried the wag, thinking he might as well win his bet right away, "without what?" "Without horses, sir!" was the solemn rejoinder, "*it's a motor!*" The wag didn't try again.

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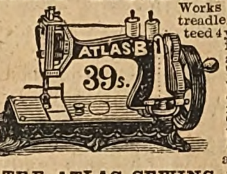

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

Beautiful Hazel Harlow's adventures begin this week. You must on no account miss reading them. Under the general title of "Adventures of an Actress," all Hazel Harlow's trials and temptations will be recounted. A novel element in these stories will be the fact that the theatrical company which Miss Harlow joins will tour through the principal towns in the kingdom. Sheffield, Newcastle, Scarborough, and Rugby are among some of the first places she will visit. Readers living in these and other places will therefore be peculiarly interested. You should acquaint your friends with these particulars.

* * *

Love, Courtship and Marriage.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

"Town Mouse" was engaged to a man for three months, when one night, at a theatre, in removing her hat, she accidentally lifted off her toupée as well. He immediately got up and left her, and since that night she has only seen him once, and then he would not look at or speak to her. She is very unhappy, and asks what she can do to get him back.

Take my advice, "Town Mouse," and do nothing. He could not really be fond of you, or his love would have stood firm under such an ordeal. The wearing of false hair is a thing most men dislike, and, really, girls look far prettier with their own nicely curled.

"Sister Emmie" writes a sad letter. She has been nursing for ten years, and one day, in the fret and worry of hospital life, she rashly married one of the students on her afternoon off. Now they never see each other, as she has been moved to another block in the building, and she dares not go out with him on her day off, as it is against the rules. He has nothing in the world but what he is given by his married sister. She asks me whether I advise her to go and tell the matron all about it, or leave the hospital.

I am very sorry for you, "Sister," but should not advise you to do anything in a hurry. Why not go and see the matron, and ask her to get you a post in another hospital; give any excuse you think best, short of telling her how matters really stand. Write and tell your husband when all is settled, and you will at least be able to see him occasionally. It would be unwise to give up your hospital connection, as you will have to work until he sets up a practice and can offer you a good home.

Yes, "Jeanne," I am really pleased to have the opportunity of giving you the benefit of experience and of advising you. I know that it is a great comfort for a motherless girl to have a friend in whom she can confide. You say that you have been engaged to a worthy young man for five years, during the whole of which time you have waited for him to get into a better position, and he has worked hard to do so, because you think that his earnings are too small for matrimonial purposes. You believe he will make an excellent husband, and that in time he will rise to a much better position; but he thinks that you are spoiling your chances by waiting, and is willing to release you for your own sake. You are willing to wait for him, but wish to know whether it is wise, and maidenly, to go on.

Yes, "Jeanne," it is. A man of such qualities—a man who will work as hard as he is doing to raise himself in the social scale—is one among many; you will do well to wait, and your love will help him in his struggle. He is bound to succeed, and you are still young. I prophecy that I shall hear from you again soon, with quite a different tale. Show him this, and he will know that I bid you both "cheer up."

"Crazy Jane" has loved a sailor for a long time; he loves her, too, and has asked her to marry him, but she does not feel that she ought to become engaged to anyone, as she had an aunt who died mad. He has now asked her for the last time to be his wife, and she writes to know whether I think she would be doing wrong in accepting him.

Certainly not, "Jane," I think you are worrying yourself needlessly; many and many a happy married couple have some relation or other who has died insane. You say you love him dearly, so there can be no reason against your taking him "for better, for worse."

"Mollie" met a man last year at the seaside. He told her he was rich, and asked her to write to him. She did so, and they have kept up a correspondence until a month ago, when, instead of his weekly letter, she received a sheet of paper with a coffin, skull, and cross-bones upon it, and underneath the words written R.I.P. She thinks someone must be playing her a practical joke, and asks my advice as to what she is to do. She is doubly anxious, because she gave him her gold watch and chain to wear, and has lent him sums of money from time to time.

I should say that you have been taken in, "Mollie," and are very well quit of a rogue. It is a very dangerous practice for girls to scrape up friendship with casual seaside acquaintances.

* * *

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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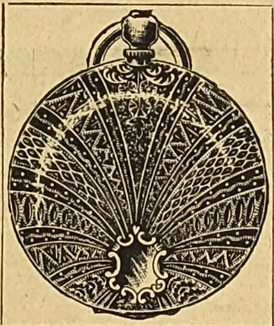

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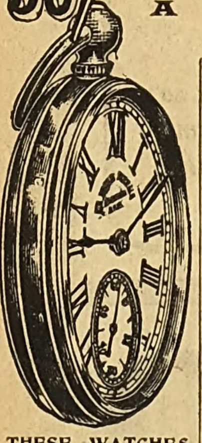

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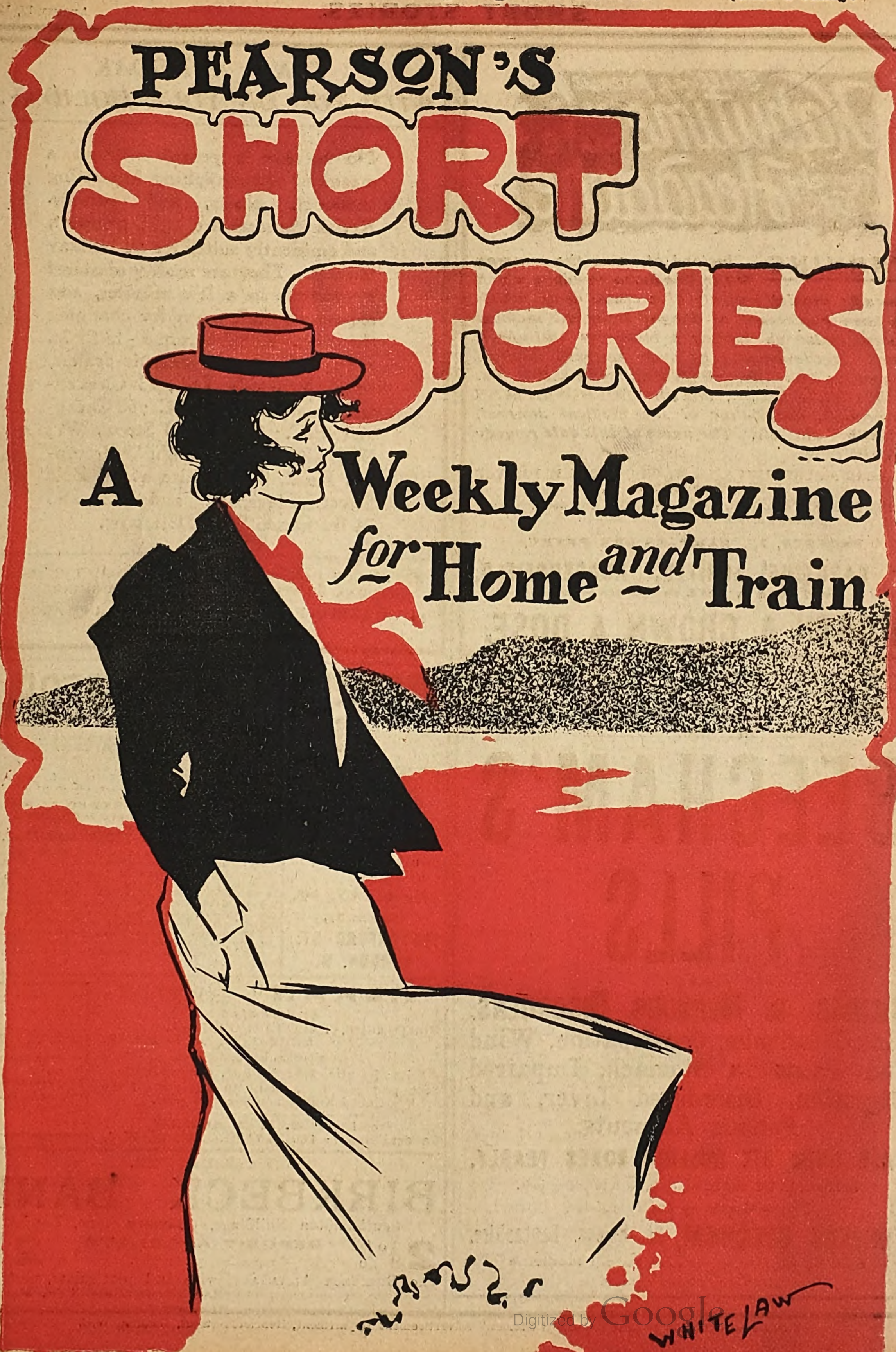

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SHORT STORIES.

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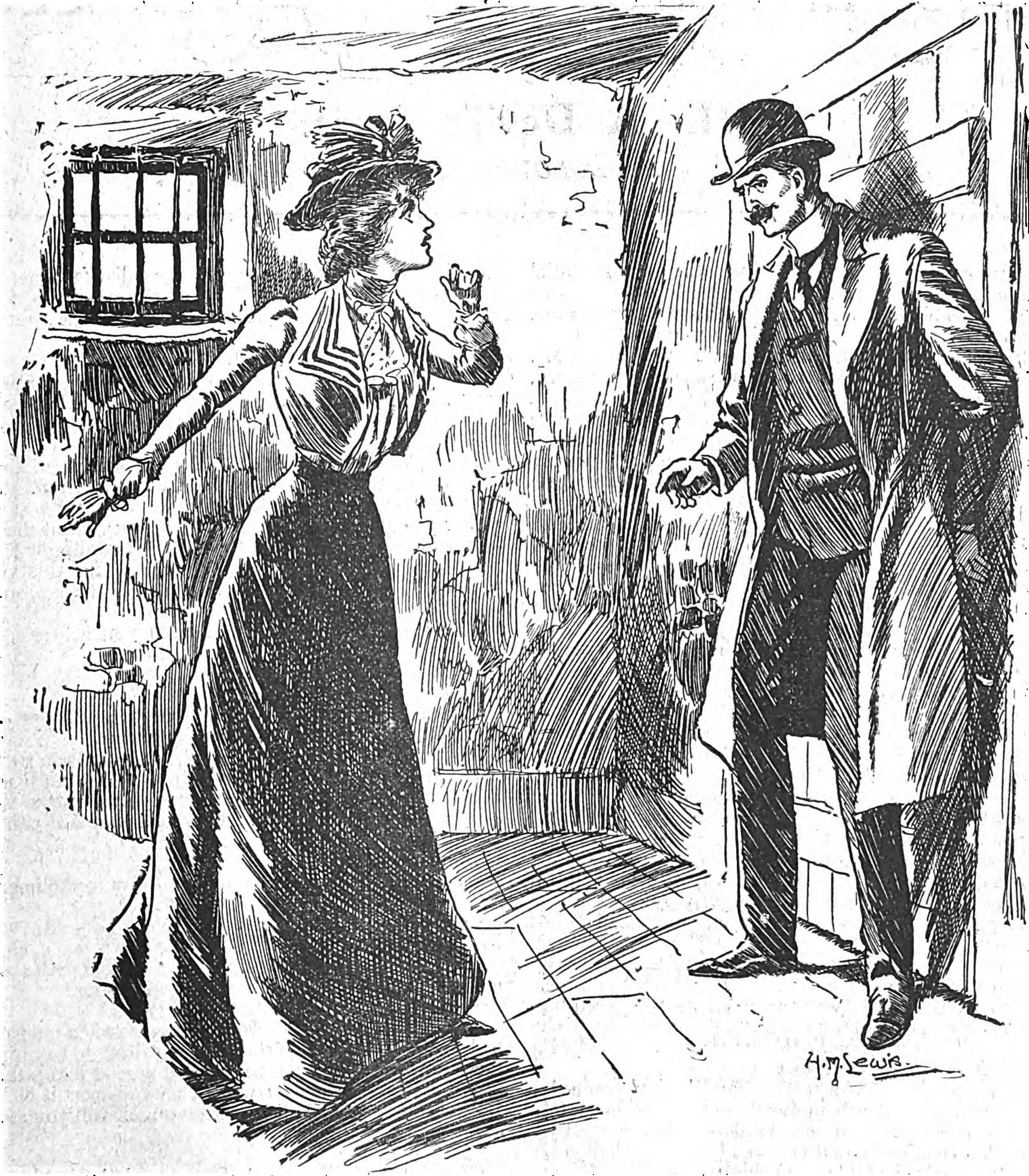
THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.



The blood fled from her face. For the second time she had been trapped.

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STARTLING REVELATIONS OF THE STAGE.

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

II.—A Devil's Lure.

By DONOVAN MART.

It was evening-time. Alone in the study of his palatial London house sat Horace Caldecott, his brows knit with thought, his black eyes gleaming with some hidden rage.

"So that's how the wind blows," he muttered. "Hazel Hadlow gives me the slip and rushes into the arms of Mr. Eric Monteith and his sister. She tells them her story, doubtless. And they befriend her, and escort her to a boarding-house, where she may be safe. But they little thought that the seedy tramp who dogged their footsteps this afternoon was Horace Caldecott. And now what's to be done? I've found out a good deal. Master Eric is to fetch her at eleven o'clock and escort her to Mark Danvers, the theatrical agent. He's to be her knight, is he? We'll see. Curse the girl! And yet I want her all the more now. How beautiful she is! Beside her Valerie Bellairs is positively ugly. Well, she's not seen the end of me yet. No, no! She's innocent, trusting, easy to dupe. I must think out a plan somehow. Anyhow she's safe where she is for the present. To-morrow, well—it will be Eric Monteith against Horace Caldecott, with the odds upon the latter gentleman. For, by Heaven, I'll move heaven or hell to get her in my power again! She shall be mine! She's nullified the hold I had on her through her father, but that's not the only trump in the pack! But there's a good deal to be done. I can't work the job through single-handed."

He pulled out his watch. It was nearly eight o'clock.

"H'm," he continued musingly, I'll have dinner first and then I'll go and pay an evening call upon Ben Quirk. He's the man for my money. I think with his help I'll be able to nab Miss Hazel for the second time. And she shan't give me the slip so easily again, or my name's not Horace Caldecott."

An hour later and a muffled figure might have been seen leaving Squire Caldecott's abode. It was the Squire himself. With hurried steps he made his way along the darkening streets, looking neither to the right nor to the left, pressing onward with the air of a man who had a fixed destination ahead of him.

Twenty minutes quick walking and he had reached a neighbourhood that was in direct contrast to the stately streets he had left behind him, a squalid network of alleys, one of those plague spots that infect London and all great cities, the abode of a low and ruffianly type.

He dived down a particularly unsavoury court, and stopping before a door, rapped in a peculiar fashion. In a few minutes he heard footsteps on the other side of the portal. Then the door opened furtively. "The squire?" queried a low voice.

"Yes," muttered Caldecott. "Let me in."

The door opened with a dismal creak. Caldecott slipped inside the house. It was very dark. There came a sound as of a match being struck. "This way," said the strange man.

Caldecott followed his guide into a somewhat dingy little room, the window of which was shuttered. The lessee of the apartment lit a candle. He was a small, rather wizened figure, with a humorous, clean-shaven face, and bright little eyes that twinkled cunningly from deep sockets. "To what am I indebted for this visit, squire?" he asked in a curiously well-bred voice, quite out of keeping with his surroundings.

"Business, Ben, business! And if you help me, I'll pay you well."

Ben Quirk smiled.

"Out with it then," he said.

Caldecott hesitated for a few minutes. He was evidently ill at ease. At last he found his voice.

"I came to you, Ben," he said, "because you're the only man in London who can help me. I want a man who has the appearance of a gentleman, who is well-educated and a good actor. How does that suit you for a start?"

Quirk shrugged his shoulders.

"You didn't come here only to pay compliments, Squire," he answered quietly.

Caldecott laughed. "You're right," he said, "and I'll be frank with you." He sat down on a chair. "Listen attentively," he continued, and then with quick, incisive sentences, he unfolded his base scheme.

The other heard him out attentively.

"It's a ticklish bit of business," he said, when Caldecott had finished, "and I suppose you're willing to pay for it. Ben Quirk's hands have been soiled a good many times since—well since the days when I used to sport it in Pall Mall with the best of them. How much will you stand in for the job?"

"Fifty pounds!"

Quirk's eyes glittered. "Fifty pounds let it be!" he said tersely.

Another splendid Hazel Harlow story next week.

CHAPTER II.

"Here I am, really in London town, saved from the clutches of Horace Caldecott, free from the degradation of Harlow Farm. And to-day Mr. Monteith is coming for me. And he is going to take me to the agent's. I'm going to try to earn my living on the stage. I can hardly believe it's really all true."

So mused Hazel Harlow, safe beneath the roof of motherly Mrs. Bryant's lodging-house, careless of the future now that to her inexperienced, unsullied eyes, the future seemed to hold out so many golden opportunities.

How could she be otherwise than sanguine? All her short life had been spent hitherto amidst the quiet of the country, a quiet that had only held one disturbing element, the advent of Horace Caldecott into her narrow world. The universe was a sealed book to her. She knew scarcely anything of evil, did not realise the dangerous potentialities that lay in her wondrous virgin beauty, even the terrors of the day before, when she had so providentially escaped from Caldecott's clutches, had almost faded from her memory.

Her high-souled nature revolted instinctively from anything that was base or sordid. And as her standard was so high it is surely no matter for surprise that her temperament was so sunny, so confiding.

She had found friends in Eric Monteith and his sister. What could she fear from Caldecott now. The depth of a villain's cunning resources were yet to be plumbed. It was a case of hawk and pigeon.

Hazel was not so unsophisticated, however, that she did not realise that difficulties lay in the path that led to her hopes of becoming a great actress. Yet her innocence, her fresh country instincts made her view those difficulties from quite another point of view to Monteith's and his sister's.

They knew the trials and dangers that must be in the path of an unprotected girl like Hazel Harlow, a girl, moreover, who had such beauty. Long and earnestly they had discussed Hazel together on the evening of the day that had witnessed their strange meeting.

And now Hazel sat in the little sitting-room that Mrs. Bryant, her landlady, had apportioned her, weaving golden visions about the future.

It was nine o'clock. She had still two hours to wait before Eric Monteith would come to fetch her, to escort her to Mark Danvers, the theatrical agent.

Eric Monteith! The name rang pleasantly as she murmured it to herself. And Eric's handsome, open face rose up before her mental vision. She could not admit to herself that she had fallen in love with him. As yet she was not ripe for love. The future seemed too dazzlingly alluring to allow her girlish thoughts to be distracted by a man's attractions.

A knock at the door dispersed her thoughts. "Come in," she said.

The door opened to admit the pleasant face and somewhat portly figure of her landlady, Mrs. Bryant.

"Here's a note for you, miss," said the woman. "There's a man waiting for an answer."

Hazel's astonishment can be well imagined. "Who could be writing to her in London?" She opened the envelope and drew forth a letter, written in pencil in a scholarly, neat handwriting, that ran as follows:

"Dear Miss Harlow,—It is with the utmost regret that I write to you a few hurried words to ask you to be so kind as to come with the bearer of this note at once. The fact is that my sister has met with an accident. I dare not leave her as she is, and she has asked for you repeatedly. Please come with all haste. You need not say anything to Mrs. Bryant, as urgency is of the utmost importance. The messenger I have sent is thoroughly to be trusted. Yours very sincerely, Eric Monteith."

Hazel read the short note with the utmost care, and after she had mastered it, she felt that there was only one thing to be done. Her benefactress of the day before was in danger, perhaps seriously ill. It was habitual to Hazel's trusting, sympathetic nature, to show her gratitude by every means in her power; of course she would go. She hurriedly put on her hat and hastened down the stairs.

In the hall a man was standing—a small, dapper figure, who smiled encouragingly at Hazel as she approached him.

"I am very much at your service," said the girl, "from the note I have just read I am to come with you at once."

The man touched his forehead with his forefinger. "Right you are, Miss," he answered. "I've a cab outside."

He opened the door, and Hazel, following his directions, sprang into a hansom drawn up against the kerb. The little man leapt in beside her, and they were off.

"Please tell me what is the matter with Miss Monteith?" asked Hazel eagerly.

"Well, you see, Miss," answered the man with alacrity, "it's this way; Miss Monteith, than whom a better young lady never existed, is a district visitor. She set off as usual this morning after breakfast to visit some poor people not very far from her house. These people live in a very poor street as you will see for yourself. Mr. Eric, he got a message not an hour ago, to say that Miss Alice had been hurt by a falling piece of masonry. He hurried off, to find her so badly injured that she couldn't be moved yet awhile. He had promised to meet you at eleven, but of course he can't now. And Miss Monteith asked for you. She asked me to take the note."

Hazel's eyes filled with tears. Poor Miss Monteith! What a terrible accident to have befallen her! As if a visit to a theatrical agent couldn't be postponed for such a cause. Her tender heart went out towards the sorrowing brother. How poignant must his anxiety be.

The cab suddenly pulled up. "We must get out here, Miss," said the little man, "the rest of our journey—it's not far—must be done on foot. We're going into a rather unpleasant place, but you will be quite safe. No one would think of harming such a beautiful young lady as you, Miss."

So saying, the man helped Hazel to alight. Dismissing the cab, he led the way down a narrow court, which debouched, near where they had alighted, from the street. In a few moments Hazel found herself in a maze of squalid alleys, the like of which she had never in all her life seen or imagined could exist.

It was a warm morning. There were but few people about in the sordid slum with which her comrade seemed so familiar. Hazel could scarcely repress a shudder. What a horrible place. The few people she saw only added to her repugnance.

The little man at her side murmured encouraging words into her ears. "Mr. Monteith and his sister are in an upper room of this house," he said, pausing before a door, which he opened, to disclose a rather dark and grimy passage, leading to a ricketty flight of wooden stairs.

With a beating heart, yet anxious above everything to reach and be possibly of assistance to the girl who had befriended her, Hazel began to mount the stairs, the man following.

"Top of the stairs, first door on the left," the latter said in a low voice. "I'll not come in. They won't want me."

Hazel turned the door handle and entered the room, words of pitying welcome ready on her lips. In a moment it shut to behind her, being slammed back by a man standing almost against the door jamb inside the room. Not a soul save he was in the apartment!

With a cry Hazel wheeled round. The blood fled from her face! For the second time she had been trapped. She was alone once more with Horace Caldecott, whose black heart had worked out so diabolical a plot to disarm her confiding innocence.

"Once more we meet, Hazel!" the villain muttered hoarsely. "And there's no garden across which to escape here!"

Hazel stared at him for a moment as though spellbound. Speech and action seemed frozen out of her. But it was only for a moment.

Then she sprang towards the door, and her villainous captor. "Help! help!" she screamed with all the power her lungs could give. "For pity's sake, help! help!" and her words were backed up by a scream that echoed again and again within the narrow compass of the squalid room.

Horace Caldecott uttered a cry that sounded like the snarl of a tiger. "Curse it!" he said, "keep quiet!" and his hands shot out so as to grapple the slender white throat of the hapless maiden.

CHAPTER III.

Punctually at eleven o'clock Eric Monteith presented himself at the Bryant's and inquired for Hazel.

"Miss Harlow's gone out," answered the landlady; "she have been gone about an hour."

"Gone! Where?"

"I don't know, sir. A gentleman came with a note. She drove off with a man in a cab in a great hurry!"

Eric's face blanched. His blood seemed suddenly to turn to water. "Good heavens!" he murmured. "What can it mean? Did she leave no message for me, Mrs. Bryant?"

"No, sir. But wait, I'll go up to her room. Perhaps she may have written a note and forgot to give it me."

Mrs. Bryant hurried away. She was only gone a minute or so, but to Eric it seemed hours. His heart was beset with a hundred sickening doubts and fears.

When the landlady returned, she had a piece of paper in her hand. There was a puzzled expression on her motherly face. "Read this, sir!" she said.

Eric almost snatched the note out of her hands. This is what he read, the note Hazel had received and left behind her in her haste:

"Dear Miss Harlow,

"It is with the utmost regret that I write to you a few hurried words, and ask you to be so kind as to come with the bearer of this note at once. The fact is, my sister has met with an accident. I dare not leave her as she is, and she has asked for you repeatedly. Please come with all haste. You need not say anything to Mrs. Bryant, as urgency is of the utmost importance. The messenger I have sent is thoroughly to be trusted.—Yours very sincerely, Eric Monteith."

Only one reading of this, and Eric realised the truth. Hazel had been the victim of a forgery, and there was but one man who could have perpetrated the dastardly deception, that man Horace Caldecott.

In a moment he had thrust the note into his pocket, dashed out of the house, to Mrs. Bryant's heightened astonishment, and leapt into a passing hansom. "Colbourne Terrace!" he said to the cabman, "and don't spare your horse."

The jehu, scenting a double fare, whipped up his steed, and in a few seconds Eric was dashing away towards Caldecott's house.

As the horse was urged onward his mind was working at lightning speed. Caldecott must somehow have tracked Hazel to his—Monteith's—house. He must have dogged her footsteps, how, Eric could not conceive—the ragged tramp he had noted so carelessly did not come into his mind as being connected with Caldecott—must have overheard the conversation between himself and Hazel, learnt that the girl was going to the theatrical agent's, and forestalled Eric by an hour. And now the girl was in her hated lover's power again!

Eric's blood boiled within him. He gnashed his teeth together with impotent fury. For he realised to the full now that he loved Hazel Harlow with all his heart and soul. Caldecott should pay for this black deed so sure as there was a sun in the heavens.

The cab pulled up with a jerk. "Colbourne Terrace, sir!" said the cabman through the butterfly. Eric leapt out, and thrust a heap of loose silver into the man's waiting hand.

He looked around him. Caldecott's house was a few doors beyond where the vehicle had pulled up.

And now what was to be done? Eric had no doubt in his mind, but that Hazel was within the house, and the villain Caldecott as well. Should he forcibly seek an entrance, and leave the issue of the adventure to Fate?

The young man's heart ceased beating, for a moment it seemed to him, as Caldecott's front door suddenly opened and a woman stepped out—a woman fashionably dressed.

For a moment Eric thought it was Hazel herself. In another he realised the vanity of his hope. The woman was stylish and handsome in a dark, somewhat pronounced style, but was as nothing, when compared with Hazel's glorious beauty.

The woman hesitated at the head of the steps, and looked half expectantly up and down the street. Then she caught sight of Eric, and her eyes were attracted to the young man's wild, somewhat disordered appearance.

Then Monteith sprang forward. "Pardon me, madame!" he said, raising his hat, "but is Mr. Caldecott in the house?"

The woman's face flushed.

"No," she said, "why do you ask?"

Eric hesitated. Was the woman lying? Then, almost before he realised what he had said, he blurted out, "Because he is a scoundrelly abductor, and find him I must!"

The woman uttered a slight scream, and came down the steps rapidly.

"What are you saying?" she hissed. "Horace Caldecott an abductor! Of whom?"

Eric drew himself together with an effort. "My name is Monteith," he said stiffly, "Miss"—"Bellairs," put in the woman—"Bellairs, and I have unimpeachable authority for what I say. This morning"—but at that moment a fresh interruption ensued as a cab dashed up to the door, in which were two men, the one helpless, with a white bandage stained with blood bound across his forehead, the other a small, wizened man with a clean shaven pale face.

At sight of the wounded man, Valerie Bellairs (Caldecott's lover and his dupe—see the story that appeared in last week's Short Stories) gave vent to a scream of womanish terror. "Horace!" she cried, "and wounded—perhaps dead."

"Caldecott!" muttered Eric, with a groan. "Where then is Miss Harlow?" He pressed forward to the side of the cab.

The little man, who was indeed Ben Quirk, looked up and down the street apprehensively.

"Best get him inside the house!" he muttered.

In a moment Eric sprang forward. "You catch hold of him under the arms," he said, "I'll take his legs."

Ben Quirk shrugged his shoulders and looked somewhat hopelessly at Valerie. But she was too much concerned with Caldecott's lifeless appearance to pay any attention to Quirk's gestures. "Get him up to his own room," she said, and running up the steps of the house pealed vigorously at the bell.

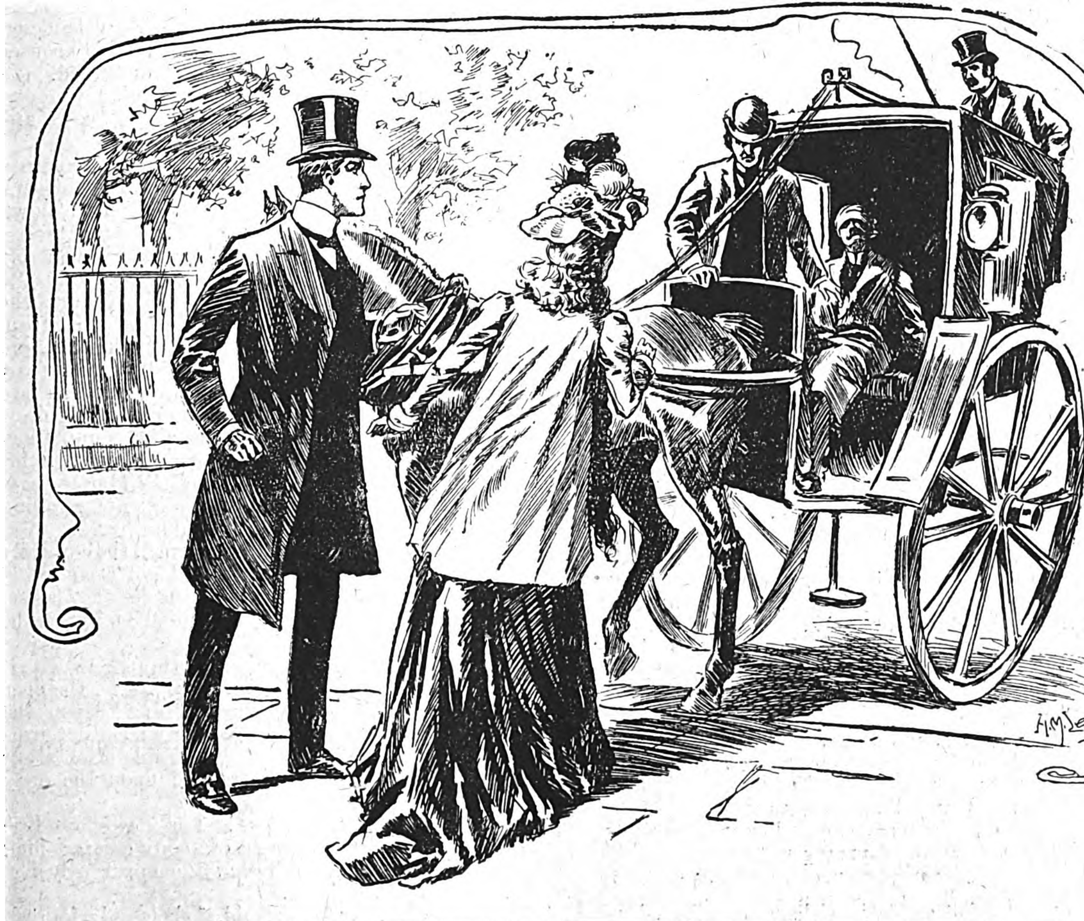
The peremptory summons brought a servant to the door almost instantaneously. Caldecott, still apparently lifeless, was borne up the steps slowly by his two bearers. Eric, with suppressed loathing and a fierce desire to learn what had become of Hazel; Quirk, impassive, yet pale, each man measuring the other, as it were, with their eyes.

Caldecott was carried to his room and laid on the bed. This done, Quirk did not hesitate. Muttering something incoherent he darted from the room and away down the stairs with surprising agility.

The little scoundrel did not dare to face the music any longer.

Valerie Bellairs was bending over Caldecott, her slender white fingers seeking to ease the bandage that bound his injured head. On the other side of the bed stood Eric, gnawing his upper lip, with an expression of impotent rage upon his face. For he felt instinctively that in some way or another Caldecott's present plight and Hazel's mysterious disappearance, were bound up together.

Suddenly Caldecott moved uneasily on his couch.



"Horace!" she cried. "And wounded—perhaps dead!"

Another splendid Hazel Harlow story next week.

His lips began to move, a ghastly smile played about the corners of his mouth.

"He is delirious!" muttered Valerie, "send for a doctor in mercy's name!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed the sick man. "I've got you now, Hazel! I've got you now! You won't give me the slip again! Falcon Court's not Colbourne Terrace. There's no back garden to help you here!" His ravings suddenly changed to a higher key, as with a white face Eric leant forward to catch every word that the fever-stricken wretch uttered. "Keep still, curse you! Ah, they're here! they're here! Help! help! help!" and a scream broke from the man's unconscious lips.

Valerie turned hysterically to Eric. "How can you stand like that, man?" she cried fiercely. "He's delirious! Raving! He doesn't know what he's talking about! Run for a doctor. Run, I say."

Eric drew himself up. He looked unmeaningly at the woman's white, haggard face.

"'Falcon Court,' he said!" muttered the young man. "Good God! what can it mean?" The next moment he had dashed like a man possessed out of the room, and down the broad stairs that led to the entrance-hall thronged now with startled servants.

The next moment he was in the street. Not twenty yards away was a policeman. To him Eric turned.

"Policeman!" he gasped breathlessly, "do you know Falcon Court?"

"Falcon Court," answered the man, musingly; "why, yes, that's the name of a vile slum not more than three-quarters of a mile from here."

"Then for heaven's sake come there with me at once. There's been foul play—murder, for all I know, in Falcon Court. I'll give you ten, twenty, fifty pounds if you'll come! Hie, cabby, cabby!" he called frenziedly, as a hansom trotted briskly past, to pull up abruptly at the insistent hail.

Eric almost hustled the constable inside the cab. The officer broke out into expostulation.

"Falcon Court, or as near as you can get there!" cried Monteith to the cabman. He thrust a sovereign into the policeman's hand.

"There's an earnest of my *bona fides*," he said imploringly. "A life may hang in the balance at this very moment. Or"—his young voice trembled—"we may even now be too late."

The policeman pocketed the coin and gazed wonderingly into the handsome face of his comrade. "Well, this beats anything," he muttered. Then he said aloud, "Are you armed, sir? Falcon Court isn't a place where the police are very much loved."

"We must find another constable nearer our destination," answered Eric decisively. "They can't kill the three of us, and"—with a touch of unconscious pride—"I was champion light-weight at Oxford last year."

The policeman looked admiringly at the slim, well-knit figure. "Well, what's the game, sir?" he said.

"I have reason to believe," came the rapid answer, "that a young lady was abducted this morning by a scoundrel, and lured away to Falcon Court. The man has since returned wounded and alone. Now do you see my reason for haste."

The constable let fall an oath with ready expressiveness. "A pretty game!" he muttered. "Poor girl! I hope we come in time. We'd best get out here, sir."

Eric needed no second bidding. A second policeman was standing on the kerb near at hand. Monteith beckoned to the man, and following the first constable, he plunged down a narrow court, just waiting to see that the other officer had taken his hint.

Accustomed as he was to the various phases of London life, Eric could scarcely repress a shudder as he followed the policeman down the sordid alleys that led to Falcon Court. To think of Hazel amid such surroundings seemed too terrible. And supposing that she was not there! Supposing that Caldecott had hidden her away somewhere! What could they do then?

Suddenly, just as Falcon Court—the name of the alley spoken mutteringly by the policeman who had been Eric's first guide—was reached, Monteith caught sight of a man that sent the blood racing through his veins. It was Ben Quirk, the little man who had brought Caldecott home. The man had dashed into a house. The court seemed deserted. Yet who knew what fiends in human guise lurked behind the closed doors that opened into the fœtid alley.

Eric noted the house into which Quirk had dashed. "Try here," he muttered, pausing before the closed door of the dwelling.

The policeman battered at the door with a vehemence that seemed to suddenly create a stir such as is aroused in a bee-hive when the inmates are disturbed. A suppressed hum of voices seem to break out; windows were cautiously opened; heads appeared, oaths and muttered invectives were heard.

But the door against which the trio battered, remained closed. The constables exchanged notes in whispers. Eric drew himself back preparatory to battering down the woodwork of the portal by main force. For somehow, instinct told him that behind that very door lay the solution to the enigma he had sworn to solve.

Then, as is often the case in this world of ours, the unexpected happened. The door was flung open from the inside, and a stream of men issued forth, like fluid escaping from a hole in a barrel. Cursing and swearing, the rabble nearly overwhelmed Eric and his two upholders as they swept out. The two constables drew their truncheons, and kept a way clear all round them by ample use of the same. Eric made play with his fists, standing back against the wall of the house, warding off many a blow and a kick, though not escaping sundry of the assaults made against him.

But at last, and by a miracle, as it seemed, the cowardly crew, warned doubtless by Quirk, had got clear away. The door lay open. Eric dashed inside the house, followed by the policemen, who shouted at him to be on his guard.

Regardless of their cries, he flew, as though on wings, up the ricketty staircase, and to a room above, the door of which was open. A cry escaped him. Upon the floor lay the body of a woman, upon her face, her arms stretched out in front of her, with a tangle of chestnut hair rippling down her shoulders and upon the dirty boards of the apartment.

It was Hazel! Hazel Harlow! For a moment Eric thought she was dead. A groan of agony escaped him. Then one of the policemen raised the apparently lifeless body in his strong arms.

"Don't take on, sir!" he said, "she's only fainted. My word, ain't she beautiful!"

"Only fainted," echoed Eric. "Then we were in time. Thank God! Thank God!"

Hazel Harlow's adventures will enthrall you.

CHAPTER IV.

While all these stirring events had been happening, Alice Monteith, the unsuspecting catspaw of Caldecott's scheme, had remained quietly at home, awaiting the return of her brother after the projected visit to the theatrical agent with Hazel Harlow.

Judge of her surprise, therefore, when at about half-past two o'clock a cab drew up at the door to disgorge Eric and Hazel, the latter looking strangely white and ill.

In a moment Alice realised that something had happened. But the story that she heard a little later from Hazel's own lips far exceeded anything that she had expected to hear.

Hazel described how she had received the note purporting to come from Eric—a palpable forgery, and yet written by some educated man, not Caldecott, for, of course, Hazel would have recognised her detested lover's writing—how she had not for a moment suspected foul play; how she had been lured away, only to find herself entrapped once more by Caldecott. The rest of her story can be told in her own words:

"On seeing the man I have more reason to hate and fear than all others—the man who ruined my father; my first feelings were those of almost abject fear. Hardly knowing what I did, I screamed out with all the force of my lungs, again and again.

"My action enraged Caldecott. He seized me by the throat, to still my cries, when suddenly the door flew open, and a stream of uncouth men rushed into the room.

"In a moment Caldecott was overpowered, in spite of his struggles, and, I believe, hurt"—we have seen how he was brought home by Quirk.

"But if I had hoped that my rescuers were honourable men, my expectations were to be cruelly cast down. Never have I seen such a repulsive crew of human beings as the men who confronted me then. I uttered a silent prayer to Heaven to protect me from such awful fiends in human shape as these men appeared to be.

"Then they began asking me questions. Who was I? How had I come there? Why had I screamed, and the like. I answered them as fully as I thought fit, imploring them at the same time to let me go.

"'How much money have you got?' asked one of the men. I told him, only a few pence with me, as was true. . . .

"He swore fearfully, and then he and the other men drew apart in the corner near the door, muttering together, though I could not hear what they said. At last the ringleader came to my side:

"'Look here,' he said roughly, 'you've got no money, and you don't appear to be anybody in particular, but you've got a fine face and figure of your own'—he leered at me in a horrible manner, and I felt myself growing cold all over. I seemed to be in some terrible nightmare—'and we're going to draw lots for you!'"

Hazel paused in her narrative, and a simultaneous cry of horror broke from her two listener's lips. Eric pictured the terrible scene vividly; Hazel beautiful, pale, helpless, around her the foul scum of as foul a neighbourhood as perhaps even London could with shame own to.

"For a few moments," the girl went on, repressing a shudder with difficulty, "I could hardly realise what the man meant. Then the full purport of his words came to me.

"I was to be made the means of affording these ruffians sport. In a few moments perhaps I should find myself alone with one or another of these fearful creatures. What could I do, alone, not even knowing where I was?

"Suddenly the men withdrew. But they carefully locked the door behind them, and all hope I had of making my escape faded away. I could not have got out of the tiny window, and even if I could have done, the act would have availed me nothing.

"The minutes dragged slowly on, and I was the prey to the most sickening fears. From sounds of laughter and conversation below me, I could judge pretty accurately where my captors were. What they were doing I could only conjecture—perhaps drawing lots at that moment for me.

"At last, after, as it seemed, hours had passed away, I heard a shuffling footstep outside the door. The next moment the lock shot back and a man entered the room, a dirty, blear-eyed man, who waved a piece of grimy paper in his hand.

"'I've won!' he cried, and to my horror I saw he was drunk. 'You're mine, my beauty!'

"The room seemed to go round. I could endure no more. The next moment all was darkness. I remembered nothing further until I came to my senses to find Mr. Monteith and a couple of policemen bending over me. How you found me, Mr. Monteith, you have already made clear."

Eric drew a long breath. "That scoundrel, Caldecott," he cried, "he shall not be allowed to get off scot free. I shall go round and see him this afternoon again. He must be all right again now."

"Oh, leave him alone, Mr. Monteith," cried Hazel imploringly; "he will kill you."

"It is only defenceless girls he dare try to injure," broke in Eric impetuously. "No, I must have it out with him."

"And now, dear Miss Harlow," broke in Alice Monteith, "let me beg of you to abandon this project of going on the stage; let——"

But Hazel interposed. "Miss Monteith," she said proudly, "I can't thank you enough for all you and your brother have done for me, but, believe me, I am more resolved than ever now to earn my own bread. I am sure that I have the makings of an actress, and I am not daunted by what Squire Caldecott has done. It has been a rude awakening for a country girl—this advent to London—but it has taught me a lesson. I shall not be caught again like that."

The girl spoke eagerly, almost defiantly. Alice Monteith sighed. As for Eric he could not trust himself to speak. The love that had arisen in his heart for Hazel seemed to grow stronger every moment. And yet how powerless he was. He could not even give voice to his love. And he knew, in spite of Hazel's brave words, that the dangers in the path of the girl, so beautiful, and withal so innocent and confiding, were manifold. He knew, moreover, that there were trials and tribulations that not even his strong young arm and passionate love would be able to avert.

"To-morrow, Mr. Monteith," Hazel pursued gently, "if your forbearance has not already been too severely tried, I will still ask you to accompany me to the agent's. And to-morrow I will not move from Mrs. Bryant's until you yourself come for me."

You will mention "Short Stories" to your friends, won't you?

“Then we cannot persuade you to stay with us?” asked Alice.

Hazel coloured. “I owe you so much already,” she said quietly, “that I could not dream of trespassing so much upon your goodness.”

There was something in the girl's voice that convinced her listeners that she did not speak thus out of mere coquetry. The speech was no honeyed politeness, such as *convenance* so often demands. Coquetry and Hazel Harlow were strangers.

Eric without further words slipped out of the room. He did not say whither he was bound. He merely asked Hazel to wait until he came back in an hour or so, when he would once more escort her to Mrs. Bryant's.

But his destination lay not far away. It was to Caldecott's house that he turned his steps. He rang the bell peremptorily. A page in buttons opened the door.

“I wish to see Mr. Horace Caldecott,” said Eric haughtily.

“Mr. Caldecott is not at home, sir,” said the boy.

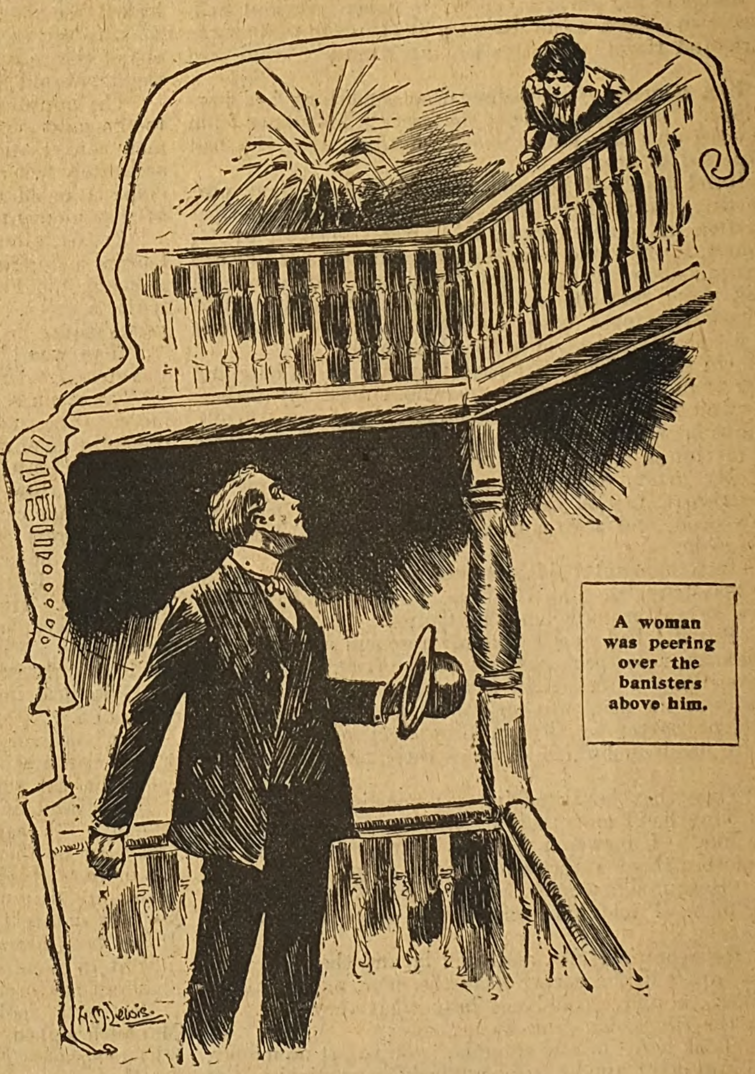
“I don't believe it,” answered Eric coolly.

The page-boy was too astonished at the unexpected answer to make any retort himself.

Eric, taking advantage of the boy's amazement, slipped inside the house. “I'm going up to Mr. Caldecott's room,” he said calmly.

He put his foot upon the bottom-most step of the broad flight of stairs leading up to the room where he had helped to carry Caldecott a few hours before. With a few quick strides he reached the first landing of the stairs. Here he paused, for a woman was peering over the banisters above him, the same woman with whom he had conversed when Caldecott had been brought home—Valerie Bellairs.

“What are you doing here?” the woman said, in a whisper almost, though every word was heard by the man below. “Have you come back to gloat over Horace Caldecott?” She beckoned to Eric. “Come,” she said imperiously. “Come and see the room where you helped to lay him. You needn't fear his delirium now.”



A woman was peering over the banisters above him.

There was something strangely insistent about Valerie's manner. Impelled by sudden curiosity Eric followed her directions. She threw open the door of the room in which Caldecott had been placed by Monteith and Quirk.

The chamber itself was empty. Eric's astonishment was visible in every line of his countenance.

A mocking laugh fell from Valerie's lips.

“So you thought to find him here, did you?” she said in a curiously restrained tone. “Well, you see your mistake. Horace Caldecott is *not* here. He has been taken to a place of safety by my orders. And now listen to me very carefully, Mr. Eric Monteith—you see I know you. This girl that calls herself Hazel Harlow, who has been responsible for all this, for Horace's sudden lapse of allegiance to myself—this country wench— thinks of going on the stage.

“Well, let her go. But remember, she has Valerie Bellairs to reckon with. Perhaps you'll think of that in a few days. Anyhow, I warned you. Don't forget that.”

Eric drew back a few paces. His frank eyes blazed with rage.

“And so you are in league with the hound Caldecott,” he said, “you, who call yourself a member of the *gentler* sex, are bound with a villain to endeavour to wreck the life of a girl who is as pure as she is beautiful, whose only fault is her stainless beauty. Well, as you say, forewarned is forearmed. This is not the first case on record where criminal jealousy and hopeless lust have been ranged on the same side against purity. As for Horace

Another splendid Hazel Harlow story next week.

Caldecott, tell him that I will not rest until I have given him the horse-whipping he deserves."

Valerie's coal-black eyes contracted. Her limbs trembled with suppressed rage.

"Say another syllable," she hissed, "and I will call the servants of the house to have you 'chucked out.' I will give Horace Caldecott your message. And remember he is not friendless, neither is he poor. You will find that threat to give a horsewhipping cost you somewhat dear, Mr. Eric Monteith!"

Eric realised that he could gain no more good by prolonging the interview with Valerie Bellairs. He realised that Caldecott, if he were in the house, which was unlikely, would not be found by talking to this woman. He turned on his heel and left the room.

He met with no opposition as he descended the stairs and walked across the broad entrance-hall and out into the street.

Yet one thing he realised poignantly. He had, by his somewhat ill-advised visit, stirred up a veritable hornets' nest of vindictiveness against himself. For that he cared but little. What could Caldecott and Company do to injure him.

And if his visit had been ill-advised it had at least taught him one thing, and that was that in Valerie Bellairs, Hazel had now a most implacable and unscrupulous enemy.

Eric ground his teeth together in impotent despair. Would nothing suffice to divert Hazel from her fixed resolve to seek fame and fortune upon the stage? Would not even the portrayal of the scene between himself and Valerie Bellairs serve to convince the girl of the hopelessness of her aspirations? In his heart of hearts Eric knew that it would not.

Yet he determined to leave no stone unturned in his endeavour to dissuade Hazel from her purpose. If only she would marry him, slight though their acquaintance had been! He could then snap his fingers in Caldecott's face. And the most beautiful, the most adorable maiden he had ever seen would be his, while there would be no obstacle in the way of her taking her proper place in the world as the wife of a young and wealthy gentleman.

Hazel and Alice were still discussing the events that had just transpired when Eric returned.

To his sister the young man had made the somewhat strange request that she would allow him five minutes private conversation with Hazel.

To this demand Alice made no demur. As soon as Hazel and he were alone, Eric came to the point.

"Miss Harlow," he said breathlessly, "will you marry me?"

For a moment Hazel was too astonished to find an answer. When she did there was no mistaking her words.

"I cannot, Mr. Monteith," she said. "I do not love you in the way I think a girl ought to care for the man who is to be her husband. And besides, you have known me for such a short time."

"Yes," answered Eric moodily, "and yet I love you with all my heart and soul. I had hoped that you might have cared for me enough to have promised to think of becoming my wife. And, besides——"

"You wanted to find a pretext for dissuading me from a theatrical life," broke in Hazel, with something suspiciously like a smile playing about her lips.

Eric coloured. "Yes," he answered, somewhat constrainedly, "that is so, though it doesn't make any difference to my love. Believe me," he continued, with increased earnestness, "I am convinced that a hundred dangers and difficulties lie in the road that leads to your becoming a great actress. Will nothing make you swerve from your fixed determination? Put all that I have just said about myself on one side. Think of the terrible experience that you have just gone through——"

"And which your bravery alone has rescued me from, and worse." Hazel's eyes filled with tears. "You must think me most horribly ungrateful," she said piteously, "and yet something within me urges me to go on, to persevere in spite of all. Whether you consent to help me or not, I must go on now." And Hazel held out her hand with an imploring gesture.

Eric seized the little hand and pressed his lips to it.

"Come what may," he said fervently, "hate me, or love me—I had rather the latter—I will serve you to the best of my abilities. If you feel that the only course before you is that of endeavouring to go upon the stage I will help you all I can. And I can say the same for my sister. We are alone in the world. So forget what I have just said—for the present. I can't help loving you, Miss Harlow. I'm afraid I shall do so all my life. But I won't worry you with my attentions."

And thus did Eric Monteith promise to aid Hazel Harlow in her efforts to woo the histrionic muse. He had rescued her from death, or from worse than death, and yet the way before him seemed black and fraught with danger. What those dangers were time alone could show.

Hazel Harlow is now about to embark upon the sea of stage life. How her first efforts are rewarded will be told in a thrilling tale in next week's Short Stories.

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Hazel Harlow's adventures will enthral you.

HIS NECKLACE.

"But the idea is absurd!"

"Is it? Well, the evidence is against him."

"Uncle!"

"Great-uncle," corrected the old gentleman, interrupting her shortly.

"You surely cannot mean to say that you actually believe Robert, my husband, to be guilty of stealing those paltry gems—stealing that paltry necklace while enjoying your hospitality!" protested the young wife indignantly and yet almost tearfully, like one who knows that what she is endeavouring to scout is the firm belief, nevertheless, of the person to whom she is talking.

She had used the word "paltry" to express her opinion that it was not likely that Robert would stoop to theft, not in reference to the value of the necklace, but old James Bull, who was suffering from an attack of gout and was an irascible individual at the best of times, interpreted the term as a depreciation of the ornament.

"Paltry!" he echoed. "It cost—never mind—and it belonged to one whom I—er—liked very much."

A softer expression passed over his face, and Lucy Marks took advantage of a momentary weakness.

"Uncle," she said tenderly, "Robert likes me very much."

"He'd be an idiot if he didn't," was the discouraging reply.

"And I like him very much indeed," continued poor Lucy, hoping to bring her great uncle to a more tractable frame of mind."

"And I don't—and never did!" screamed Bull.

He had not intended to shout it out in that way, but a twinge of his enemy made him lose control of himself.

"It's no use talking any more about it," continued Bull an instant later, when he was more at ease. "I don't want a crying woman in my room; the gout is quite enough to put up with at one time—it claims all my attention and more patience than I possess. You may talk about the absurdity of it, and about the awkward and undignified position of a man who is virtually a prisoner in his own room, and all that, but I wouldn't lose that necklace for a lot of money. The evidence is against him, and I never had any opinion of him. A weak-minded fellow like that——"

"I will not stay to hear my husband vilified," cried Lucy proudly. Her eyes were still wet with tears, but they flashed indignation and defiance at her relative. "You will be sorry one day for your injustice to him—and me!" And she left her uncle to his own reflections and the gout.

"I like the girl's spirit," muttered the master of the house when Lucy had passed through the doorway. "I can't help believing the fellow guilty and yet I'm sorry for her sake. Shall I let the matter go? I really feel inclined to do so on her account, but I don't believe she would consent to have it hushed up. That's the contrary nature of women. I suppose I must declare that I think him to be perfectly innocent and let them both go about freely while the affair is being investigated. That would give him a chance of disposing of the things and clearing himself. And I *don't* think him innocent!"

It certainly was a peculiar situation. Lucy had been left an orphan at an early age, and her grandfather had taken charge of her; he had died within a year and Lucy was handed over to the tender mercies of her grandfather's bachelor brother, who was some years younger.

James Bull had behaved handsomely towards the girl, and had brought her up in a style befitting a young woman who was to inherit a considerable sum, for he intended to leave all his money to her. He was very fond of her in his autocratic way.

He settled a yearly sum upon her when she was nineteen, and expected that she would make a good marriage; but, to his dismay and anger, she set her affections on a man whom Bull regarded as ineligible from the first moment, and married him in spite of the old gentleman's protests.

"I do not wish to appear ungrateful, and I am ready to renounce the money you have settled on me," Lucy told him. "I love Robert and I shall be happy with him. You have often said that your only desire is for my happiness, uncle."

So the marriage took place, and James Bull increased the amount of the settlement, but his dislike to Robert Marks remained.

The chief reason for the antipathy was the weakness of Marks' character, an almost unpardonable sin in the eyes of a man of such indomitable will as James Bull. This weakness had caused Marks to sow various wild oats in the past and to waste his patrimony.

Lucy had settled some heavy debts before her marriage. Robert had not—so much must be said to his credit—courted her for her money, but had asked her to wait until he had gained a position which he could ask her to share.

You will mention "Short Stories" to your friends, won't you?

He was an artist—or "thought he was," as Bull put it—and hoped to do great things; but Lucy, with just a touch of her uncle's will, had insisted on using her own money. What did it matter if they loved one another and were soon to have all things in common? she argued. But that did not improve Bull's opinion of Robert Marks.

Marks worked at his profession, but the results were not satisfactory. After a while he was led into various excesses, which Lucy always screened from the eyes of others, and of which Robert always repented for a time. Lucy's love in no way diminished, and this caused her to see his faults in a less glaring light than other people.

When their little son was old enough to toddle about and to talk in baby fashion, old Bull's heart warmed towards the child, and the result was that the little family spent most of their time with James Bull at his house in the country.

It was during one of these extended visits that the untoward incident occurred that gave rise to the conversation just recorded. The old gentleman, in a confidential mood, had shown to his relatives an old-fashioned diamond necklace, which he seemed to prize very much. He had merely explained that it had come into his possession many years previously from a friend, and that it was worth a great deal. When they had finished admiring it he had said that he "must put it back into his room," and had left them with that object.

However, on reaching his room, he suddenly remembered that he had omitted to instruct his man, who was about to make a special journey to the market town to bring back something which he wanted particularly, so he left the case on his table and hurried out.

He forgot the case till the next morning, when he found it open and the necklace gone. Then he remembered that, as he was hobbling back to his bedroom after breakfast, he had met Robert on the threshold and evidently coming out of the room. The artist became confused, and the old man had passed him without a word, much annoyed at the presumption of the artist in entering a private apartment secretly.

Two hours later, when he thought of the necklace and found it gone, this incident naturally aroused his suspicions. He summoned Robert and Lucy to his room—his gout was now giving him great pain—told them of the loss, and bluntly asked the artist what he had been doing in the room.

Robert admitted that he had noticed the case through the open door and had taken another look at the ornament. Bull, now in acute pain, furious at the loss and bitterly prejudiced against Robert, accused him of taking the necklace.

Of course, there was a great to-do—angry and unfounded remarks from Bull, hot protests from Robert, and tearful entreaties from Lucy that her uncle would be more feeling and reasonable. But the old man, in the agony of gout, persisted in his angry denunciations, and ordered Robert to keep to his room and not leave till the mysterious affair had been sifted.

Bull summoned the local police superintendent in order that a thorough search of the house might be made, and it was while he was waiting for the arrival of this functionary that Lucy made her last attempt to relieve her husband from his undignified position, as we have narrated.

"What does he say?" asked Robert Marks anxiously as his wife entered.

"He will not relent, dear," half sobbed Lucy. "He says that nobody except us two knew of the existence of that necklace, and that the case is exactly like another which he sometimes has on his table and which contains a curious pipe, so that no one else would be attracted by the case as they would think it contained that pipe. He says he did it on purpose. I thought it was a peculiar case for such a thing, and it was certainly much newer than the necklace," she added with a touch of feminity.

"But it's preposterous!" cried Robert. "I'll not submit to it!"

"The matter must be cleared up or the stigma will cling to us for ever—even if he goes no farther than keeping you in your room for the present, Robert dear."

"But he would never dare to hand me over to the police if he does not find it!" gasped the artist.

"He will find it. It must be cleared up," said Lucy. And then she allowed her tears to have full sway.

"I was a fool to go into his room to look at it without asking his permission," groaned Robert, "but it occurred to me that it would suit for a picture I'm thinking of painting, and I wanted another glimpse to make sure, and I thought, as I saw the thing on the table, that I could just glance at it without worrying him. He's such a queer man and seems to have a grudge against me."

He pondered for a while and then started to his feet as a light dawned upon him.

"Yes, I've been a bad lot. I'm a weak fool, led away by any pleasant companion, and I've wronged you, Lucy. I can see it now. My career hasn't been creditable, though I've never done anything really wrong, and the old man despises me and is ready to believe anything. But he is a wicked old man to think I could do *that!*"

Husband and wife were so full of their trouble that they did not notice the presence of their four-year-old son, who had entered while his father had been speaking. Little Dick stood amazed, glancing from one to another, not knowing whether to cry or not. After a few seconds his hesitation vanished, and he stole away to confer with his friend and playmate, James Bull.

That worthy had just been interviewed by the police superintendent, to whom he had related his loss, but without mentioning the object of his suspicions, and to whom he had given orders to make a search of the apartments, including all private ones.

"I must have that necklace," he concluded, "and if you can recover it, in the house or out of it, I'll give you something that will make you happy."

So the officer had commenced his search. It was rather irregular, perhaps, but James Bull was a notability in the district, and he was rich. And the old man sat in suspense, expecting, yet dreading, to hear the footsteps of the child he had grown so fond of during the past two years. Ah, he was coming.

"Mummie's crying and daddie's——"

The youngster blurted out this intelligence as he pushed open the door, then he stopped and appeared to be on the point of crying himself.

"Come here, Dick," said old Bull. His voice was husky and his face wore a worried expression that might have been due to gout twinges.

The child approached him and waited to hear more, but as Bull did not speak, the child continued:

Another splendid Hazel Harlow story next week.

"Daddie says he's a wicked ole man. An' he is if he makes mammie cry." The boy began to whimper, "Who is wicked, grandads?"

"H'm!" coughed Bull. It was a delicate question, but the child unconsciously relieved him from the necessity of answering by placing his hand rather heavily, so it seemed, on the gouty member, and causing Bull to cry out more in anticipation than in actual pain.

"You mustn't touch that tootie, Dick; it hurts."

It would have amused the old man's former business friends to hear him talking baby language.

"But w'y does she cry?" persisted the child. "An' who is wicked?"

Bull felt that he must say something, for the child's eyes were fixed on him with innocent confidence. "Grandads" always helped him and told him things.

"I've lost something, Dick," he began awkwardly, scarcely knowing what he was saying; "something out of that box."

Then he stopped, hoping that this would satisfy the child. He could not tell him that *he* was the wicked old man or anything more connected with the affair.

The child's eyes followed the direction of the finger, then he ran from the room as quick as his little legs would carry him. He returned in three minutes, out of breath and holding something in both hands, something that made James Bull stare and turn red and pale in quick succession.

"I fo'got it, grandads. I'se very sorry, 'cos I didn't ask," said the child contritely.

"Did you take it out of that case?" demanded Bull hoarsely.

"Yes," replied Dick, frightened at the hoarse tone and beginning to cry.

"It's all right, Dick; don't cry, but tell me all about it," remarked the old man with assumed cheerfulness.

Reassured, the child told him all in response to questions artfully put. He had walked into his "grandfather's" bedroom, as he often did, and had opened the case which his father had not shut properly. Old Bull recognised that this was a natural action, for he had humoured the child in many ways. Attracted by the brilliancy of the ewels, he had taken them away to play with, as he hadj been allowed to do with any other unimportant effects belonging to Bull, but he had placed the necklace with his toys and had forgotten it.

No man ever felt in a worse fix than James Bull did at that moment but his iron will acted against himself just as promptly as in any other situation it would have done for or against anybody or anything else. In an instant he had summoned a man servant and bade him fetch Robert and Lucy.

"And tell that superintendent that he needn't look any farther and I'll see him to-morrow," adding under his breath with charming inconsistency: "I suppose the noodle has poked his nose into everybody's business by this time.

"I'm a fool and I've been unjust," was his remark as Lucy entered, followed by Robert.

After that confession he was able to explain more easily. Robert and Lucy frankly accorded the forgiveness asked for by James Bull, and as for Dick's share—well, they could not find it in their hearts to blame the child.

"It was a rough experience," observed Robert, "but it has done some good. We shall know ourselves and one another better after this."

Here are some of the Cities and Towns where Hazel Harlow's Adventures will occur:

Look out for when she visits your district.

SCARBOROUGH,
SHEFFIELD,
NEWCASTLE,
RUGBY,
BELFAST,
DUBLIN,
BIRMINGHAM,
BRISTOL,
PORTSMOUTH,
LEEDS,
MANCHESTER,
NOTTINGHAM,
EDINBURGH.

Hazel Harlow's adventures will enthrall you.

A LITTLE MISUNDERSTANDING.

"PLEASE, sir, there's 'er lady wants to see you."

It was our office boy, who had broken in on my labours with his customary affability, not to say impudence, and even in my preoccupation I could not fail to discern that something or other about my unexpected visitor had stimulated his somewhat vulgar notions of humour.

"A lady, George! What sort of lady? I am busy. Tell her to leave her message. It is only a manuscript, I expect."

"I don't think so, sir," retorted the lad. "She said it was a very important personal matter, and she must see you."

"What does she look like?" I queried irritably, for really the interruption was annoying.

George sniggered mirthfully.

"Rather as if she had been on the tiles all night, sir, 'aw, 'aw! Prodmore said she'd want to tap you for a bob."

Prodmore was rather a low-class little brute of a clerk, and as I began to discern something of what had been going on in the office concerning the matter, I got more irritated than ever.

"Prodmore should be an excellent judge of that condition, certainly," said I, with crushing dignity. "Tell him, with my compliments, to pay more attention to his work, and less to matters which do not concern him, and put the visitor in the waiting-room!"

George retired whistling, with an easy unconcern, and afar off down the passage I heard a ribald chuckle escape him. Finishing the bit of work that was immediately engaging my attention, I allowed the sportive imp to follow my directions, and then I changed my coat for one a trifle more respectable and went down to interview the caller, whose appearance was so abnormal as to enlist the interest of a clerk in an office where callers pass in and out in a steady stream the whole day long.

My word! I didn't wonder at the mirth of George, nor the critical interest displayed by the unseemly Prodmore, though the thing was a long way from being amusing to me. Seedy journalists and penniless authors in varying stages of decay had passed through that waiting room, but never, it is safe to say, had it been graced or disgraced by such a disreputable, rakish old woman as I found waiting for me in a state of nervous excitement. A shabby old green velveteen dress hoisted on anyhow terminated in a pair of decent though broad-toed and evidently masculine boots, and was surmounted by a frowsy, moth-eaten fur, and a bonnet in the last stages of decay. A black-dotted veil hid the face from view; but it did not require an expert physiognomist to judge the lumpish, evil, dissipated features that its removal would discover.

My first idea was to beat a strategic retreat and be providentially out "for the rest of the day"; but ere I could put my purpose into action the door was flung open; and my visitor was pulling me into the room in a hysterical burst of welcome and explanation.

"Oh, Bob, I'm jolly glad to see you! What a deuce of a time you've been."

"Madam," said I, coldly unresponsive, "really I——!"

"Don't be a fool, Bob," interrupted the lady frantically. "I'm Murphy—you know, Cousin Murphy—and I'm in a deuce of a hole."

"You're what?" I stammered, and then, as my respectable fool of a relative hauled up her veil, the idiotic nature of the situation struck me and I subsided into a chair in a wild abandon of mirth.

"I don't see anything to laugh at, myself," protested Murphy, with chilling dignity; "but perhaps when you have done enjoying your evidently humorous appreciation of my unfortunate situation you will not mind lending me some little assistance."

"You—you look such an ass," said I, by way of explanation, between my bursts of laughter.

"Thanks," said he, more gruffly than ever. "Sort of reflection, I suppose—holding mirror up to nature and all that sort of thing. Hang it, I wish I was back home in Essex. Your confounded city seems to be populated by thieves and fools in about fair proportions."

"Don't get shirty, old man," said I soothingly. "What's wrong, anyhow, and why to mix in such doubtful society has the estimable Murphy wandered from his rural residence in the garb of a—er—lady? Fancy-dress ball gone wrong, was it, or just fleeing from your creditors disguised in drink and other things?"

"Drink! I haven't so much as seen an egg-cup of water nor a biscuit since yesterday," observed Murphy, forgetting his indignation in the new train of reflection called forth by my chance allusion. "You haven't a drop of whisky handy, have you?"

I hadn't; but there are means of satisfying such legitimate cravings at hand, even in newspaper offices, and while it was being procured Murphy waded in and gave me a concise and fairly lucid account of all that had befallen him since, in a misguided moment, he left his native village to come up and transact some business in the great metropolis.

It began the previous afternoon, and in the Post Office station of the Twopenny Tube, of all places. Murphy landed in London at twelve, and, after lunching at the "Woolpack," in Cheapside, he transacted his business and then went on to Holborn to make a few purchases of a domestic nature. Coming back his eye caught the station of the new line, and as the fame of the Tube had travelled even as far down as Wickford where he lives, he immediately conceived the idea of a short trip on it for the sake of the experience.

At the bottom of the lift he threaded his way through the tiled passages, filled with wonder and appreciation, and was about to enter the train when a foxy-looking gentleman rushed up to him, looked at him irresolutely, and then putting a weighty black bag of the Gladstone order into his hands, whispered: "Tottenham Court Road, and look fly—Splits is on to us. Bill will meet you there," and was gone again before Murphy could quite take in what had happened.

Murphy's chief feeling was one of resentment. Who was Bill, and why particularly should he "look fly" (whatever that might be), and what were "splits," and why, above all, should he be expected to act as light porter for casual strangers without a word of apology or explanation? His first idea was to put the bag, which was securely locked, and very heavy, under the seat and abandon it to its fate; and it would have been well for Murphy had he done so. But on reflection he felt that a mistake had been made, and since the bag might contain valuables, such a course might be productive of great loss and inconvenience, and so dutifully he went on to Tottenham Court Road, and struggled along to the lift and, perspiring freely in the effort, managed to drag his burden into the street.

Barely did he get there, when a gentleman of somewhat coarse exterior, and rough in manner, passed him, and, after furtively scrutinising Murphy first and then the bag, turned back.

"Come on," he whispered. "It's all right so far, but things are looking dicky."

"Are you Bill?" demanded Murphy, with a sudden inspiration.

"Right, cully! Come on," and the summary stranger turned and dived through the traffic with Murphy, his few wits scattered to the winds by the rapidity of the odd adventure, struggling after him.

Happily, for the bag was heavy (as Murphy forcibly insisted on my recognising) he had not far to go, and in a dingy side street, before a dingy house, his guide drew up, let himself in with a latch-key, and beckoned Murphy to come in without any undue delay. This Murphy did, and to his consternation and uneasiness the man paused to bolt and bar the front door, and when this was done to his satisfaction, he led my cousin downstairs into a sort of underground kitchen which was sparsely furnished with a deal table and a few plain chairs and some odd domestic utensils of the commonest order.

"Half a mo, and let's see what they've sent?" observed the man. "It was a close shave, but I think they must have got it all away by now."

Murphy's uneasiness, which had been steadily growing, culminated as the guide unlocked the bag and turned out on the table—just ordinary common building bricks.

"What the deuce?" began the astounded man, and then he paused and gazed at the contents of the bag first, and then at Murphy.

Brickbats evidently was not what he had been expecting to receive.

"I—I—I—," began Murphy with a stammer, and then he stopped dead, for, with a smothered ejaculation the other jumped to his feet and had Murphy covered with a suggestive looking revolver. "I mean," he continued, screwing up all the courage he could muster in a desperate endeavour to straighten the affair out before it assumed dangerous proportions, "I think there is some mistake."

"I hope not," responded the other with an unpleasant emphasis. "Who are you, and how did you get here?"

"You brought me," protested Murphy with some assertion. "I'm sure I didn't wish to come. Somebody, a friend of yours, possibly, pushed that bag into my hands at the Post Office station and told me to bring it to someone named Bill at Tottenham Court Road."

"The blundering fool," muttered the gentleman behind the revolver. "Well, look here, mister, you ain't a 'split' unless you are a darned sight more artful than you look; but you may be a 'nark' so mind what you are up to. There has been some little mistake here. You ain't unlike a gentleman we expected to meet, and my pal, being in a hurry, may have took a liberty. If so it's unfortunate for you, because I'm going to take another—lots of 'em maybe—and as I am a bit impatient look out that you don't worry me in case this happens to go off and hurt you."

Murphy said he'd be very, very careful. He said it feelingly, as though he really meant it, and I have no doubt he did, because even a brave man might object to be turned into a target for casual revolver practice in a dingy cellar without any compensating balance, and Murphy is far from being a brave man. What he chiefly wanted was to get out and go straight back home; but to this modest request, when he put it, his captor laughed frankly if somewhat cynically. His fitful mirth speedily gave place to ferocity again, for at that juncture an emphatic knocking at the front door above made itself heard.

"That's the police, or I'm a Dutchman," observed the fellow, more to himself than to Murphy. "Now look alive and hustle yourself into those, and—mark me!—if you say a word or give a sign, I'll shoot you dead." As he spoke he flung some articles of feminine attire at Murphy's feet, and my cousin, too dazed even to think for himself, abjectly donned them, while the other repacked the bricks, and fastened up the bag. "Now, then, hurry along. Put on the bonnet and veil, and, remember, not a word. I'll do all the talking necessary. Coming, you silly fellow; don't be in such a hurry."

This last was to the impatient caller, who was making the knocker play stentorian demands for admittance in his impatience at the delay.

The man left the room, and returned shortly afterwards closely followed by a police inspector.

"William Simon?" he queried brusquely.

"That's me, sir, and this is my missus," said the man, with leering insolence, all his ferocity having seemingly given place to the most humane and benevolent kindliness of heart and innocence of purpose. "We was just going out, and as we have a train to catch, perhaps you wouldn't mind hurrying up your business. Sorry to——"

"That will do," retorted the other. "Where's the man who called here half-an-hour ago."

"Man—who—called—here," repeated Mr. Simon thoughtfully. "I don't——"

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"Yes, you do," said the inspector. "He brought a bag from the Tottenham Court Road Station——. Ah! got you."

The inspector's sharp eyes had alighted on the bag, and in a moment he had opened it, oblivious of the protests and entreaties of the custodian. When he saw the contents his jaw fell, and Mr. Simon grew aggressive and resentful in proportion.

"Them bricks are made by a new patent what me and a friend have discovered," he observed darkly. "And maybe you won't hear a bit more about this, Mr. Inspector. My missus here is a witness, and though I won't say there is any harm done yet the principle of violating a man's secrets in this way is against the law. What did you expect to find, dynamite or snyde coin?"

The inspector chewed his lips, and looked so thoroughly the fool he must have been feeling, that Murphy, despite his misery and precarious position, was constrained to snigger.

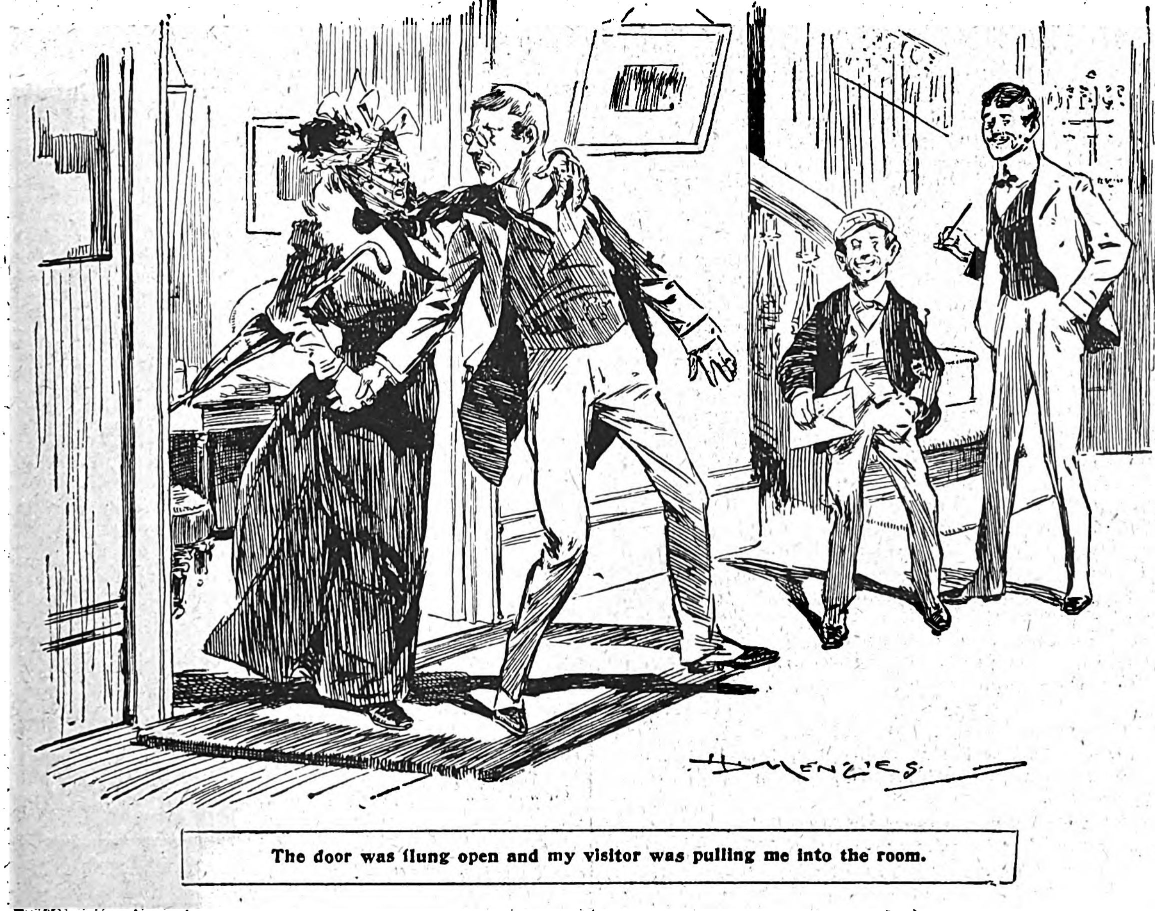
"You make the bloomin' missus laugh at you, and I don't wonder," observed Mr. Simon casually. "Now then, hurry up, because we wants to be off. You can have a look round if you like," he added generously. "Undo the oven door, Sal, and let the gentleman have a look there; or maybe he'd like to turn out the copper, or look in the coal-'ole."

The "gentleman" wouldn't, and with a mumbled apology or explanation he turned and left the room, followed by the tenant, who bantered him all the way to the front-door, and fired a Parthian shot at him from the doorstep. Then, returning, Murphy's captor made a few hurried preparations, and hustled my dumbly protesting and oddly reluctant relative out of the house.

"Best take my arm, Sal," said he with a grin. "It'll look affectionate and more natural like, and besides, it'll be handier in case—— "

He broke off abruptly; but the significant manner in which he tapped the pocket in which Murphy knew the revolver reposed was enough in itself to exact servile unquestioning obedience.

It must have looked lovely! I told Murphy I'd have sprung a pound to see it, but he only scowled, so I was constrained to chuckle in isolated glee over the mental picture I immediately conjured up of Murphy in that absurd guise perambulating the Tottenham Court Road, arm in arm with a disreputable gentleman who was evidently well known to the police. Murphy couldn't trust in his disguise as implicitly as he might well have done, and at first it was a matter of real surprise to him that he attracted not the slightest notice from the people they encountered during the walk. Not being particularly well acquainted with London, he had no idea where



The door was flung open and my visitor was pulling me into the room.

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his guide led him. He noticed Wardour Street placarded on a big stone building at the corner of a street they passed, and from that and the time occupied, I judged that it must have been somewhere round Soho that Murphy was taken.

It was a dingy old house up a court, and for the first time since he had walked so complacently into this odd series of misadventures, Murphy jibbed. The place, he explained to me, looked "cut-throaty," and he had a preference for dying on the doorstep if he had got to die at all. A vicious dig in the ribs soon brought him to his senses, however, and under the refreshing influence of this he allowed himself to be propelled through the door, which opened mysteriously without sound or signal being given, and closed as mysteriously after they were inside, to find himself in a mixed and mysterious company of men.

A witty gentleman in a velveteen coat and a choker sang "Never Introduce Your Donah to a Pal," and complimented Murphy in somewhat broad terms on his personal charms. Another member of the company, with an eye to business, manifested a keen anxiety over his personal possessions, and seeing that he wore a twenty-guinea lever, to say nothing of a fair supply of spare cash, Murphy was not unmindful of his obligation when his companion promptly and effectively interfered.

"None of that, Saunders," said he tersely. "The gent is fair dealing, and don't mean us no harm. He has come along here to oblige me, and we don't need to give him any personal reason for wanting to come back later and pay us another visit with company which, maybe, we'd not care overmuch about meeting. Seen anything of Tom?"

They hadn't, and there as far as Murphy was concerned the mystery ended. Precisely why he should have been saddled with a bag of bricks first, and then dragged in ridiculous garb from one house to another in the way he had been, was quite beyond his comprehension. Nor did he have any further chance of investigating the affair, for shortly afterwards he was hustled into a dusty old lumber-room, and securely locked up there until far into the next morning. Faint from want of food and cowed and thoroughly demoralised, Murphy was then released by the gentleman who had been addressed as "Saunders," and, gowned and bonnetted as he was, was led forth for another perambulating trip round London. He had lost interest in everything by this time. The traffic and people in the streets seemed misty and intangible, like a dream, and he walked on in this dazed condition until he suddenly realised that his companion had discreetly vanished and left him to his own devices. Despite the taboo extended to his property, sundry other things had vanished as well, including all his money, though his watch, perhaps because it was deemed too risky, had been spared to him. Wandering along aimlessly, Murphy found himself at length in Holborn, and then pulling himself together a bit he remembered me in his time of need, with the result that I have already set down.

Fed and rested, and once more restored to his normal unintelligent frame of mind, Murphy, assisted by myself, made up a parcel of his disreputable raiment, and together we cabbed it down to Scotland Yard, and had an interview with the officials there. The result was not particularly gratifying, though it served to provide us with a reasonable theory in explanation of the comedy, and Murphy came in handy for helping to identify "Tom" (who had been captured on leaving the station with a bag of nefarious implements, including a supply of spurious coin) with the gentleman who had so casually enlisted his services the day before.

The bag found in the prisoner's possession coincided in every respect with that which had been intrusted to Murphy, and we could only surmise that in a hasty moving job, prompted by fear of a police-raid, "Tom" had got the two bags pretty badly mixed, with disastrous consequences to himself. It seemed reasonable to conclude that in the haste and apprehension the prisoner had not only mistaken Murphy for the accredited messenger, but had given him the wrong bag, the idea being to get the damaging evidence safely away to another place by one agent whilst the police were led off on a false trail, after a bag of common or garden bricks by another. Happily, or unhappily, according to the way you are viewing it, the best laid and most innocently artful schemes of mice and men, etc., and so it came to pass that one man got three years' hard labour, and Murphy got a brief experience of the crooked side of London life that will afford him all that he needs in that way for the rest of his existence.

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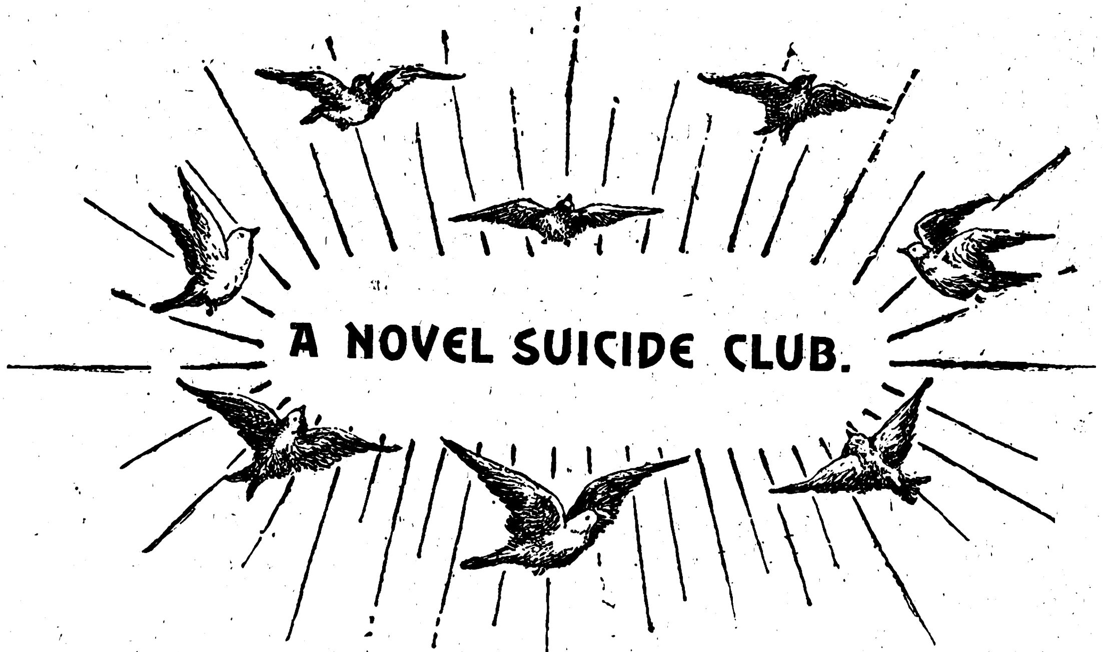
A NOVEL SUICIDE CLUB.



THE following extraordinary advertisement appeared in a London paper one day last summer. It was in an obscure corner, and hardly likely to attract widespread notice, yet its weird invitation to suicide did not escape the eagle eye of my chief at Scotland Yard, at which famous establishment I was then employed :—

> WHO WILL DIE WITH ME TO-NIGHT ?
>
> I am tired of a solitary life and can bear it no longer. I have neither family nor friends, and I seek others similarly situated who will join me in a plan to end our lives together in comfort. Meet me in the South Kensington Museum at six o'clock, and wear a badge of crape upon your arms. I will wear a similar badge.
>
> X. Y. Z.

I was ordered to investigate, and, if possible, to prevent the formation of such a Suicide Club as seemed to be projected, the methods of which were to be so sweeping and so sudden.

Although armed with a warrant for the arrest of " John Doe, others implicated, etc.," I was especially warned not to make any arrests until I was fully satisfied as to which of those who wore the badge of death, if more than one should appear, was the author of the advertisement and the founder of the new Suicide Club. I was further instructed not to act until I was sure that the crucial time had arrived, and that the strange body of cranks were about to execute their compact to die together.

It was with mingled feelings of amusement and awe that I examined my revolver before starting out on my strange adventure. I was totally unaware of the number of desperate mortals I might be called upon to encounter ; but when I reflected upon the folly of attempting to make them desist from their deadly purpose at the point of my pistol, the absurdity of the situation made me smile. There was a suggestion of ghastly humour in the idea of covering a man with a revolver and bidding him, in the name of the law, desist from committing the crime of self-slaughter.

South Kensington Museum is by no means a well-defined trysting place, and as I wandered through its many spacious galleries I feared lest I should fail altogether to encounter the bloodthirsty X.Y.Z., who had not only determined that he himself should die that night, but who sought to obtain travelling companions to that bourne whence no traveller returns.

I felt much oppressed with the weight of responsibility placed upon me. I was to save the life of one, perhaps of more than one fellow-creature ; to rescue more than one soul from eternal damnation ; and incidentally to arrest possibly a crowd of cranks who cared so little for human life that they were prepared to take even their own at practically a moment's notice. I endured an almost unbearable tension of fear and apprehension lest by some sudden impulse or by some pre-arranged signal one or more of my fellow creatures should hurl themselves into eternity before my eyes, through my delaying action, the fraction of a moment too long.

I had strolled into the Mummy Room, fancifully imagining that it might be an appropriate place for such

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a meeting as I had come to witness, and I was leaning against a case containing the shrivelled remains of what was once an Egyptian king, with all the hopes, passions and ambitions of a powerful and lusty ruler, when a bright-eyed, handsome, athletic young fellow sauntered past. I scarcely heeded the eager glance with which he scanned me, for at the moment I did not in the least associate that muscular and healthy specimen of humanity with the presumedly morbid creature who had signed himself "X.Y.Z."

My attention, indeed, was wholly absorbed by a young and extremely pretty girl, who at the same moment was approaching from the other end of the gallery. She bore an unmistakable business air, which, however, did not conceal certain restless symptoms of timidity.

As the handsome young couple passed each other, they started violently, and exchanged an obvious glance of recognition, though they neither spoke nor stopped. It was that which caused me to watch them more closely.

The man wore a somewhat threadbare, though well-fitting, suit of clothes, and a feeling of horror mingled with a sense of professional satisfaction as I saw upon his left sleeve a broad band of black crape. The girl was quietly and tastefully clad in a gown of some dark material, and as she passed me I saw upon the right sleeve of that fair bud of womanhood a similar band of black.

The young girl had evidently noticed the badge of death upon the man's arm, for after walking a few steps beyond me in a hesitating manner, she stopped, and, with her pretty face crimson with blushes, she turned and looked back at him. He also had turned, and stood with his hand at his chin in an attitude of indecision. In this position each looked long and curiously at the other, whom they reciprocally supposed had given them invitation to join in a double suicide.

Pity mingled with admiration seemed to beam from the eyes of the man as he looked at the splendid young creature to whom life, apparently, had so soon become unbearable. Presently, raising his hat with great courtesy, he approached the damsel, who stood expectantly with downcast eyes in evident embarrassment within a few yards of me.

"I am surprised to see you here, Miss Fligh," he began, with some embarrassment.

"I don't see why, Jack," she replied, with a little lingering emphasis on the name.

He flushed with pleasure, and said eagerly, taking her hand:

"Then it's all forgiven, Nelly?"

"Of course, you foolish boy," she answered. "Why were you so stupid?"

He was about to clear up this point, doubtless, when suddenly his face fell, and he said gloomily, touching the band of crape on her arm, "This means business, I suppose?"

Her expression instantly reflected his, and she said, sadly:

"You, too. I had hoped to be alone in this."

He laughed bitterly, and, turning with one accord, this sane and healthy pair, who, according to the terms of the advertisement, were soon to die together, walked slowly down the gallery side by side.

It was clear that neither of them was X.Y.Z. That they were previously acquainted was equally clear. The unmistakable glance of recognition which they had exchanged when they first met had prepared me for the intimate character of the conversation which I had overheard, and which gave an ample clue to the situation. It was evident enough to me. Two lovers, separated by some inexorable reason, probably money or the lack of it, had independently resolved upon making a life which could not be happy as brief as possible. All this I thought out as I strolled down the gallery after them.

As I came nearer to them their talk was again audible to me. Not another word of the unpleasant object of their meeting was spoken by either, however. By a sort of tacit understanding each appeared to avoid the subject of the advertisement, and their conversation consisted exclusively of the usual allusions to the weather. Once when the man thoughtlessly remarked that it would probably be warmer on the morrow, the girl seemed to shrink from him and shiver slightly. And then the pair who had been brought together under such extraordinary circumstances uttered a laugh that had more of pain than pleasure in it, and, lapsing into silence, strolled out into the gallery.

As they approached the restaurant at the entrance of the Museum, the young man said to his beautiful companion, who was soon to be his partner in death:

"Shall we not take a little refreshment—first?"

The word "first" seemed to stick in his throat.

With a smile of reviving happiness the little maid cried, as it seemed to me, joyfully:

"Oh, yes! I would much rather take a little refreshment"—and she, too, had to gulp down something as she added the word, "first."

They took a little table just inside the entrance, and I secured a seat sufficiently near to overhear some of their conversation. They ordered brandy and sodas. So did I. They evidently felt that they needed bracing for the work before them. So did I. Presently they ordered more stimulants, and I began to wonder if the curse of drink was the cause of their being tired of life.

It would have been a merry feast if the skeleton of that horrible advertisement had not sat in the vacant chair and chilled that bright young couple to their very marrow. I flattered myself that I was a close student of character, and though I caught but few of their whispered words, I did not fail to read the feelings of that pair rightly.

In spite of the skeleton, it was quite clear that the young man was very much in love with the strangely pretty creature who was to woo death with him, while the dainty little damsel was entirely unable to disguise the fact that this man who was seeking to die in her company was dearer to her than life. As I watched their ardent glances, and noted their complete absorption in one another, a hope sprang up in me. They had had a little quarrel, I remembered, since there had been a talk of forgiveness. Might not their present ghastly purpose have been the result of this misunderstanding, and might not this misunderstanding be removed in time—before the arrival of the fateful X.Y.Z.?

Inwardly I rejoiced that my mission promised to have such a pleasant termination; but my satisfaction and self-congratulation was premature and misplaced.

At the moment when I felt that their eyes were speaking the preliminaries to an appeal to live and love, as their lips were tremulously framing the words, "Live for me, and I will live for you," a tall, gaunt stranger stopped suddenly just outside the restaurant, and gazed

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long and earnestly at the badges of crape upon the arms of each of the young people. I immediately noticed that he, too, wore the fatal badge of the new Suicide Club, and recognised him at once as the arch-conspirator, X.Y.Z.

If any doubt existed, it would have been at once dispelled by the man crying out in a loud voice:

"Are you the young folks who answered my advertisement? I'm X.Y.Z. Glad to meet you. I've been looking all over the place, but little expected to find my friends of the black band in the restaurant. Never mind. A nip of brandy will put you in good shape for what is to come. Everything is ready and waiting. My carriage is outside. Let's jump in and get along."

All this before the startled pair could speak a word.

This was surely the recklessness of insanity. No one but a madman would have spoken of such a hideous project as he had in hand, in the hearing of people so loudly and so freely. I realised that I had yet a difficult and possibly dangerous task in hand.

Still, I was almost sure that I could count upon the co-operation of the young man who had found a new motive for life in his love for the romantic girl, the current of whose morbid folly he had stemmed.

What was my dismay, then, to see the young people instantly change, and show the greatest eagerness to fulfil to the limit of their appointment with X.Y.Z. It seemed as if the stern old man had suddenly obtained hypnotic influence over that athletic young fellow and that fair frail girl. Before his arrival they had seemed all gentleness and tenderness. Now each seemed as if on stern business bent. They announced their readiness to accompany X.Y.Z. to his home, and at least listen to the details of his scheme.

I knew that the proper moment to make my arrests had not yet arrived; but above all I wanted to see the home of the founder of the Suicide Club, and to learn the means by which he proposed that these two young people should die with him. It was therefore necessary for me to accompany them in the carriage. I had provided for such an emergency as this, and unobserved I slipped a band of crape around my arm. Then I announced myself as anxious to be of the party.

The young people started suspiciously, but X.Y.Z. greeted me cordially. He laughed loud and boisterously, shouting: "Bravo! The more the merrier!"

At this the young girl shuddered slightly, and seemed about to falter. For a moment her courage appeared about to leave her, and she clung to the arm of the younger man for support. Her pretty cheek flushed, and then became very pale, but she bit her lip and rallied with a determined effort. We passed out of the Museum.

That the founder of the new Suicide Club was no mean personage was proved by the splendour of the brougham and liveried coachman which awaited us outside. We were driven rapidly to a pretentious house in one of the best streets in South Kensington.

On that strange journey not one word was spoken except by the voluble old man, who laughed and chuckled fiendishly. And time after time congratulated himself upon having gathered together, as he expressed it, "such a nice little family party."

Arrived within the luxuriously furnished room on the ground floor of X.Y.Z.'s house, I was astonished to see that a banquet had been prepared, and we were cordially invited to sit down and partake.

Not one word of our supposed approaching death was spoken by our host, who seemed to be in the best of spirits; but the three of us naturally thought of nothing else, and the dinner was naturally dull. For my own part, I sent everything away from me untasted, partly from the fear that the old fiend's scheme might be to poison us unawares, and partly because I had no inclination to eat with such a distasteful and probably so dangerous a task before me.

It was a relief when the table was cleared and I still saw no symptoms of convulsions or collapse in my companions. Then it was that the old man arose and deliberately said:

"Now I will make a proposition by which I and my friends may mutually end our lives together in comfort, according to the promise contained in my advertisement."

I fumbled in my pockets, and held a pair of handcuffs ready to snap them on the wrists of the maniac.

"I regret that I am only able to extend this offer to two of you," continued X.Y.Z.; "for you, sir,"—he was addressing me—"have not fully complied with the terms. You have sat at my table, but you have not eaten with me."

A wave of happiness and thankfulness surged through me at that moment. I felt that my caution had saved my life. But the others! They had eaten, and I felt that there was no time to be lost. Arrests must be made, and physicians must be summoned. Stomach pumps might yet save the lives of those two sturdy young people.

"My scheme is simply this," began the old man, and I decided to wait at least long enough to hear the vile story from the madman's lips.

"You will make a pretty a pair as ever were wed," continued the old fellow; "and I want you to keep house for me. You shall have the deeds and my fortune when I die."

I was mystified. I gasped for breath.

"All I ask," said X.Y.Z., taking the young people kindly by the hand, "is that you let a lonely old fellow without a friend in the world since he put the badge of a widower on his sleeve have a lodging in the house. Above all, let him never dine alone again as long as he lives."

There was a moment's silence. Then simultaneously three newspaper clippings were produced, and three voices asked in consternation—

"Are you not the man who advertised for someone to die with him?"

"To DIE with me!" shouted X.Y.Z. in accents of horror, at the same time snatching the advertisement from my hand.

"Hang it!" he ejaculated. "The confounded printers have dropped the letter 'N' from its place. I wrote, WHO WILL DINE WITH ME?"

* * * * *

Two smart City editors of up-to-date newspapers the next day failed to print the sensational story of a new Suicide Club, which they had scheduled. For Jack Brevier and Miss Nelly Fligh, each clever reporters, reported it to be a "fake." Shortly afterwards, those enterprising reporters sent in their resignations and X.Y.Z. welcomed into his household an adopted son and daughter.

As for me—I left Scotland Yard, and took to—well that is immaterial, anyway.

J. Brewster Fisher

"BOSS."

"D'ye 'ear?"

"Yes, I 'ears yer."

"Well, do as I tells yer, then! Wot am I 'ere for?—wot are you 'ere for?—eh! you grey-headed old tar-brush, you!"

"Look a' ere, Joe Bracket! You may be skipper of this y'ere rotten old sailin' box, but you ain't Admiral of the Fleet—yet! So don't you go for to sling yer dirty insinivations at my grey 'airs. I've a' buried six o' your sort; so don't you forgit it, as I ain't a 'green,' 'and as 'll stand your cusses with impunerty."

"Captain" Bracket evidently concluded that he had had the worst of the argument; and, well knowing old Jim's peculiarities, and fo'castle reputation as a "ship's lawyer," prudently dived below, in retreat to his own den.

Old Jim did not seem to care much either way. He just turned his "quid," followed with one eye the disappearing form of his superior, and resumed his work (a splicing job) as composedly as if nothing had occurred to interrupt it.

It was a moot point with three for'ard hands as to who it was that really "ran" the craft—Old Jim (otherwise "Spouty,") or "Captain" Joe. There was a periodical inclination towards the "cook" (such being Jim's rating on board); but an exceptional "bluster," or a more than usually vigorous "tear-round" on the skipper's part at once put the latter in front again, an easy first.

He was, in fact, a "terror," on the whole, to every man on board the *Sarah Ann*, save and except Old Jim.

It was not that he drank to excess, thereby aggravating any natural predisposition to play the tyrant—his worst enemy could not justly accuse him of that. Truth was, he was a born "Jack-in-Office." To be master, absolutely, and without appeal, was his devouring ambition. Certainly, any success he may have had in that direction was due in large measure to an abnormal cultivation of two attributes than which none better serve the purpose of the average would-be despot—obstinacy, and self-esteem.

Then he was a big man, and bore down weaker wills by sheer force of physical superiority.

The mate, a little man, one Abel Dove, was a notable example, and an especial and a frequent victim. Each trip Abel vowed should be the last, and it was only because he and the *Sarah Ann* had been friends, without a break, for over twenty years, that he could not bring himself to give effect to his resolution.

Old Jim and the "mate" were the best of "pals," owing, it may be, more to the existence of a common grievance than to any moral likeness between them, or a similarity of disposition.

The cook was, of course, an "*ex-officio*," a member of the fo'castle set, its spokesman (on occasion), and its adviser at all times; but the mate, occupying a sort of "Mohammed's Coffin" position, between skipper and crew, the butt and scapegoat of the one, and the distrusted natural enemy of the other, was virtually acknowledged by neither.

The *Sarah Ann*, this trip, was in "light ballast," and bound back for Rochester, to which place she belonged.

Everybody on board was having a lazy time of it. The weather was fine, and the sun, during the major part of the day, hot to blazing point.

Now and again, "Captain" Joe would arouse him from a Napoleonic nap (like the great Corsican, he could sleep at will), and scatter the "idlers" in all directions. He had earned his patronymic "Boss," not so much by a righteous insistence upon the strict performance of legitimate duty, but for his aggravating assumption, and "bullying way" in connection with trivial and altogether unnecessary details. "*The* Boss," in the ordinary sense of the designation he was not, but "Boss," a riverine despot, an autocratic irritant, whose every act and word was as a "storm signal" for his unfortunate subordinates.

His passage-at-arms with Old Jim, already chronicled, had reference to a somewhat sore subject, perennial almost in its habit of continually "cropping up" as between the two.

It seemed that "Boss" had at some time or other in the remote past wooed and won a certain Kentish beauty, dwelling in the neighbourhood of Rainham, on the Medway.

Another splendid Hazel Harlow story next week.

The wedding-day was fixed, the guests invited, and a gorgeous spread supplied by a Rochester confectioner.

At the last moment, however, almost, it may be said, at the Altar's foot, the "bridegroom designate" elected to repudiate his obligations—incontinently changed his mind.

When bride and guests assembled in eager anticipation of an especially "happy day," gastronomically and otherwise, "Captain" Joe was well on his way, with a fair wind and a flowing sheet, towards London.

It cannot be contended that the lady's disappointment was either keen or lasting, as, before three months had elapsed, she had consoled herself with the runaway's "best man."

This convenient arrangement ought, in the nature of things, to have ended the matter, and would have done, no doubt, had there not been something more behind.

The sting of the whole affair—the sting left, that is,—was the unsettled-for marriage feast.

In the not-as-yet faded glow of love and expectant happiness, it had been ordered by "Captain" Joe himself, and when the day of settlement arrived, the friends of his sometime intended, deeming the recreant swain alone responsible, declined paying on any consideration.

Now it so happened that Old Jim, then Young Jim, was at that time a working hand in his elder brother's "cook and confectionery" business in High Street Rochester—the particular establishment favoured by "Captain" Joe.

A single man himself in those days, and therefore without any of life's ordinary cares and anxieties, Old Jim had adopted this "bad debt" as a peculiar personal grievance.

His brother had long ceased to trouble about it, seeing the utter hopelessness of ever getting his money; but Old Jim had his own opinion, and backed it to the full extent of his ability. Ever with the one purpose in view the bringing "Boss" to book—he first schemed, and successfully, to get employed on board the *Sarah Ann*; and then, in season and out of season, to maintain a patiently persistent "nudging," as it were, of the "defaulting" skipper's memory.

No one opportunity did he lose to "say a few words;" and when his victim, goaded almost to madness, commanded the doing of something "not in the order book," Jim only smilingly shrugged his shoulders and "piled up" for next time.

In this, his latest attempt to "dun" the skipper, he had been aided materially by some news which had reached him while the boat was lying for a few hours off Erith.

"Captain" Joe's old flame had, it appeared, recently lost her husband, a prosperous Rochester tradesman, and the widow, though past middle life, was not disinclined to the idea of taking another mate. Being fairly well-to-do, this would be no very difficult matter—Jim's informant more than half hinting that "Boss" could have the "situation" for the asking.

This latter detail Jim had, for obvious reasons, kept to himself; but the fact of the "Captain's" erewhile rival's decease had been used by him in a masterly manner as an illustrious means to the one great end.

That it affected Mr. Bracket not a little we have seen, and when he sat down to dinner with the mate, the latter saw unmistakably that something more than ordinarily important or unpleasant was on the board.

Still, nothing occurred of any moment or worth mentioning, beyond the usual "snap" and "snarl", which was too common and every-day an experience to be taken serious notice of.

Rochester reached, "Captain" Joe "tidied" himself with exceptional care, and, leaving strict injunctions with his deputy that no one was to go ashore until he returned, went his way up from the river into the town.

Two hours afterwards he came aboard again, and sent immediately for the "cook."

Old Jim slouched aft, and deliberately made his way down through the "hatch" to where the skipper awaited him.

"I want," he said, rattling a handful of coins in his trousers pocket, "I want to pay that bill."

"Well," said Old Jim, a trifle puzzled, but not showing it, "pay it! You've bin long enough time thinkin' about it! It's time yer did."

"But who've I got to pay it to?" asked the skipper, impatiently a bit, but still keeping his temper wonderfully for him.

"D'ye want ter know?" queried Old Jim, with a curious little laugh.

"If I didn't I shouldn't ask yer!" retorted the other.

"Oh, yer wouldn't, wouldn't yer? I ain't so sure about that; but since yer don't know, and want ter know, why, I'll tell yer."

"Out with it, then. Who is it I've got to pay the money to?"

"ME!"

"You! You miserable old scallywag! You! What have you got to do with it?"

"Jist this. Brother's dead; bin dead for years. I'm 'is 'exekiter,' an' sole legatee. That's wot I've got ter do with it!"

"Well, I ain't disposed to argue the point with you. Here's the money, and your discharge. Now you can clear out as soon as you like. Go ashore and stay there."

"I will—it'll just suit me. I wants a master, not a 'Boss.' But look a 'ere, 'Captain' Joe," and Old Jim held out his right hand, and turned over slowly the money in it with his left, "if I may be so bold as to ask, Wot's yer little game? Why's yer so sudden pertikler in payin' up?"

"If you don't pack up and get ashore, I'll 'ave you put over the side!"

"No you won't. Not, at least, without paying me my wages."

"Captain" Joe saw that he had made a mistake, and hastened to rectify it.

In half an hour Old Jim, bundle in hand, his wages in one pocket, his "breakfast" money in the other, left the *Sarah Ann* without much regret.

In the bar of the "Rodney Arms" he ran against the mate, Abel Dove. To him Old Jim repeated his query anent the probable motives of "Captain" Joe; but the mate was in all respects as ignorant as himself.

When, however, in the course of a week or so, Old Jim heard of his late skipper's union with the widow Dyson, the riddle was solved, and—he thought things.

He made just one remark on the subject, which, inasmuch as it explains much which otherwise would remain an inexplicable mystery, is worthy of record.

"'Boss' he may be on the deck of the *Sairy Ann*; but if 'e'll be 'boss' on 'er 'earthrug, then I'm a thunderin' old idiot."

Which he certainly was not.

Ralph Enderby.

Hazel Harlow's adventures will enthrall you.

The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"It is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Felix in vain protests his innocence.

But the cloud of suspicion gathers around him. Meantime, the child Brian has been kidnapped, and Felix is suspected of this too. He discovers a riding whip with some peculiar marks upon it.

CHAPTER XXII.

"A Very Pretty Clue."

"I am fortunate in finding you alone, Miss Carew; I particularly desired the privilege of a brief private conversation with you."

Otto Hare paused near the large "chesterfield," from which Esther had just risen. He removed his driving-gloves to extend a small, brown palm.

Esther Carew permitted him to clasp her fingers; the Golden Dwarf felt that they were of an almost deathly coldness.

"The last time I had the honour to touch your hand, Miss Carew," observed Otto Hare, "you fainted; owing, no doubt, to the closeness of the afternoon. May I express my pain at your indisposition and a hope that it was merely transient."

"Quite, thank you, Mr. Hare," murmured Esther.

Her voice trembled—she had reason to dread an interview with the diminutive personage who now stood before her. This particular colloquy she had especial cause to fear; Dr. Kraft's warning was precise; upon her conduct for the next few moments hung the fate of the man she loved best in the world.

The Golden Dwarf flung down his hat and gloves and leaned on the end of the couch; fascinated yet terrified, Esther resumed her seat. The dark eyes of Otto Hare studied her—a sombre passion glowed in their unfathomable depths.

"Miss Carew," he said, "tell me, would you rather have me for a friend or an enemy?"

The demand fell on Esther's ears like a veiled threat.

"I—I don't wish to have any enemies," she stammered.

Her persecutor frowned.

"Some people must be either one or the other," he objected. "I am a person of that sort, Miss Carew. If I were to become your foe, for instance, I should hate those you cherished and cherish those you hated. Man, woman, child, or beast, I should rejoice in destroying all that was dear to you, in aiding all that was hostile to you. Were I in love and had a rival—a favoured rival, Miss Carew—I would ruin him; by fair means or foul, I would ruin him."

Esther struggled for breath, a grasp of iron seemed laid upon her heart—Kraft's caution came back to her: "Mr. Hare has secretly obtained proof that on the night of Sir Christopher's death his nephew was in Wyresdale." Whether or not she was intended to comprehend the full meaning of the Golden Dwarf's deliberate phrases, they were an unmistakable menace.

"You—you could not be so dishonourable, Mr. Hare," she faltered, her bosom heaving.

Otto Hare sneered. "Honour and dishonour are but words, Miss Carew," was his answer; "when I set my mind on a thing, every expedient is good which brings me to my goal. If you knew me better you would admit that I do not boast in saying so. However, I will not pursue the subject, since it displeases you."

He relinquished his lounging attitude and stepped up to sit by her. A shudder ran over Esther, yet she did not dare to shrink from him. "Harden yourself against Mr. Hare's suit," the wily German had told her, "and I would not give a bad half-crown for Mr. Dering's life."

"You are aware," proceeded Otto Hare, "of my plan to give a garden party in Wyresdale Park and of your mother's kind promise to act as hostess?"

Esther Carew assented; the Golden Dwarf, by a skilful change of position, diminished the space between them.

"Miss Carew," said Otto Hare, "you will naturally be present at that event, and your presence, under the circumstances, will set the gossips chattering. You are young and beautiful, I am rich and a bachelor—you are the only woman in Wyresdale to whom I have paid, during fifteen years, the least regard."

He looked into her pallid face with cool self-possession.

Esther gazed at him, her nerves strained, her brain whirling. Would he ask her to marry him—him whom she had met a bare fortnight earlier, yet had never seen except to fear and to loathe? She could not, she could not say "yes." But if she answered "no" what might not happen to Felix?

"Such gossip," continued the Golden Dwarf, "flattering though it would be to me, might offend you, Miss Carew. I have even been assured that without Mr. Felix Dering, whose mourning for Sir Christopher must keep him away, my party would be but dull to Miss Esther Carew."

Esther blushed, as much with terror as embarrassment. The keen pupils of Otto Hare seemed to devour her expression.

"Not that I credit these foolish rumours," said the Golden Dwarf; "yet I confess, Miss Carew, had I believed this, I should have been compelled to protect you from this black-sheep of the Derings. I have a sly sympathy for the criminal, and while I could, if I chose, put Mr. D.'s neck in danger of the noose, it is no business of mine to do the work of the police. But if he were to cross my—or shall I say our paths, Miss Carew, it would be different. I should have to hit hard."

The listener moaned. Dr. Kraft had not, then, deceived her. Vaguely, diabolically, Otto Hare was threatening Felix Dering. The Golden Dwarf smiled—a cruel, satisfied smile.

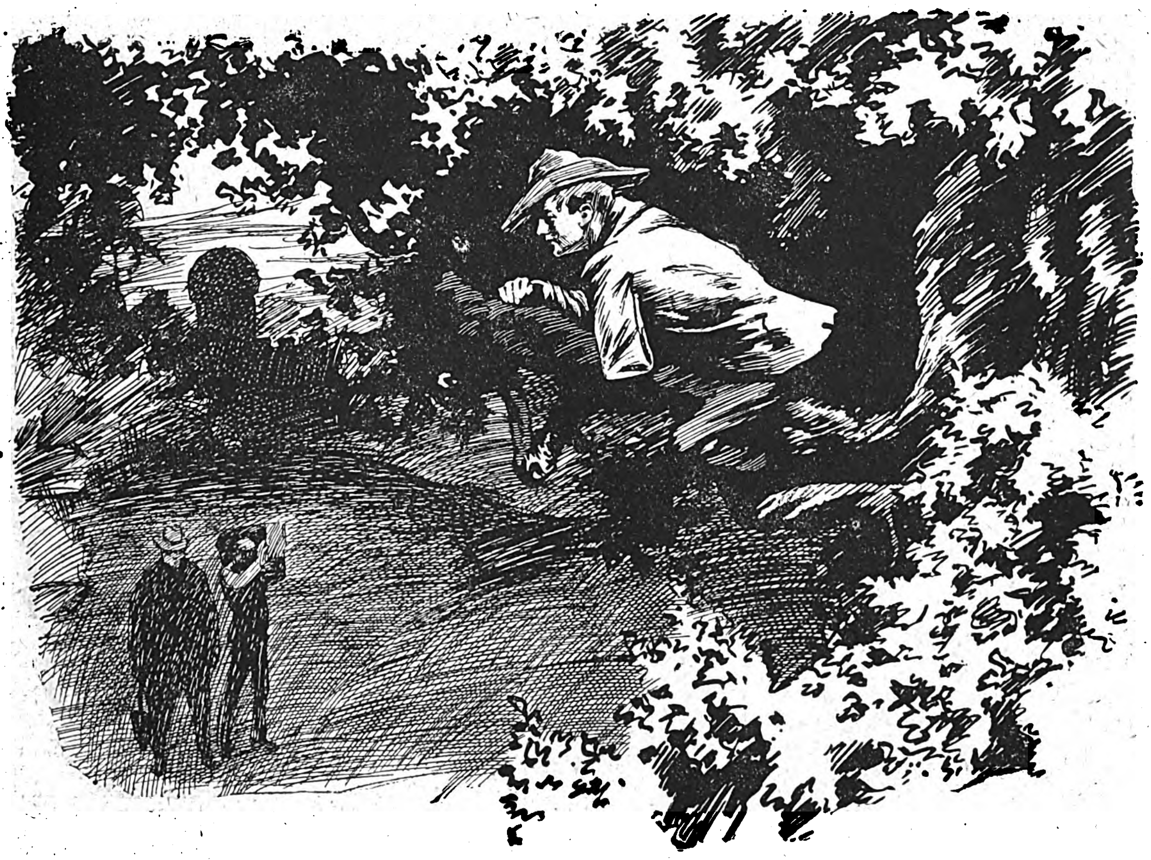
"Of course," added Otto Hare, "I realise the ridiculous nature of the report that you are attracted by Mr. Dering, and he is safe from me so long as he does not insult you with his attentions. Were he to presume that far, I will own, Miss Carew, I should be malicious enough to do him a very ill turn, a very ill turn."

The Golden Dwarf bent towards the drooping form of Esther.

"I have pointed out to you," he said, "the construction which will be placed on your presence at my party. You might be tempted to develop a headache, or some nominal indisposition as an excuse for your absence. I should resent that bitterly, Miss Carew, and I want you to promise you will not fail me."

He put out a tiny palm and laid it on hers. It stung her like the contact of some venomous claw. But she murmured to herself the name of Felix; for his sake she would endure, she would warn him to fly, she would gain time for him to make his escape. Glancing with piteous eyes at Otto Hare, she replied weakly, "I—I will certainly be there, Mr. Hare, since you wish it."

A kiss, lightly imprinted upon Esther's hand, was the Golden Dwarf's acknowledgment of the undertaking she had entered into. Unimportant as it seemed, it served to show that Esther had understood his threat against Felix Dering, and that, moreover, to protect her lover, she was prepared to tolerate at least the rumour of an engagement



A couple of figures—a thin and a stout—were stealing towards him.

Another splendid Hazel Harlow story next week.

between herself and Otto Hare. Thus, the unscrupulous device of Dr. Kraft had been crowned by a measure of success.

The Golden Dwarf was no mean diplomatist.

Content with his achievement, he bade his quivering victim farewell and bowed himself out, leaving Esther to weep and chafe unavailingly.

Mounting into his "spider" phaeton, Otto Hare took the reins from the groom and roused the cobs; the animals dashed off at their usual swift trot. They reached the cross-roads and turned down, under their master's control, the narrow lane which led to the lodge-gates of Dering House.

Their way took them past the dilapidated cottage of Nicholas Foley. The Golden Dwarf, who glanced this side and that as the roans dashed along, noticed the one-armed sailor. Nicholas, grasping a tall lime-wash brush, was at work on the weather-beaten walls of his residence.

Otto Hare drew rein in so sudden a fashion as to drag the most spirited of the cobs upon its haunches.

Foley heard the scuffle of hoofs and looked round. The Golden Dwarf motioned with his whip, and Nicholas, reluctantly enough, deposited the brush in an angle of the door and came to the kerb.

The sailor's tanned countenance was a trifle anxious, but he stared up boldly at the remarkable being who had summoned him.

"I've seen you before, my man, haven't I," said Otto Hare, his delicate features distorted to a grim smile.

Nicholas Foley stepped clear of the phaeton wheels, the cobs were swinging fretfully back and forward, impatient of the stoppage.

"I'm none so positive of that, sir," he observed. "Where might you fancy you'd sighted me?"

The Golden Dwarf knitted his brows. "No evasions," was his answer; "you know where I saw you—in Wyresdale Park, the other day. Come, I forgive you taking care of yourself; you shall hear no more of the accident to—to my dog." He got out a sovereign-purse, slipped a coin from it, and tossed the piece of money to the sailor. "What were you there for," he demanded; "poaching or curiosity? You shan't regret frankness."

Nicholas grinned. "Well, your honour," he said, "a fine fat rabbit gives a bit of a taste to bread and ale, and I'm but a dismasted hulk. It's hard to live at the best."

Otto Hare studied the speaker a second. "I don't grudge an old seaman a rabbit or two," rejoined the Golden Dwarf; "but you must be careful of the dogs. And you'd better tell the keeper you have permission to set a few snares. But no powder and shot, mind. What's your name?"

Nicholas pulled his forelock, astonished. "Foley," he said; "Nicholas Foley, and thank your honour."

Otto Hare had not waited for the expression of his *protégé's* gratitude; the phaeton was already a score of yards down the road.

The sailor scratched his cranium. "Nick, my lad," he muttered; "here's where you'll heave the lead, if you're wise. Is the little beggar bony-fidey, or is he not? And why the dickens should he forgive me knifing his bow-wow; it isn't natural."

He went up the narrow garden-walk, regained his brush, and proceeded with the whitening of the cottage.

"Blowed," was his reflection, "if I don't toddle off to-night and take afresh the bearings of that ruin place in the Park. With a pal and a length of good rope I'd have had it overhauled from truck to keelson; I've neither line nor messmate, worse luck."

His task occupied him till dusk. When he had eaten his evening meal and smoked a pipe, the moon was up and the lanes of Wyresdale cool and dark in the scented gloom.

Locking his door, Nicholas set out in the direction of the brick wall that skirted the Golden Dwarf's demesnes. The low-growing boughs on the main-road once more gave him access to the park and he stole through the plantation to the green slope and the round-topped tower.

On the edge of the plantation he paused. A couple of figures—a thin and a stout—were stealing towards him. An indistinct load was borne by the latter, an implement of some sort by the former. Foley climbed a tree with singular skill and stretched himself upon its biggest branch.

At a short distance the shadowy shapes had halted. By the moonbeams the sailor was able to perceive that one was apparently engaged in the act of digging. Anxious to observe them at less disadvantage, Nicholas crawled further along his branch. The procedure was disastrous, the strained fibres bent and swung.

The noise of the rent wood arrested the dim figures, they moved towards the origin of the mimic explosion. From several quarters there arose also the sudden clamour of the ferocious mastiffs which ran loose in the park. Foley dropped to the ground, doubled on his tracks, and fled.

As he surmounted the wall and slid to the kerb a heavy hand descended upon his shoulder. It was that of Inspector Brasher.

Nicholas threw off the grasp.

"Belay there," he said, "I've not been trespassing nor yet poaching. I've merely been to set a few snares for rabbits—Mr. Hare himself gave me permission. My name is Foley, retired seaman, and brother-in-law to Mr. Forester, chemist, of the High Street. This course is the nearest, so I steer it, though I might go round by the avenue."

Michael Brasher stroked his beard. "Brother-in-law to Mr. Forester," he repeated. "How long have you been in Wyresdale?"

"Less than a fortnight and more than a week," said Nicholas, dodging alertly by the Inspector. "I've lost a spar, as you see, and come back to my old wharf. Ta-ta! You ask Mr. Hare about me; he'll tell you I'm right about the snares. Bong-swore!" And the sailor sprang off into the darkness and vanished so abruptly that Mr. Brasher could not have guessed which way to follow him.

The Inspector, however, was not thinking of pursuit.

"Less than a fortnight and more than a week," repeated Michael Brasher, "and it is but eleven days since Sir Christopher Dering was found dead in the ditch at the cross roads."

Mr. Brasher whistled softly. "By Jupiter!" burst forth the Inspector. "And he said he was Forester's brother-in-law. Michael, you have picked up a very pretty clue."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Mrs. Schwartz Takes a Cab.

"Whew, Keturah, but you do beat all for sizing up the situation. Not but what I think you're wrong this time, though it's as well to take an account of the possibility that you're right."

Keturah Schwartz sniffed. "I tell you," she retorted; "Joseph Kraft kept his eye on the lad the whole while he was here, and when he went he stopped to look at the brat as though he were making an inventory of it."

Neal Garland lighted a cigarette. "You are too imaginary, Keturah," he observed; "however, we'll be on the safe side. Brian Dering shan't stop in Pimlico another hour. Yet, as I brought him into London and I may—I say I may—have been tracked, you had better do the next move with him."

"Don't expect me to mix myself up with your dirty work," objected the landlady, folding her plump arms; "I did more than was wise when I sheltered the kid."

Her lodger bit his lip. "Come, Keturah," he growled;

"it's too late in the day for you to shirk trifles. Besides, if you've decided to spoil my last chance of picking up a bit I shall cut and run to France. I'm sick of this low British starvation. In Paris I can have a merry life, whether or not it proves to be a short one."

Mrs. Schwartz sighed. "I'm a bit of a fool over you, Neal," she confessed, "and you know how to work on my feelings. But there, I'm a woman, and women have a weakness for your sort of rogue. What do you want me to do?"

Neal slipped an arm about the speaker's fat waist. "In the first place, my dear soul," was his answer, "we must give the boy a disguise that'll last long enough to let us cover up his trail. And in the second place we must put him with some thoroughly discreet person, who, for a consideration, will relieve us of him altogether. I will provide the disguise if you will recommend the guardian."

Keturah Schwartz pondered. "I'll manage my share," she said at length; "but how do you propose to hide the identity of a child like that?"

"You will see," responded Neal, tipping the ash from his cigarette, and going towards the door; "I shall be back in a moment." He waved a hasty adieu and left the room.

Mrs. Schwartz followed her lodger out to the stairs which ascended in a series of steep flights from the basement of the house. Brian still sat where she had deposited him, on a step carpeted with worn Brussels. Keturah took the young baronet by the hand and led him into the parlour.

"Let me be sure you understand the lesson I taught you," she bade the child; "tell me your name."

Brian coloured and hesitated. Mrs. Schwartz gained the hearth-rug, stooped, gasping, secured the poker, and stalked across to her charge.

"Tell me your name," she said again; "and speak up, you limb."

Brian Dering faltered over the single syllable required. "Jack," he murmured; "but please mother will cry if I tell lies."

Mrs. Schwartz feinted at him with the steel bar. "And I," said the landlady "will make you cry if you don't. You ever dare to admit you're called anything but Jack and I will heat this poker till it is red-hot and bore ten thousand little holes in you with it. No matter where you are I will hear you and fly to you on a broomstick with my poker."

Keturah Schwartz resumed her chair, poured herself out some gin from the flask at her elbow and sipped it in a succession of laps resembling those of a cat.

Brian sank down on the floor and began to weep, terrified by the landlady's threat. The tortoise-shell kitten, recognising a playmate, walked to him and purred invitingly.

The little baronet gathered it up, sobbing, yet soothed by the contact of the soft and furry creature.

Mrs. Schwartz fanned herself with her newspaper, yawned and dozed. The arrival of Neal Garland awakened her.

Her lodger carried a palm-leaf fan and a paper parcel, which he tore open to reveal a large squat bottle.

"Bring me some warm water," he ordered, "in a wide basin; also some soap and a towel."

"Gracious!" ejaculated the landlady, "the imp's too clean as it is, to pass for a gutter brat."

Neal motioned impatiently.

"Don't argue, Keturah," was his retort, "but do as I wish."

Mrs. Schwartz descended, and, after a short absence, appeared laden with materials for the toilet.

"Fetch the kid to the table," desired her lodger, "he seems to fear you sufficiently to be quiet while you wash his head. Rinse and dry it thoroughly."

Keturah Schwartz obeyed.

Too horrified by her ingenious threats to resist, Brian endured her powerful operations.

The first stage completed, Neal displaced her, and, with a small brush, worked into Brian's fair curls some strongly-smelling fluid.

This done, he deputed Mrs. Schwartz to fan them dry again, a long and tedious process.

When they had been freed from moisture, the silken tresses of the tiny baronet showed no less picturesque than usual, but their yellow gloss had changed to a ruddy chestnut. So had her fair brows and lashes.

Once more Neal picked up his brush, plied it, and then had recourse to Mrs. Schwartz and her fan. The perspiration rolled down the stout woman's glowing face as she fluttered the crisp palm-leaf.

"I never knew before, Neal, my man," she owned, "that there was so much labour in a dyeing job. Another coat, Neal, and his hair will favour mine wonderfully. Does it wear off?"

"Of course," snarled Neal, "it's not the real article, like your ginger mop. Steady with the fan, I'll give him a last touch with the brush. Hang those blue eyes of his, if it hadn't been for them I'd have made his wig brown, and given his skin a dash of walnut-juice, but, thanks to his azure orbs, I'll have to leave his complexion as it is.

The speaker's lean fingers travelled quickly over Brian Dering's head, using the brush deftly to equalise the colour. No trace of the child's fair curls remained, and the more recent warm tint had deepened to a dark chestnut. Neal himself fanned his concluded handiwork dry.

"Now," he said, "I deliver the boy to you, and recollect it is penal for both of us if the child blabs in dangerous ears."

Keturah Schwartz lifted Brian Dering into her arms. So much manipulation had rendered him sleepy, he drooped upon her shoulder.

"I'll guarantee that," she promised; "since I am to be responsible for the job, I'll see it's done properly."

Her lodger lit a fresh cigarette and reached his hat.

"Ta ta, Keturah," he remarked; "you're a trump, and I'll not forget it."

With this vague pledge, Neal Garland strode off downstairs, the softness of his footfalls suggesting that his boot-soles were in need of repair.

Mrs. Schwartz bore the unconscious Brian to another chamber, and laid him on a bed, while she pinned a rusty black bonnet above her coiffure and donned a soiled cloth dolman. Equipped for her journey, she took up the child, went to the hall below, and requested her maid to procure a hansom.

The slatternly damsel blew a huge whistle, and a cab trotted to the kerb. Mrs. Schwartz, weighted with the slumbering child, entered it.

"Houndsditch," she instructed the driver, and the vehicle clattered away.

But Keturah Schwartz did not notice the amazed countenance of her servant, who, from the steps of the dismal boarding-house, watched the departure of the hansom.

"My goodness!" cried the girl, "what have they done to his poor dear hair?"

If Mrs. Schwartz could have heard the query she might not have driven eastward with such content. As it could not gain her attention, she rolled on unwittingly, past Westminster, up the Strand, through the City, and towards that distant haunt of vice and crime, Whitechapel.

At the bottom of the oddly titled but famous street to which she had directed the cabman, Mrs. Schwartz dismissed the vehicle and struck into the Whitechapel Road, the central artery of the huge low-class suburb that boasts the same sobriquet."

Her goal was a mean terrace on the fringe of a district that swarmed with foreign Jews.

You will mention "Short Stories" to your friends, won't you?

Keturah Schwartz paused and scanned a group of miserable shops, which, illuminated by smoky oil-lamps, threw a slight additional radiance across the gloom left by the few gas-standards on the side-walks. After a brief survey of these establishments, Mrs. Schwartz slipped into one—a squalid sweet and grocery store.

Behind the counter sat an old hag—a hideous being, with chin-tuft, bristling moustache, dirt-engrained cheeks, and eye-lids bleared to rawness by filth.

The new-comer, still folding Brian in her arms, leaned on the grimy board—where was displayed a few boxes of confectionery, a shank of boiled ham, some canned meats and pickle-jars—and began to whisper.

As she muttered, the palsied head of the listener nodded, and nodded, and nodded again. Then Keturah Schwartz pulled up her dress-skirt, opened a linen pocket, got out a purse and produced a handful of coins. The beldame snatched at them, fearful of losing the precious pieces.

The colloquy over, Mrs. Schwartz glided to the shadow at the rear of the place, and relinquished, into the unsteady clasp of the old crone, the form of Brian Dering. A moment later Keturah had darted forth into the night.

Grinning covetously, the hag put away her bribe, reeled with her burden down a cramped passage which gave upon the shop, turned a latch, and entered a fireless kitchen. On the damp hearth a child was crawling, with deep, pitiful coughs, another toddled about the flagged floor, yet another kicked helplessly by the mouldered skirting-board, on a ragged cushion that had once done duty in a trap.

His custodian laid Brian on an evil-smelling pallet which furnished a corner of the apartment. Unheeding the desolate childhood around her, she regained the exit, passed out, and fastened the latch.

Brian Dering was in the merciless clutches of an East-end baby-farmer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I Have No Brother."

"Then you have at least been able to track the child," murmured Felix Dering; "thank Heaven for that. But the cheque, Miss Garland, have you realised how it may be construed? If I had only filled it in to you, the fact would have sufficed to prove the theft. As it is, made out to bearer, it cannot but suggest a plot between myself and the abductor."

He hesitated and glanced suspiciously at Judith—she wielded the reins like a born whip, the ponies moved at a free, quick trot, the neat basket carriage swaying on its springs.

"For an amateur detective," added Felix, "you have worked with singular skill, Miss Garland. The problem you claim to have solved has so far baffled the keenest professional minds. What else have you learned? Who is the scoundrel? We must take immediate action."

"*S-s-s-t!*" said Judith Garland, under her breath; "speak low, you forget the groom behind us. This is not the moment for a full explanation. But abandon all thoughts of desperate remedies. You are at the mercy of a dangerous man; he it was who discovered the blood-stained links of your chain and interpreted their significance, he it was who abducted Brian, he it is who now assures me that the child can never be regained alive."

The listener gasped.

"But his—his motive?" stammered Felix, bewildered by this new development of the mystery.

"I—I dare but conjecture it," whispered Judith, and her voice broke in a clever assumption of dread; "yet I have wondered if he had any grudge against Sir Christopher, if he has been pursuing a terrible scheme of revenge, if—he was the—the one who——"

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Felix; "the one who murdered my uncle! Miss Garland, you are the possessor of ghastly secrets. Then those blood-stained links you represented to me as the evidence of my crime came possibly from the actual murderer himself. But why should he give you them?"

"I will come to that in a moment," said Judith Garland. "Mr. Dering," and, under cover of the driving-apron, she laid her hand on her companion's, "I told Lady Dering I had to go to London this week on family business. I spoke the truth; the unhappy wretch of whom I have been speaking is—is my brother."

Felix felt himself the prey of some frightful nightmare.

"Your—your brother!" he repeated. "The brother for whom I advanced you, by means of that cheque, the twenty pounds of salary you could not ask Lady Dering for?"

"The same," assented Judith. "He appeared unexpectedly at Wyresdale, in a piteous state, and implored me to aid him. I asked him why he needed the money, and he would not answer. When I took him your cheque he found, by chance, in my presence, those links of your chain. I recognised them impulsively, and so placed you in his power; for you had denied being at Wyresdale the night of your uncle's death, and he himself had seen you by the Cross that evening. And now, Mr. Dering, I don't know which is guilty, you or my miserable brother."

She stirred the soft palm which had slipped upon his. "But," she said, "since I gathered, the other day, that you had come back for a dear, romantic reason—to be near a certain person who cares for you as much as you can do for her—I have liked to believe you innocent."

Felix shuddered. How could he attempt to convince Judith Garland of the mistake into which she had fallen, it seemed, so naturally? How confess to her it was not her window he had returned to gaze at the night of Sir Christopher's death; but Esther Carew's?

"We—we must consider what can be done," whispered Judith, as she guided the ponies between the double row of firs that yielded access to Dering House; "but remember, Neal—my brother—can ruin you in two ways; he can prove you were in Wyresdale House, though you chivalrously denied the suggestion rather than direct attention to a lady. And also he is able to allege, by producing the cheque, that you paid him to kidnap Brian."

A sense of paralysis seized on Felix. Fatality had dogged him with a perfect completion. He had but to extend a limb to find it bound.

"How—how was Brian taken?" he murmured.

Judith sighed. "I—I was his reluctant accomplice," she said; and added, with a master-stroke of falsehood, "he threatened to betray you if I refused to help him. He—he guessed that I was not indifferent to you—I had borrowed the links to satisfy you of your danger, for then I believed you guilty. He was obliged to force them from me again. In any case he had but to enter the witness-box and swear to your presence in Wyresdale on a certain evening."

Judith halted the ponies at the embayed central door of Dering House. "Good-bye, for the present," she whispered, "I have some purchases to deliver Lady Dering—we can talk more at ease another time."

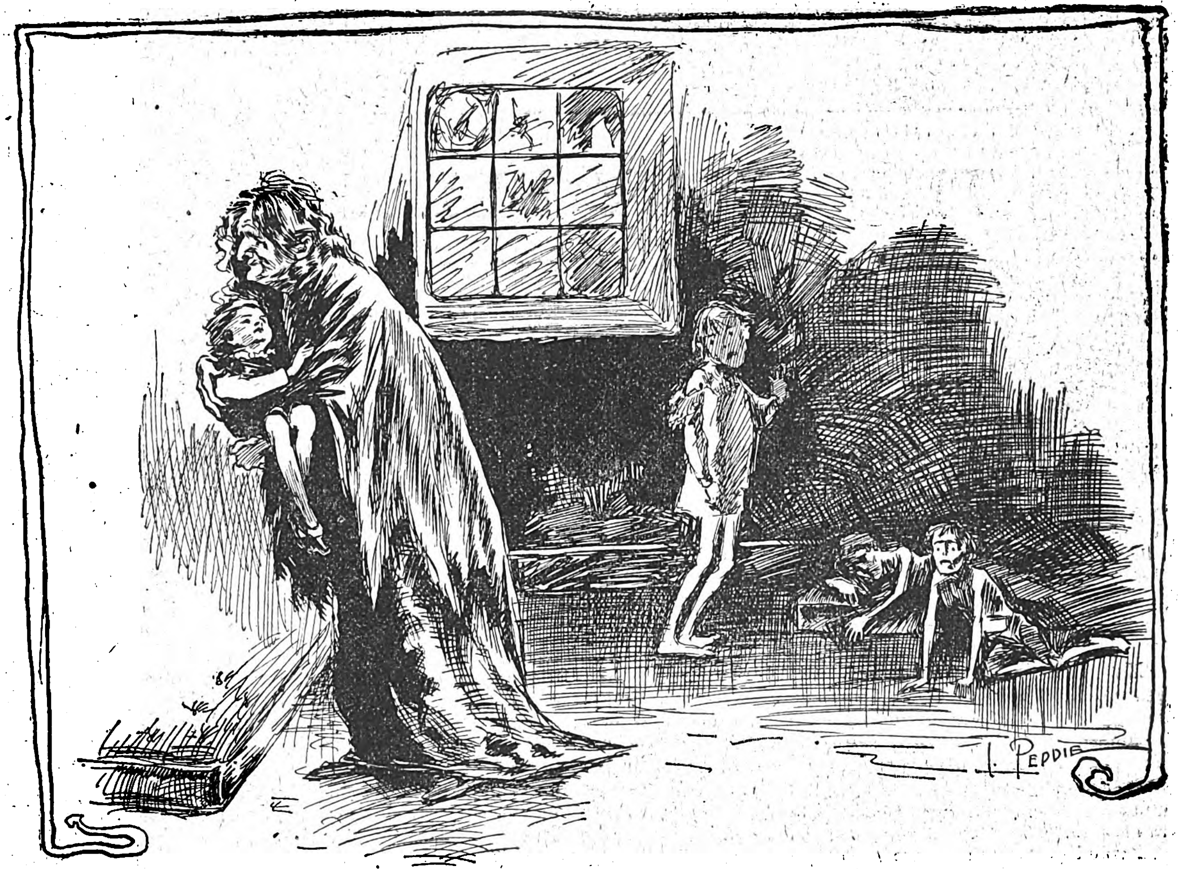
She threw the reins to the groom and passed, a dark, handsome, yet sinister figure, into the hall.

Felix pursued her across the threshold. "Miss Garland," he began determinedly, "you shall not escape me thus. You have said too much and too little."

Judith paused and glanced over her shoulder—a flush of curious passion warming her features. Supple, erect, with her Spanish cast of countenance, ample tresses and red lips, she was a seductive whole.

"Too little, my poor Felix," she answered, the strange

Another splendid Hazel Harlow story next week.



His custodian laid Brian on an evil-smelling pallet which furnished a corner of the room.

ardour she felt for him throbbing in her voice and lending a singular resonance to her wilful misapprehension of his meaning," what more can I say than that I love you; is it possible that you can doubt it?"

And evading him, she hurried on into the hall. Stepping out of the late sunshine to the cool shadows of the lofty apartments, Judith Garland lost for an instant all power of vision. When she recovered it she perceived before her a tall and bulky form, clad in a loose frock-coat and carrying a brown straw hat of a Continental shape. His bright spectacles veiled yellow pupils and imparted to them a singular glitter. It was Professor Kraft, and he stood within the entrance to the hall of Dering House.

Judith regarded him questioningly. The German bowed. "I am Dr. Kraft, Mr. Otto Hare's private medical attendant," he said in his thick, deliberate foreign accent. "you may have heard me mentioned. You, I see, are Miss Garland. Pardon this call without introduction, but I know so few people at Wyresdale. The servants told me you were expected each moment, and I ventured to wait—my errand being a business one. How is your brother?"

The quiet gaze of Judith Garland met the yellow pupils. Dr. Kraft smiled. "You can trust me," he said. "I guess Master Neal is not a desirable kinsman for a young lady earning a moderate competence in a genteel household. But I urgently need some particulars about him, though you need not fear my publishing them in any fashion detrimental to yourself."

Judith contemplated the German scornfully. "I have no brother, Dr. Kraft," she said, "and therefore am unable to be a sister of your evidently disreputable acquaintance."

Joseph Kraft rubbed his great palms together. "In face, hair, complexion, and stature," he declared, "you resemble my 'disreputable acquaintance' as one pea resembles another. Yet it may well be that I am wrong. In which case, Miss Garland, I beg your pardon. Forgive my being ungallant enough to remark, time will show if the apology is deserved."

He bowed again and sallied out to the terrace before Dering House, passing Felix as he did so. Kraft gazed thoughtfully at the stalwart frame of Esther Carew's lover.

"'What more can I say,'" repeated Kraft to himself, "than that I love you; is it possible that you can doubt it?' So I have not visited Miss Judith Garland in vain, be she Master Neal's sister or not. Felix Dering is coquetting with the brunette as well as the blonde. We have here a distinctly useful weapon against the amorous Felix."

(*To be continued.*)

Hazel Harlow's adventures will enthrall you.

THE IVORY BELLS.

By James Buckham.

MY name is Imogen Diller, and I am twenty-five years old. The reader will, perhaps, understand more readily from this statement the confession I am about to make. Being a woman, I am naturally a believer in dreams. I think I never knew a woman who was entirely free from this mild form of superstition. And being comparatively young—as life is estimated nowadays—I am romantic.

I was twenty-two when my heart first began to hunger for sympathy, for appreciation, for affection. How natural, how inevitable is this period in a girl's life-history. It is a condition as normal as the unfolding of a bud. And equally natural, I think, are the little innocent, instinctive girlish devices for rendering herself beautiful in dress and manner, her love for going into company, there to meet the rank and file of those from whom must be recruited her possible prince. She shines in looks, in thoughts and words, in actions, with the glow of that hardly-acknowledged desire within her breast—the desire for the true, manly love which she feels that she can so opulently repay.

If the world only knew! It laughs at girls who are dying for unattained love. It would weep could it see into their hearts. So terrible is it to feel youth slipping away, and with it that hope for which, by the decree of God, most women live.

It was one day, soon after I had passed my twenty-third birthday, that a terrible thought came to me—the thought that I should be over the hill of youth in a little while, and going down to the other side; that the hope I had silently cherished, which I had never as yet considered impossible, might soon be a lessening one. I cannot tell what a flood of depression overwhelmed me! All that day, and far into the night, my soul cried out to God for the precious gift, without which my life would mean nothing.

Among my dreams that night when at last I slept there was one that visited me twice and seemed to be in a vague way an answer to my passionate prayer. I saw myself standing on a bare hillside, whose slope was black with shadow. In the midst of the gloom I raised my hands and something white came floating down out of the clouds. It looked like a wreath of snowy flowers; but as it drifted slowly down and settled in my outstretched hands I saw that it was a necklace of little white bells. I put the bells about my neck, and instantly a glorious burst of sunlight illumined the hill and I awoke. Twice I say this dream came to me—once in the middle of the night and once just before waking in the morning. As I opened my eyes in the real sunlight the dream seemed so actual and so vivid that I clutched my bosom, thinking to catch the bells before they melted away.

As I considered the vision, I said to myself, "There is a hint in this dream worth heeding. Hitherto I have neglected personal adornment, thinking that love must indeed be blind, if he cannot see beyond the surface glitter of that which is foreign even to the physical person. But it may be that love is not blind, only wandering of sight. Does, perhaps, something crude, glittering, conspicuous, catch his eye, and draw it whither it may discover the better thing that lies behind? I will see!"

Every girl knows perfectly well the kind and amount of her own personal attraction. I knew what people called me—what I was: "Not exactly pretty, but stately, impressive; a matronly girl, of the Dutch Madonna type." Such a type is not generally winsome. It is too quiet. Men will jostle a Madonna who stands between them and a coryphée. Yet if the Madonna could only fascinate and attract them at first sight as the coryphée does, how much more they would admire and love her! It is all a question of initial fascination.

With some such idea eddying through my mind, I went to a famous firm of manufacturing jewellers, and gave them a novel commission—to make me a necklace of ivory bells. I bade them spare no expense; no material to be used but the finest, most transparent ivory; the bells to be perfect and complete in every detail, even to the tiny, vibrant tongues; and all united by a chain of polished ivory links. "Even if the dream prove in no sense prophetic," I thought, "it has given me the idea of an absolutely unique ornament. I shall not be unnoticed when I wear it."

Four hundred pounds was the cost of my necklace. I am not wealthy, but I am not poor. I could pay the money, and I did.

Immediately a new experience came into my life. I became a centre of admiration! Hitherto, with other quiet, inconspicuous girls I had been comparatively unnoticed in company. But from the first occasion when I appeared wearing my necklace of ivory bells I was ringed about with admirers. And the most intoxicating part of it was that I really could not determine whether the ivory bells were the sole attraction or whether they had called out and emphasized some actual personal charm that made me admirable. I do not remember that a word was ever said to me in society about the ornament: society is too conventionally polite for that. But I wondered, especially when the men thronged about me, whether they were looking at the exquisite workmanship of the bells or at the girl who wore them.

It was during this brief season of social triumph that a revelation came to me which accounted in large part for my disquietude of a year past. The prince had come! Indeed, he had been near me for a long time and I had not known that I loved him.

He was a silent man, a poet—some called him a dreamer. He went into society, not for pleasure's sake, but that he might study human nature, for the same reason that he went into the lumber camps of the North and the slums of the great cities.

The first time he came to me, at the dull tinkle of the ivory bells, I felt an almost overpowering desire to stretch out my strong young arms and sweep from before me all the simpering circle on whose outskirts he stood. Then for an instant—and the only time I can remember until the strange thing happened—he looked into my eyes, and I became as a child before him. Afterwards, as often as he came near me, such a rapturous thrill ran through my being that I could scarcely keep from crying out.

Yet he alone of all the hovering circle seemed most interested, not in me, but in the ivory bells. I continually caught him studying them, and the thought maddened me that he whose love meant all the world to me admired only the ornament on my neck.

One summer evening there was a grand ball given at an out-of-town villa. He and I were there with a great company of the gayest of the gay.

As usual, I wore my ivory bell, and, as usual, those who admired them or me—I could not tell which—gathered around me.

As the stifling night wore on and dance followed dance I grew faint and weary and felt as if I must have a breath of Heaven's pure air.

As I moved towards the wide-open French windows from which one could step upon the veranda, the poet crossed my path.

He stopped, and I saw that his eyes were fixed upon the ivory bells. Much as I loved him, I could almost have smitten him then.

He spoke:

"Are you going out for a breath of fresh air, Mademoiselle Diller? So was I. May I have the honour of accompanying you?"

The honour! My soul surged within me. I was about to return some stereotyped refusal when the thought came to me:

"Is not this the hour of fate? Yes! I will prove myself this night that it is the ivory bells alone he cares for."

So I put my hand upon his arm and together we went into the night! Could a thousand years blot out its memory? The stars twinkling so purely in the blue-black sky; the restful sighing of the trees; the patter of a fountain near by; the music floating out across the shrubbery.

"Let us go down by the lake," my companion said; "there we may rest and enjoy the coolness."

Down the terraces we went arm-in-arm. There was a trembling between us. I could not tell whether my hand wavered upon his arm or his arm shook under my hand. But when we reached the little artificial lake I sank upon a bench and he, standing a little aside, stood before me. Some gaudy lanterns not far away cast a faint glow over us.

The silence grew oppressive. Suddenly my spirit rose to the level of its purpose. I started up, withdrawing a little, and snatched the glistening circlet from my neck. The next instant it was flashing in the crystal water of the lake, sinking so slowly that it seemed to hang suspended in the tide like the golden goblet that the poet saw from the bridge at midnight.

Then I looked at my poet, and all of life trembled upon that instant. O gracious heavens! His eyes were fixed not upon the sinking bauble, but upon my face. Love had passed the crucial test. At that supreme moment something like the rushing darkness came over me—something with roaring wings as of a great bird. I fainted from the awful stress; but even as I sank I felt my lover's arms encircle me.

I have confessed. For me the world is made new and all things in it.

My poet smiles as I read him what I have written about the ivory bells. He declares that he never saw them in his life until they flashed from my hand that night into the lake.

If he seemed to look upon them, he swears it was because he dared not lift his eyes to the soul that burned in mine. The light had slain him, except it had been of love.

Another splendid Hazel Harlow story next week.

Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, August 12th. Postcards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Mr. G. Daniels, of 20 Princess Street, Accrington, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

JESS: "My chaperon has been dismissed, and an older one engaged." Bess: "You didn't have a difference of opinion, did you?" Jess: "Never; we always fell in love with the same man."

"I SAY, milkman, you give your cows too much salt." "Why, how do you know how much salt I give them?" "I judge from the appearance of the milk you have brought us lately. Salt makes the cows dry, and then they drink too much water—that makes their milk thin, you know."

"CLARA, dear, we've been careful so far, and I don't think they suspect we are just married. You must scold me a little now as we get off the train." (Sharply and in a high-pitched voice): "George, darling, when we get to the hotel you must certainly take off that absurd lavender necktie!"

"YOU should make allowances for Tomlinson. Any man is liable, you know, to act foolishly for a few days after he has become the father of a bouncing boy." "But great Scott, man, this is Barker's ninth!" "Oh, well, then there's all the more reason for making allowances. It's a wonder that he is able to control himself at all."

MRS. WYLES: "Did your husband give you anything for a birthday present?" Mrs. Styles: "Indeed he did." "Did it have your name on it?" "Yes, and my husband's name, too." "That's just like selfish man. He must share the gift with you." "But he didn't." "What was his name doing on it, then?" "It wouldn't have been any good without it. It was a cheque."

CAPTAIN CRUISER: "So your son is a little dissipated, eh?" Anxious Mother: "Oh, very, captain, very! What can I do with him?" Captain Cruiser: "Leave him to me. We sail from Liverpool for San Francisco next week, and won't touch port for some weeks!" Anxious Mother: "Yes; but it's whisky I'm afraid of."

*HE was a kind and a loving fellow, was Mr. Smiler, the cotton manufacturer of Accrington. He always allowed his employées full pay when off work through sickness, in consequence of which several of the men profited thereby in a sense, being members of a sick club which allowed 12s. per week during sickness. One morning, a little boy, who had overheard his parents talking at home, presented himself at Mr. Smiler's office, and said: "Please, Mr. Smiler, feyther's t' ill t' come t' wark. He's stopping off a fortnight ill, 'cos mother's going to mek rent straight."

GOOPH: "I tell you Mutt knows what he is talking about." Wooph: "Yes, but he talks about it constantly."

TEACHER: "How do you define the word 'gloaming' Dickey?" Dick Hicks (after reflection): "Something spoony that people go out and sit in."

MOTHER: "Well, my dear, I see you are engaged to Mr. Bashful at last." Daughter: "No, he hasn't proposed yet." "What? Not engaged? I saw you hugging and kissing him last night." "Y-e-s, I was trying to encourage him a little."

"BRIDGET! Bridget! why don't you bring up the lemonade?" said Mrs. O'Brien, on the first of July, from the top of the kitchen stairs. "Why, marm," said Bridget, wiping the sweat from her red face with her check apron, "you see the ice I put in the lemonade is so hard that it hasn't melted yet, although it's stirring it over the fire I've been for the last fifteen minutes or more."

IN a certain town in England stands a public-house with a well-known sign over the door, "When shall we *three* meet again?" and on the board the figures of two asses are painted. An Irishman could not reckon it up, only being two asses, and the sign saying three. He stood gazing at it a long time, and at last the landlord popped his head out of the window above. Pat's face lit up with a smile as he said: "I wondered where the other chap had gone to!"

LAST Christmas a couple of fellows were sleeping in camp in Canada, and towards morning one of them awoke shivering with cold, and found the fire low, and his comrade fast asleep. He didn't like getting up to stir the fire, so he gave his bed-fellow a kick, and pretended to be asleep, thinking his companion would awaken, feel cold, and get up to stir the fire. There was no response, so he gave him another; then the supposed sleeper burst out laughing, and said: "I tried that on you a few minutes ago. That's why you woke up."

A YOUNG man who wished to be appointed a county police-constable put in an appearance one morning accompanied by his mother, and was taken in hand for examination by the inspector. This progressed satisfactorily, until the inspector observed: "Of course, you are aware you'll have a lot of night-work to do? You are not afraid of being out late, I suppose?" Before the candidate could reply, his mother electrified the official with the statement: "That'll be all right, sir, never fear; his grandmother's going round with him the first two or three nights until he gets used to it."

AN English curate, while visiting a friend who was a magistrate, was shown by the latter the county gaol. The curate was much interested in the working of the treadmill, declaring to his friend that he wished he had one at home to give him the gentle exercise he needed, but was too lazy to take except under compulsion. The magistrate smiled and shook his head. To remove the former's scepticism, the curate asked to be allowed a turn. Round went the wheel, the curate declaring the movement delightful; but after three minutes he had had enough, and called to the warder to stop the treadmill. To his dismay, the warder answered, "Truly sorry, sir, I can't. It's timed to go fifteen minutes, and it won't stop before!"

Hazel Harlow's adventures will enthral you.

IN A YEAR'S COOKERY

The question naturally arises, "What is the Best Beverage to place upon the Breakfast and Supper Table

Every Day of the Year?"

Without a doubt the drink which is most generally recommended by the leading Medical Practitioners of the present enlightened age is a really Good Cocoa.

There is None Better than

Fry's

PURE CONCENTRATED

Cocoa

WHICH FOR PURITY, SOLUBILITY, AND EXCELLENCE CANNOT BE SURPASSED.

Fry's Cocoa and Chocolates are used and recommended by that celebrated specialist, Mrs. A. B. Marshall.

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

This week you will find another fascinating story of Hazel Harlow, the beautiful actress, whose adventures are being recounted from week to week. I shall be obliged if you will tell your friends about them.

Remember that the scene of these stories will be shifting constantly from place to place, and that when Hazel Harlow comes to your own town, there will be added interest for you in the adventures.

⁂

David R. Ryan (Dublin) writes: "Have not all your readers been supplied with stereoscopes ere this? Why not give us a chance of a few novels in connection with the Post-card Competition?"

I will think the suggestion over. Meantime, what do other readers think?

⁂

From the Royal Mail Steamship *Kildonan Castle* "F. J. W." tells me that he is on his way from South Africa to England, and wants to know where he could spend a nice, quiet, rural holiday not too far from London.

I conclude that my correspondent wants an *inland* place, and if this is so, he cannot do better than go to some Surrey, Kent, or Sussex village. The neighbourhood of Sevenoaks, in Kent, is charming and beautiful enough for anybody. And withal it is only twenty-two miles from London on the South Eastern Railway. Dorking, in Surrey, is another charming spot. I hope my correspondent will enjoy his holiday, wherever he goes.

⁂

"One who Appreciates a Good Story" can obtain back numbers containing the previous chapters of "The Golden Dwarf" by applying to the Publisher, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, W.C.

⁂

LOVE, COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

"R. W. S." has been "keeping company" with a girl for several months. Seven times she has broken it off for no particular reason. "I love her still very dearly, and she wants to make it up again. Am I to trust her for an eighth time?"

Well, if I were you, "R. W. S.," I should have a very straight talk with her. Be gentle, but firm. Tell her that her continual "breakings-off" are occasioning you a lot of unhappiness, and she must make up her mind what she wants to do. Don't get angry with her, and don't bully her, but let her know plainly that you want a proper understanding.

Your ideas concerning the treatment of wives in Turkey are not quite correct, "Jack." Of course, there are exceptions; but the law looks after them more than you think. A Turkish woman may leave her husband, if she has cause, and the law will uphold her action and protect her. She cannot be compelled to work for her husband's maintenance; but he is bound to support her, and if he insults or ill-treats her he is liable to imprisonment. The customs in Turkey are different from ours, and, therefore, appear strange to us; but you must remember that our ways are just as strange to them.

You say, "Charlie's Own," that you are very much attached to a young man, three years your junior, but your parents will not allow you to go out with him, or be engaged to him. They know nothing against him except he is of a very jealous disposition, and are afraid he would not make you happy, and you ask my advice as to what is the best thing for you to do.

I should go to your parents, and ask them plainly to state whether they have any real reason for their dislike of the young man, and if they have no good reason to give you, tell them that, being of age, you have settled to become engaged to him, as he is the only man you really love. I never believe in girls setting themselves up to know better than their parents, but there are times when it is right and just that a sensible girl should be allowed to judge for herself, and, from what you tell me, I think this is one of them. Be quite sure he is an honest, straightforward, manly man, and if there is any good reason why you should not be engaged to him, face it bravely, and do your best to forget all about him.

"Zelia" belongs to a troupe of acrobats, and, until a few months ago, was perfectly happy and contented. Now she is miserable, because her supposed mother has told her that she is not her child at all, but was stolen when a baby from her home. She has always been very well treated, and loves her adopted parents dearly, but now she cannot help feeling that most likely she was born to fill a higher sphere than the one she now occupies, and longs to know who her real parents are.

If you are fond of the people you live with, and they are so good to you, "Zelia," I should advise you to be content as you are. Perhaps you will only find, after all, that your own people were ashamed of your bringing up, and it is also quite likely that they are not in as good a position as you seem to think likely.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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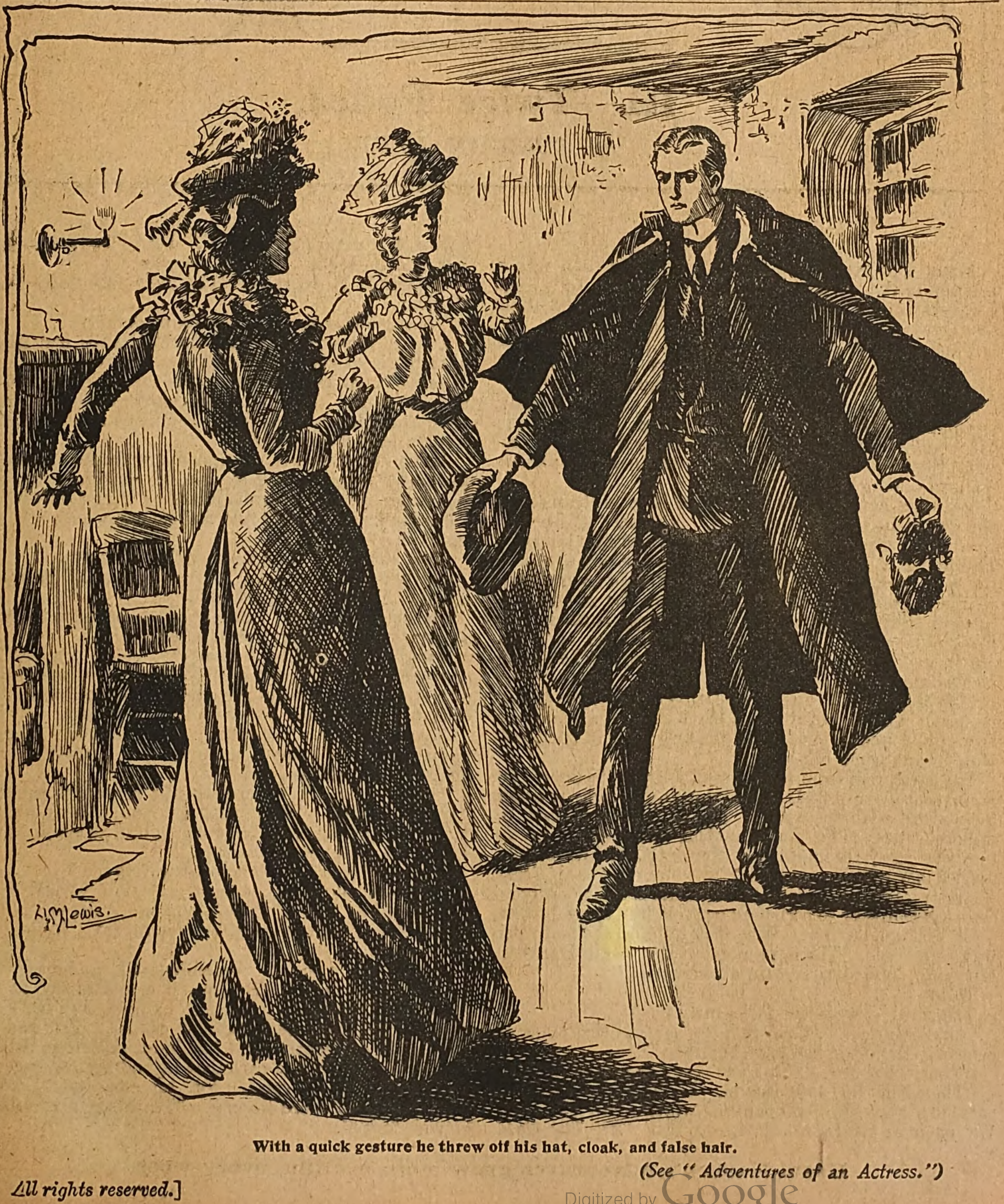

With a quick gesture he threw off his hat, cloak, and false hair.

(See "Adventures of an Actress.")

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STARTLING REVELATIONS OF THE STAGE.

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

III.—Twice Foiled.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

Mark Danvers, theatrical agent, was a man whose position in the stage world was unassailable. To be "on Danvers' books" and in his good books were the essentials for the would-be aspirant to theatrical laurels.

Hence from early morn till late in the afternoon his roomy offices in Covent Garden were besieged by all sorts and conditions of members of *the* profession.

Inside the famous agent's sanctum, upon a certain summer morning, two men were seated. The one was Danvers himself, a slim, dapper, dark man with a somewhat Semitic type of countenance, the other Raymond Venables, actor-manager.

Venables was speaking. "There's a girl amongst the crowd in the waiting-room," he said, "whose face I've never seen before. But, by Jove, she's a stunner. The figure of Diana, complexion like a peach, eyes like the sea of summer, and——" Danvers held up his hand with a deprecating voice. "Well, she's the girl for my money. She's built for the small part of Ruth in *The Good Samaritan*. My tour list is made up, and, bar Ruth, and my leading lady I'm fixed up. That girl's face would alone fill any theatre."

"My dear Ven.," answered Danvers, "let's have her in here. You'll probably get her for thirty shillings or two quid a week. And if Ruth's only a small part, you won't want much rehearsing."

The agent rose from his seat and went to the door. In an instant a sea of girls surged up around him, all eager for a word with the agent. But Danvers was used to importunities. The girl Venables had mentioned to him was easily recognisable. Her extraordinary beauty singled her out at once. She was standing apart from the rest, talking to a young man at her side, evidently no actor, as Danvers' experienced eye told him in a moment.

He beckoned to her. With a slight blush she made her way to his side. The next moment she was in Danvers' sanctum. Venables rose in an instant.

"Miss——"

"Harlow," put in the girl gently.

"Miss Harlow. You wish to go on the stage, I believe. Have you had any experience?"

"None whatever. But I am very anxious to get on."

"Then half the battle is won. I can offer you a small part in a travelling company of which I am manager. We open at Scarborough in August with *The Good Samaritan*, as the play is called. I can offer you a small part at £2 a week. Will you accept it?"

"Gladly." Hazel Harlow's beautiful face flushed with pleasure.

"Then all that remains is to fix up details."

Twenty minutes later and Hazel Harlow had signed her agreement for her first entrance into stage life.

As for Venables, his feelings were that at last he had hit upon a "star." Even the phlegmatic Danvers had to allow that Hazel Harlow was one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen.

When Venables left the agent's, with the agreement signed by his new acquisition in his pocket, he was still somewhat perturbed in his mind. For he was without a leading lady, and he could find no one who would suit his requirements.

"Mr. Venables," said a soft voice in his ear.

He wheeled round. "Valerie Bellairs!" he ejaculated. "How are you, old girl?"

The actress smiled. "Fit enough," she answered with a roguish smile, "only I want a 'shop.'"

Venables laughed. "That's a good wheeze," he answered. "Fancy our only Valerie saying she wants a 'shop,' when half the managers in London would give their heads to have her sign on for three years."

Valerie bowed. "Perhaps," she answered; "but I happen to have taken a fancy to the part of Ruth in *The Good Samaritan*, and——"

"Great Scott!" Venables broke in almost roughly, "you're joking. Why, what are you talking about? Do you mean to tell me that *you*, you of all people, want to go back to the road again?"

"Yes, and for £5 a week you can have me."

Venables' astonishment was too great for words. "Oh, look here," he said. "Come along to Gatti's and have a bottle of fizz, and sign on before you repent. But do you really mean it?"

The actress nodded. Venables said no more. He could only wonder in the deepest astonishment at the extraordinary whim suddenly evinced by his companion. Women *were* strange cattle! Yet had he known the real motive that had induced Valerie Bellairs to offer herself for the part that he had been so eager to find a suitable interpreter for, his amazement would have been still more intense. The awakening was to be rude indeed.

Hazel Harlow's adventures grow more exciting every week.

CHAPTER II.

Alice Monteith was alone in the drawing-room of the house in which she and her brother Eric lived. She was awaiting the return of her brother and Hazel Harlow, the girl who had gone off under Eric's protection to beard Mark Danvers in his den, with what result we know.

Suddenly the sound of the front door being opened caused the girl to spring up. The next moment Eric and Hazel entered the room. One glance at the young girl's radiant face told Alice that success had attended the venture.

"I've got an engagement in a touring company, Miss Monteith," cried Hazel. "Isn't it splendid?"

Alice threw a quick glance at her brother's grave face. She saw something there that filled her with vague alarm.

"What do you think, Eric?" she asked.

Monteith hesitated. "I hate to play the part of a wet-blanket," he said finally; "but, although I congratulate Miss Harlow with all my heart on her success, I cannot help feeling that her difficulties are not yet over."

Hazel's face paled. "What do you mean, Mr. Monteith?" she asked breathlessly.

"As we left the agent's," went on Eric gravely, "I caught sight of a woman who looked at you, Miss Harlow most intently—with malignance, it seemed. For a moment I could not remember where I had seen her. Suddenly I recollected. It was the woman I had seen at Caldecott's house on the occasion when you were so foully kidnapped. I looked after her. She was met by a man who came out of Danvers' office, Raymond Venables, the manager who has engaged you. They went off together."

Dead silence fellowed his words. Then Hazel spoke.

"Miss Valerie Bellairs," she said slowly. "Do you think——"

"I don't know what to think, Miss Harlow. It is not too late to throw up your project, to abandon your desire to go on the stage, to——"

"Never!" cried Hazel with flashing eyes. "What can she do? She cannot hurt me. I have done her no harm. Do not think me ungrateful, Mr. Monteith, Indeed you have already laid me under a debt of gratitude that I can never repay; but—" the girl's eyes kindled anew—"I have set my hand to the plough, and I will not go back now."

Eric realised in an instant that nothing he could say now would shake Hazel's resolve. His heart was filled with sickening forebodings. How could a girl, so pure, so lovely; so unsophisticated as Hazel Harlow, hope to enter upon a stage life with all its trials and temptations, with enemies whose only desire was her downfall, and come through unscathed? Oh, the pity of it! the pity of it!

CHAPTER III.

It was the first rehearsal of *The Good Samaritan* company at the rehearsal room of the Bedford Hotel, in Maiden Lane. With a beating heart Hazel entered the side door of the public house, and made her way up to the room, now really embarked upon her first theatrical venture. The room seemed full of strangers when she entered, and every eye was turned upon her. Raymond Venables stepped forward. "Good-morning, Miss Harlow," he said. "I am delighted to see you. First of all let me introduce you to your fellow comedians. Foremost is Miss Valerie Bellairs——" Hazel started violently, and the rich colour ebbed from her face. Venables looked his surprise. His eyes turned towards Valerie, who was holding out her hand with a smile to the other woman. "You know Miss Bellairs," he murmured.

"Miss Harlow and I have met before," answered Valerie swiftly. "We are going to know one another better," and she clasped Hazel's hand with apparent warmth. Hazel could find no words. Yet, like a flash, Eric's warning of the day before came back to her mind.

But with an effort she forced herself to answer Valerie's greeting with a commonplace remark. "This," went on Venables, in his character of introducer, "is Mr. Clive Pendennis, our lead——" a pale, tall young fellow with a rather dissipated face, whose admiration for the new acquisition to the company appeared with undisguised evidence upon his countenance—"Miss Jenny Lovelace, Mr. Ralph Garden, Miss Templeton Fane, Mr. Hayward Lindsay, Mr. Percy Carruthers—these are our principals. I would introduce you to the supers., only we don't bother about them here."

Trying to master her confusion, Hazel shook hands with her new colleagues. The men struck Hazel as being rather common and loud of speech. They seemed friendly disposed, however. The "ladies" had loud voices and louder laughs.

There is no need to dwell on the details of the rehearsal. Hazel was given her part, quite a small one, and instructed in the initiatory stages of her duties. She had a touching little love-scene with Pendennis in the last act, an episode that the actor showed that he meant to make the most of.

After the rehearsal, Valerie Bellairs approached Hazel calmly pushing aside the obsequious Pendennis, who ventured to offer to escort Hazel home.

"Will you come to my rooms with me, dear?" she said cordially.

Hazel's honest, frank temperament was touched by Valerie's apparent sincerity. Perhaps she had misjudged the actress. And yet she was the friend of Horace Caldecott, the man who had done his best to wreck Hazel's life.

Bellairs saw the other girl's hesitation, and read her thoughts like a book.

"Let bygones be bygones, dear," she said in a low voice: "Horace Caldecott can't hurt you any more. Will you let me be your friend?"

With these words, spoken with so much apparent warmth, all Hazel's suspicions fled. "Thank you," she said gratefully. "I shall esteem your friendship as a great honour."

"Then you will come with me?"

"With pleasure."

Hazel had promised the Monteiths that she would return to their house in the evening.

It was then about three o'clock, so that she would have plenty of time to accompany Valerie and then return to Bayswater.

Valerie hailed a hansom, and the two women were soon bowling away swiftly towards the actress's flat in Victoria.

But few words passed between them during the drive. Each was occupied in their own thoughts—thoughts as widely different as could be.

"And now," said Valerie, when they were alone, "tell me all about yourself."

Next week "Hazel Harlow in Newcastle."

With ready trustfulness Hazel complied. She told her listener all about her early life at Harlow Farm, how that her father had desired her to marry Squire Caldecott, how she had resolved to escape from such a contingency, how she had come to London.

Valerie's face darkened as she drank in every word of her visitor's story.

"Horace Caldecott wanted to marry you?" she said slowly.

"Yes."

"And you?"

"I loathe him. I feel sure he is a villain."

The actress's face grew harder still. "There are many villains in the world," she said. "You will want all the strength of your nature to resist the men in our profession. Your beauty will lay you open to many temptations—that and your inexperience."

Hazel sighed. Could this be true? Was beauty then of no account save to awaken vice, as a lure to the helpless and unprotected that led to disgrace and ruin?

Valerie Bellairs was watching her visitor intently. "Let us have some tea," she said, breaking in upon the other's musings.

She rang the bell. Tea was brought.

"Sugar and milk?" asked the actress.

"Please," answered Hazel. Her thoughts were still far away, in so much that she did not notice a furtive movement on the part of her hostess, who had slipped a tiny white pellet into her tea-cup, in addition to the sugar and milk.

Hazel stirred her tea slowly. Valerie seemed to have become of a sudden strangely hilarious. She lit a cigarette. "A custom you'll soon get used to on the boards, dear Miss Harlow," she laughed, though Hazel shook her head. Like a panther Valerie's eyes were fixed on the beautiful innocent face before her.

Hazel was just raising the cup to her lips when the re-entrance of the servant caused her to set down the liquid untasted. The maid was followed by a gentleman, whom one glance told Hazel to be Eric Monteith.

With a glad cry the girl arose. "Mr. Monteith!" she said. "Have you come to pay Miss Bellairs a call, too?"

Eric hesitated. Valerie had gone very pale, for she recognised Monteith in a moment as the man who had met her face to face at Horace Caldecott's house. What did he want here?

"Will Miss Bellairs pardon my intrusion?" he said, with cold politeness. "The fact is that my sister is called upon to go a journey to-night, and she wished to say good-bye to Miss Harlow before she went. I have a cab outside."

"I'll finish my tea and come at once," cried Hazel impulsively.

Then a strange thing happened. Valerie Bellairs lurched unaccountably forward. Her hand struck the tea-cup that Hazel had raised to her lips for the second time, and sent the dainty piece of china flying to the ground, where it broke into a dozen pieces.

"A thousand pardons!" cried Valerie, in apparent concern. "I can't think how I came to be so careless. Don't let me detain you, *dear* Miss Harlow. We shall meet again before long. *Good*-bye, Mr. Monteith. It *is* nice to think that Miss Harlow has such good friends," with which Parthian shot Valerie bowed her visitors out.

When they had gone the actress uttered an exclamation of anger, and stamped her foot upon the ground.

"So, Mr. Eric Monteith," she muttered, "you've taken up the cudgels for Miss Harlow. Had you come ten minutes later, your precious Hazel would have been drugged and at my mercy." Then her expression changed. "Can he know anything? It was clumsy of me to break the cup as I did, but it wouldn't have done for the girl to have drank it under the circumstances. Bah! What can he know? He can only suspect. It will only be a case of postponing my revenge. And nothing shall baulk me of that. Perdition! How beautiful the little innocent is! And Horace Caldecott loves her." Valerie clenched her teeth as she said these words, and then continued: "And I love him! Yes, he's bad right through; but I don't care. I love him, and *I'll have him yet*. I'll give you a respite, Miss Hazel Harlow, but at Scarborough look out for squalls."

And in the meanwhile Hazel was driving back towards Bayswater with Eric. The young man had explained to her that his sister's departure was a myth. He had come solely and simply to take Hazel away from Valerie Bellairs. "They told me at the Bedford," he said, "that you had gone off with her. I followed you, and——" He broke off. He dared not give voice to all the forebodings that crowded in upon his brain, dared not try and realise how dear Hazel had grown to him, how he longed to be always at her side, to protect her from any fancied harm. And so he kept silent. The question that surged through his brain remained unspoken: *Why had Valerie Bellairs upset the tea-cup?*

Had she meant foul play? He could scarcely repress a groan. For Valerie was the woman who would be with Hazel every day in a short time—would travel with her, act with her, perhaps lodge with her. And Hazel, with her innocent trustfulness, her unsullied soul, would look upon danger and see it not. Was ever lover's soul tortured more?

And, moreover, Eric knew that neither he nor Hazel had yet heard the last of Horace Caldecott

CHAPTER IV.

Let folks say what they will, the fact must always remain that stage-life is beset with trials and temptations for men and women whose refinement keeps pace with their desire to win fame in their profession.

And to Hazel Harlow, whose life had, up till now, been spent amidst the peace and quietude of the country—a peace broken only by Horace Caldecott's hateful wooing—the revelation of all that the life of a strolling player meant, seemed to become more terrifying every day.

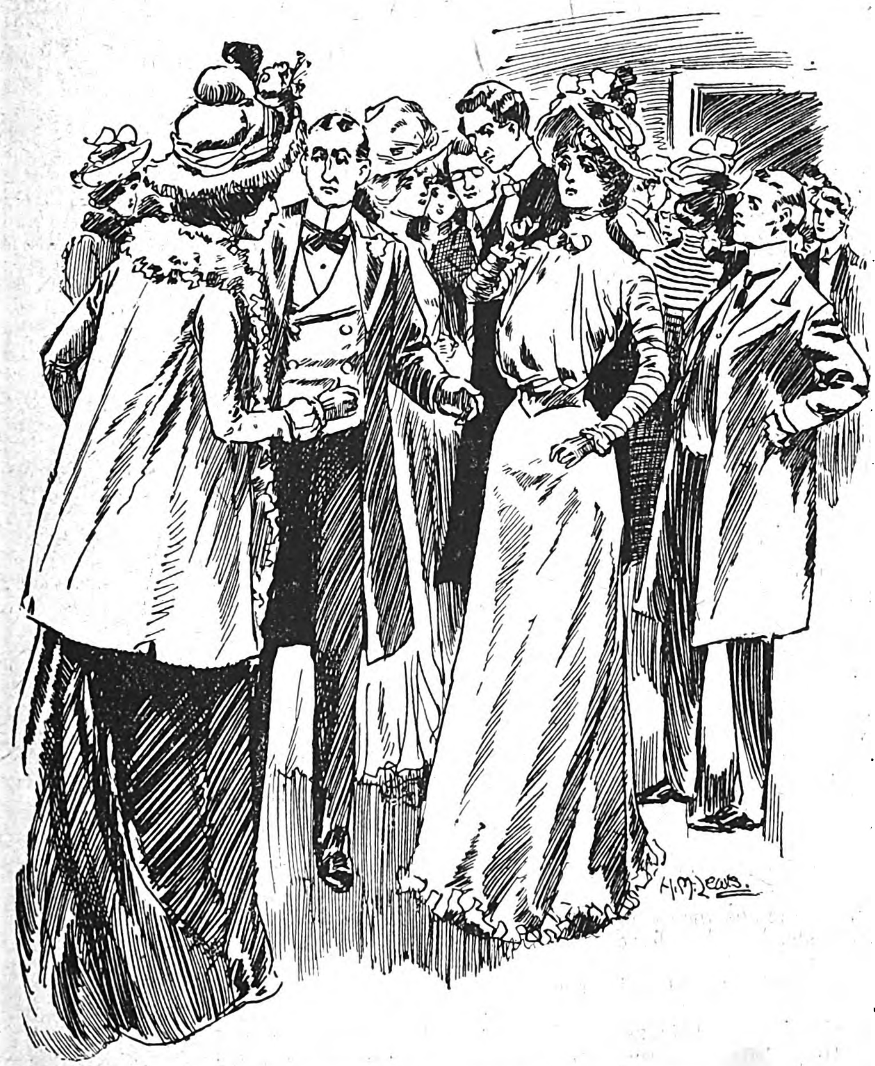
The stainless purity of her soul, coupled with her great beauty, proved, by their rarity, immense snares to her susceptibilities. In the first place, Raymond Venables, the manager of the company, had fallen violently in love with her, while "Clive Pendennis"—whose real name, by-the-bye, was Edmund Jenkins—had in a wonderfully short space of time begun to pay her unwelcome attentions. The other male members of the company, oblivious to the fact of her unassumed modesty and purity, made no disguise of their admiration and readiness to avail themselves of opportunities of showing their appreciation of her charms.

Nor was this all. The "ladies" of the company, with two exceptions, gave her the cold shoulder, jealous of her superior attractions, and incensed by her "stuck-up airs," as they styled her efforts to preserve her womanly virtues.

The two exceptions were Valerie Bellairs and Jenny

Look out for when Hazel Harlow visits your town.

Lovelace, the "soubrette" of the company—an impulsive, warm-hearted, merry little soul, who had a mind above petty jealousies, and was perfectly ready to bow down to Hazel's beauty and accept her as a friend. The two became fast friends, despite their incongruities, a fact that gave Valerie—who always treated Hazel deferentially and politely, for her own aims—cause for much hidden resentment. Jenny Lovelace made no disguise of her dislike for "the Bellairs," despite the latter's recognised talents and fame as an actress.



Hazel started violently, and the rich colour ebbed from her face.

Hazel's was, as has been mentioned, only a small part. Her lack of experience was soon counterbalanced by her conscientiousness and desire to shine in the profession she had chosen. And so the time passed quickly along until at last the day drew near for the commencement of the tour in Scarborough.

Of Caldecott Hazel had heard nothing since the day when he had been brought home unconscious. Neither could Eric give her any information as to the scoundrel's movements. His town house was shut up, and he himself had gone, no one knew whither. Valerie never mentioned him when talking with Hazel.

Indeed, Miss Bellairs was kindness itself to Hazel, who was ready enough to forget and forgive, and who was already lulled into a false sense of security by Valerie's behaviour. She failed to discern the keen blade that was so adroitly sheathed in the velvet scabbard of the actress's suave manner.

Hilda Hatherleigh was the stage name assumed by Hazel. At first she had been averse to sailing under false colours. It was only at Eric and his sister's urgent request that she had at last consented to adopt a *nom de guerre*.

And at last the day came when the company assembled at the Great Northern terminus, *en route* for Scarborough and the Theatre Royal.

CHAPTER V.

"I HAVE a confession to make, Alice."

"What is it, Eric?"

"I'm head over ears in love."

"With Hazel Harlow."

"Yes." And Eric Monteith gazed gloomily out of window upon the London street.

"And does she reciprocate your affection?" asked Alice gently.

"Not yet. But I pray Heaven she may." The young man wheeled abruptly round. "Look here, Alice, I'm going to Scarborough to-night. There's a train gets there about four to-morrow morning. I'm not going to let Hazel know I'm going. But I'm frightfully anxious about her. I can't get the idea out of my head that she's in danger. I *must* go, even if I'm making a fool of myself."

Alice knew her brother far too well to offer any opposition to his intention. And, besides, she had been captivated by Hazel's charms. She would dearly like to see her only brother happily married to the beautiful maiden who had unwittingly stolen his heart.

Let the Editor hear what you think of "Adventures of an Actress."

So all she said was: "Go, by all means, dear brother."

Eric kissed her fondly upon the cheek.

"How good you are to me, sister mine," he said.

He flew off to pack a bag. It was three days since the departure of *The Good Samaritan* company. Alice had had a short note from Hazel to say that they had had a very successful first night, and that she was enjoying Scarborough very much. The weather was perfect, and in the daytime she found plenty to amuse herself with.

It was a glorious summer morning when Eric arrived at Scarborough. There was a delicious freshness in the keen air that blew off the sea, while a faint haze betokened the advent of a perfect day.

There was scarcely a soul about, as was natural at that early hour, and Eric sauntered through the streets towards the promenade, meaning to sit there for an hour or so, before gaining admission at the Royal Hotel, St. Nicholas Street, the establishment he had patronised upon a former visit to the watering-place.

Sitting down upon one of the seats on the promenade, and turning up the collar of his light overcoat—for the early morning air was chilly—he lit a cigarette, and let his thoughts turn towards the plans for his future course of action, the self-constituted guardianship of Hazel Harlow.

"I should very much like to know where Mr. Horace Caldecott is at this moment," he mused, "also why on earth Miss Valerie Bellairs—who must surely have no difficulty in finding a London manager willing to engage her at, at least, £30 a week—why this noted actress should suddenly take it into her head to go on tour with a provincial company, where salaries rule small, and discomforts high. That's a question that wants answering, and I'll try and answer it before I leave Scarborough."

Suddenly the sound of footsteps proceeding slowly along the promenade towards the Spa Buildings attracted Eric's attention. He looked up to see a tall, strongly-built, bearded man, shabbily dressed, with a slouch hat pulled over his eyes, sauntering forward in a particularly aimless manner.

He looked furtively at Eric as he passed the seat upon which the young man sat. But Monteith had the appearance of being fast asleep. He had left his luggage at the station to be forwarded to his hotel. "Out on the spree, last night," muttered the stranger as he slouched past.

But Eric was very wide awake. His sporting instincts were aroused. It was not yet five o'clock. What should a man of the stranger's appearance be doing on Scarborough's promenade at so early an hour?

The question was answered without delay. The figure of a woman, cloaked and veiled, coming from the opposite direction, suddenly appeared in view. The motive for the early morning walk of the man in the slouch hat was made apparent by his coming to a halt before the woman, who had evidently come at that early hour for some business that could not be transacted at another time.

Languidly curious, Eric watched the pair from the corners of half-closed eyes. They threw a glance in his direction, and the man made some remark, with the result that they sat down upon a seat barely one hundred yards away from where Monteith reclined.

As the woman took her seat, she threw back for a few seconds the veil that cloaked her features. In a moment Eric's heart began beating with mad excitement. *It was Valerie Bellairs!*

What could the actress be doing at that early hour? Who was her companion? All Monteith's faculties leapt up with renewed vigour. The love he bore for Hazel Harlow had made him a detective, had made him see danger in every action of Valerie Bellairs.

The man and woman talked earnestly together for some time. Then Valerie rose to her feet. The man followed her example. She said something, of course inaudible to Eric, to her companion, and hurried away. The man raised his hat, and then, thrusting his hands into his coat pockets, strolled slowly back the way he had come.

As he passed Eric, Monteith was still sleeping, apparently. The man paused. The sleeper sprang to his feet. He looked extraordinarily wide awake for a man who a moment before had been in the depths of slumber.

The man looked his astonishment. Eric looked at him fixedly for a moment. The next instant he found his voice.

"What was that woman saying to you?" he said quietly.

The man started back as though he had been stung. "What d'ye mean?" he said hoarsely. "What's that to you?"

"A good deal. You'd better answer my question." If not——"

"What will you do if I don't?"

"Give you in charge, well"—Eric spoke with a curious significance—"you know what for."

Now Monteith knew nothing whatever about the man or his antecedents. He had merely drawn his bow at a venture. The arrow went home into the very heart of the target.

The man went pale. "See here, guv'nor," he said, "who are you? How did you find out?"

Eric's answer was a significant gesture. He dared not commit himself further, though it was plain that the man before him had some secret in his life that he had no desire of becoming known.

"Look here," Eric went on, a new inspiration having suddenly come to him. "I'll lie low about you and what I know, for a consideration. Let me take on the job that woman wanted you to do, and I'll give you £5 to clear out of Scarborough."

"How did you know she wanted me to do anything? And it was £50 she promised me."

Eric could scarcely restrain a chuckle. The second arrow had gone home like the first, and had had better results. The man was condemning himself out of his own mouth.

Monteith's face grew very stern. "Listen to me once and for all," he said. "Either you tell me all she told you, take £5 and clear, or—well, we'll go straight to the police-station and I'll tell all I know."

The strings of a guilty conscience are powerful incentives to obedience. It was good for Eric's schemes that the spur he used, had so much unknown weight behind it. The man gazed in his face, read a finality and knoledge that by no means existed, and—capitulated without a further struggle.

"I'll give in, guv'nor," he said huskily; "but don't let's stay here. Come on to St. Nicholas Cliff. We shall be safe from interruption there. You shall have my job and willing. If I hadn't been so hard up I'd never have taken it on."

Eric complied with the stranger's desire for less publicity. The pair crossed the cliff bridge, and sat down

Hazel Harlow's adventures grow more exciting every week.

in the assured privacy that the early morning gave them at that spot.

"I'm not going to tell you how I came to know Miss Bellairs," the man began somewhat sullenly.

"Oh, I know Mr. Caldecott," broke in Eric.

The man swore under his breath. Monteith's quick intuition had tapped the only source from which the fair Valerie could have become acquainted with a rascal such as this fellow evidently was.

"Well, you seem to know a lot," the stranger went on gloomily. "Let's begin with Miss Bellairs asking me if I wanted to earn fifty quid. I says yes. She then tells me that she has a down on a Miss Hilda Hatherleigh"—then Monteith's forebodings were not groundless—"and wanted her—well, 'er got out of the way for a bit.

"So I was to come down here, and one night to present myself at the Theatre Royal with a note for Miss Hatherleigh"—the man took a sealed envelope addressed, "Miss Hilda Hatherleigh, urgent," out of his pocket—"I was to give it to Miss Bellairs, who would give it to the other one. After the show they were to accompany me to 95, North Row. I was to pretend to attack Miss Bellairs and the other, who was to be chloroformed. Miss Bellairs was to skedaddle, and the other——"

"You needn't say any more, I understand," broke in Eric sternly. "So you were going to add murder to your other crimes, you confounded ruffian, were you?"

"No, not murder, guv'nor. I swear that. The girl was to be got away to London, and—well, there are plenty of ways of getting rid of a girl there without killing her."

The cold-blooded villainy of this wretch for a moment made Eric long to seize him by the throat and hurl him over the cliff. Restraining himself with an effort, he turned to him, and said curtly:

"I'll give you three hours to get out of Scarborough." He looked at his watch. "There's a train at nine, or thereabouts. You go by that, or"—his rage almost mastered him—"I'll have you clapped back again into the prison you ought never to have left, as sure as my name is what it is. And if you make an effort to hold any communication with Miss Bellairs, I'll never rest till I see you hunted down to the doom you deserve." So saying, he thrust the note, delivered into his hand by the other, into his pocket.

His vehemence genuinely frightened the cowardly ruffian beside him. Eric took five pounds from his purse. "Here's all the blood-money you'll get," he said contemptuously. "Now make tracks!"

The man needed no second bidding. He literally took to his heels, while Eric strolled slowly towards breakfast and his hotel, pondering deeply over all that he had heard, and thinking out his own future plan of campaign.

CHAPTER VI.

Hazel Harlow was in her dressing-room on the evening of the day that had dawned so eventfully for Eric Monteith.

The theatre was filling up, for Scarborough did not often have the chance of seeing so well-known an actress as Valerie Bellairs, while already the beauty of the *ingenue*, "Hilda Hatherleigh," had proved that Raymond Venables' selection had been the "draw" he had hoped and believed.

Venables himself was taking a small part in the play, the theme of which was that an unpolished exterior often hides an interior of sterling worth. Valerie Bellairs as Ruth—"The Good Samaritan"—a madcap, and apparently a worthless woman, turned out at the conclusion of the play to be a heroine in the truest sense of the word.

This was the peg upon which dialogue and scenes were hung.

Venables was standing at the wings as Hazel came down from her dressing-room, ready for her first "call."

The manager drew a deep breath. "How lovely you look to-night," he murmured in Hazel's ear.

The girl drew herself up. There was a sparkle in her eyes as she answered: "Don't fish in profitless waters, Mr. Venables."

"I'll give you anything you like for a kiss," answered the enamoured Venables, who now never tried to conceal the passion he felt for his *ingénue.*

"The first man I allow to kiss me," answered Hazel with a flush and a voice full of contempt, "will do so because I love him and mean to be his wife."

"And couldn't I be that man?"

"Never, Mr. Venables."

The manager groaned, but further conversation—typical of many such carried on between Hazel and Venables, who pestered the poor girl with his attentions—was cut short by the *ingénue's* appearance behind the footlights. A great round of applause greeted her entrance.

At the conclusion of the play Valerie Bellairs came to Hazel with a grave face.

"Here's a man just brought this note for you, dear," she said. "It's marked 'Urgent.'"

Hazel looked at the note carelessly. Already, brief though her stage career was, she had become accustomed to *billets-doux* from unknown admirers, invitations to supper, and the like attentions, all of which she steadfastly took no notice of.

Was this letter another such as this? Suddenly her face paled. There was no mistaking the handwriting on the envelope. It was written in the large, sprawling caligraphy of her father, Farmer Harlow.

She tore open the letter. It was as follows:—

92 North Row,
Scarborough.

Dear Hazel,

I've tracked you at last, only to lose you. I'm sorely stricken—dying maybe. If you want to see your unhappy father alive in this world, accompany the bringer of this note,

Your father,
Harlow.

Hazel read the scanty message over two or three times before the full meaning of it was borne in to her brain. Her father! Here in Scarborough! Dying! There could be no mistake about the handwriting. She would have sworn anywhere that her father's hand had penned that note.

Helplessly she turned to Valerie, who stood beside her, with eyes that seemed to devour every detail of her countenance.

"Read it!" said Hazel in a low voice.

Valerie took the note and mastered the contents. Then she turned to the other.

"I will come with you," she said in a voice that rang genuinely of help and pity.

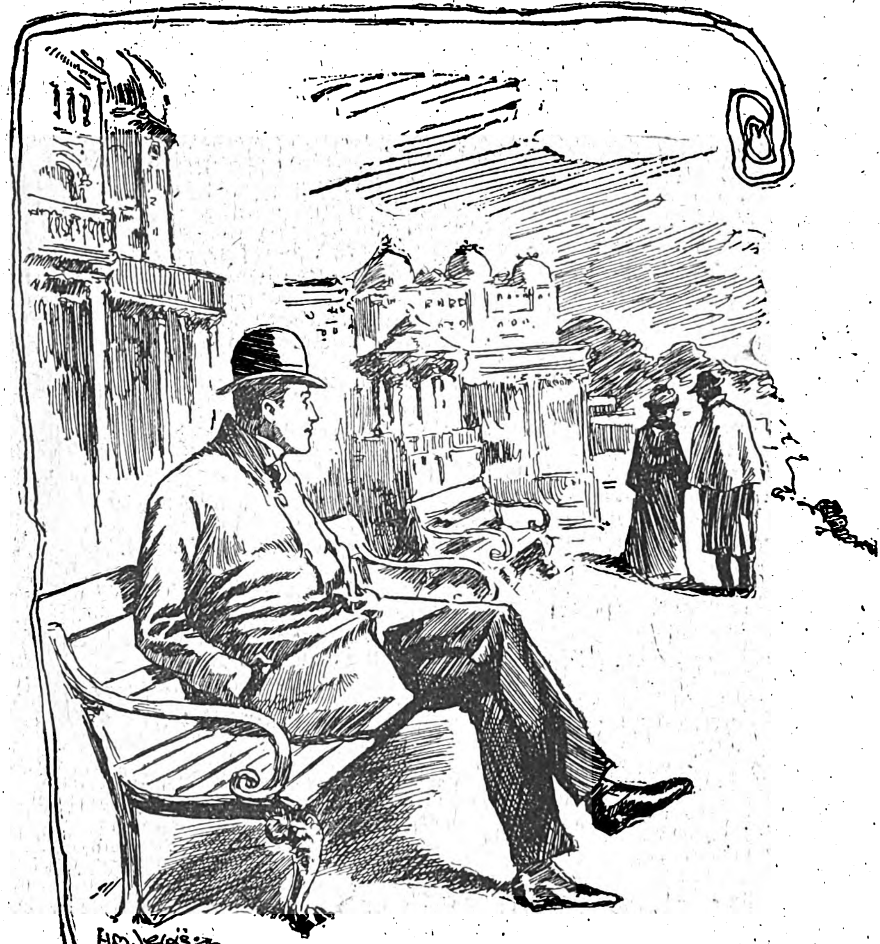
"I'll ask Jenny Lovelace to come," began Hazel, her thoughts turning to her recognised friend in her perplexity, rather than to Valerie, whom she felt she never could really like.

Next week "Hazel Harlow in Newcastle."

"And while you look for Jenny, your father may be breathing his last."

"True," replied Hazel. "Let us go. Is the messenger outside?"

The messenger was at the stage door—a tall, muffled figure in a slouch hat and somewhat seedy clothes, whose face was undiscernible in the gloom.



The figure of a woman, cloaked and veiled, coming in the opposite direction, suddenly appeared in view.

"This is Miss Harlow," said Valerie. The man nodded and motioned to the women to follow him. He hurried away from the theatre, and, leaving the main thoroughfare, turned down into a small side street. Before a door, numbered 92, he paused, and, fitting a key into the keyhole, threw it open. Valerie and Hazel stepped into a little hall, where intense darkness reigned.

The guide opened a door to the right, and ushered his guests into a small room lit by a solitary gas flare. There was no furniture in the room save a chair and a dilapidated table.

"My father," began Hazel, somewhat nervously, "where is he?"

For answer the man strode to the door of the room and with a swift motion turned the key in the lock. Then he turned to Valerie, who seemed somewhat surprised at his movements, and with a quick gesture threw off hat, cloak, and the false hair that had concealed his face from view.

With a faint cry Valerie fell back, in the blankest amazement. As for Hazel, she pressed her hands to her eyes to convince herself that she was not dreaming.

"Mr. Monteith!" she muttered.

Eric made a bow.

"Good evening, Miss Valerie Bellairs," he said. "You didn't expect to see me here, did you?"

The expression on Valerie,s face was terrible in its malignant concentration and baffled rage. Her eyes seemed to flash fire. Her bosom rose and fell in spasmodic sobs. She wrenched a revolver from her pocket.

"It's you again, is it?" she screamed. "Well, you've crossed my path once too often!" and the mad woman—for mad she was at that moment—levelled her pistol at Eric's head.

But she had forgotten Hazel. With a bound the girl sprang across the room and seized Valerie's wrist with a grip that a healthy country life had given her young muscles the capacity to employ—a grip that rendered Valerie powerless to fire her deadly weapon.

The next moment Eric had secured the weapon itself, and "the Bellairs," was disarmed.

"You shan't add murder to your other crimes, Miss Bellairs," he said quietly. "Will you come with me to the police-station?"

There was something in Eric's quiet, resolute manner that brought Valerie to her senses far quicker than any hot denunciation of her actions could have done.

The fierce light faded from her eyes. She looked helplessly at the man who, she realised, had foiled her once again in her dastardly attempt to get rid of the girl whose only crime was a beauty few men could resist. All the resolution died out of her. Fear, abject fear, sprang up in its place. She fell on her knees before Eric.

"Spare me," she wailed. "I meant Miss Harlow no real harm. She stole the man I love from me, and I wanted to get her away to a place of secrecy, so that he would believe she was dead, or had disappeared for ever from his ken. That was all. I swear it!"

"Don't kneel to me, Miss Bellairs," answered Eric coldly. "Your protestations are in vain. The man you employed was a nameless villain. What fate you had in store for Miss Harlow I know not. Yet I know enough to feel convinced that you meant to try and ruin her body and soul, to get her conveyed away to some vile den, where death, and worse than death, must have been in store for her. Providence sent me to frustrate your evil plans. With Miss Harlow's assent, I shall have you conveyed to the police-station, where——"

But Hazel sprang forward.

"No, no!" she cried vehemently, though her face was deadly pale, and she could not bear to look Valerie in the face, "not that, not that! Let her go, Mr. Monteith! Let her go!"

Eric bit his lip. He knew full well the tender womanliness that inspired Hazel's words. As for Valerie, she sprang to her feet, hope in her eyes.

"Listen," she said quickly, "I'll confess. I wrote to your father, Miss Harlow. I didn't tell him where you were. I told him to write a letter, the substance of which I supplied, to be forwarded to me that I might get you to return home. He did as I asked. I then made up my mind to have you incarcerated in London for a time, until I—I—had married Horace Caldecott."

A shudder ran through Hazel's frame.

"Will you take me back to my rooms, Mr. Monteith?" she said faintly.

In a moment Eric had placed her hand within his arm. The next moment Valerie Bellairs was alone.

"How can I thank you? Again you have been my saviour!" murmured Hazel, as Eric piloted her along the quiet streets.

"By becoming my wife," Eric longed to answer. But he felt that it would be ungenerous to press his suit now. He only said: "I only want your friendship, not your thanks." He then told Hazel how he had witnessed the interview between Valerie and the hired ruffian. "I determined to impersonate the man myself," he said. "I found out that Miss Bellairs had hired 92 North Row, a long deserted house, for a week, and for a sum of money that made inquiry superfluous. What would have happened had I not come to Scarborough last night and, by the hand of Providence, put right in the way of fathoming the intended crime, I dare not contemplate. Thank God you are safe."

There was such fervour in his voice that Hazel longed to be able to say: "You have earned the right to be my protector for life. Marry me." But as yet love had not awakened the power in her to give herself heart and soul to this man, who loved her so. She sighed and murmured out broken words of thanks. And with a dull pain at his heart, Eric realised that as yet he had no further right to ask Hazel to return the passionate love that surged like a mighty tempest in his breast.

CHAPTER VII.

"Valerie Bellairs has gone! What on earth shall I do? Was ever man in a worse hole?" And Raymond Venables stamped up and down his room like a man possessed.

It was the day after the events narrated in the preceding chapter. Valerie Bellairs had not dared to face the music again. Without a word of explanation beyond a curt note to the manager and a cheque for the money due to her during her term of agreement, she had disappeared.

Venables rushed round to Hazel's rooms, and, throwing ceremony to the winds, broke in upon her and Jenny Lovelace while at breakfast.

"Do you know where Valerie Bellairs has gone, and why?" he almost shrieked.

Hazel blushed a rosy red. Then the colour ebbed out of her face. For a moment she hesitated. "I do know," she said, in a low voice; "but I cannot tell you."

The manager stared at her in amazement.

"What plot is this?" he growled. "And what on earth am I to do without my lead?"

Jenny Lovelace sprang to her feet.

"Give Hilda Hatherleigh the lead," she cried, "and me her part. Cora Bond can take my part, and you can easily rake up someone to walk on for her."

Jenny's vehemence saved the situation, and drew the manager's bewildered thoughts into a new channel. He seemed to forget Valerie's existence, and the remarkable avowal Hazel had just made.

"Can you do it, Miss Harlow?" he cried anxiously. "It's a chance for you, and no mistake."

"I can but try," answered the girl gently.

"Then finish breakfast and come down to the theatre at once. We shall have to spend the rest of the day in rehearsing. I'll go and beat up the rest of the crowd," and without more ado he rushed from the room.

Jenny—whom Hazel had taken completely into her confidence—executed an impromptu skirt-dance round the table.

"Ta-ta, Bellairs!" she laughed. "Our chance has come, Hazel! We've cut the cat's claws! Venables will be too excited now to bother his head about Miss Valerie's exit. He's got the show to think of."

And that night the Scarborough audience howled themselves hoarse over the beautiful "Hilda Hatherleigh," whose rendering of the part vacated by Valerie Bellairs was unanimously voted a triumph in every way.

And among the audience was Eric Monteith. While Hazel had but little difficulty in guessing to whom she was indebted for a wonderful bouquet handed to her after her first appearance as "the Good Samaritan."

But Hazel's troubles were not yet over. The next town at which *The Good Samaritan* company was billed to appear in was Newcastle. Here it was the beautiful young debutante's lot to experience an adventure more thrilling even than the one related in this week's Short Stories.

WHAT SORT OF A PERSON ARE YOU?

What do people think of you? You don't know, of course. But your handwriting will tell you what your character is like. Send a specimen to—

RANEE, 21 Pearson's Buildings,
Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Inclose six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope with each specimen of handwriting.

The Reappearance of Garton Hope.

"I, HENRY SUTTON LYLE, knowing that I have but a few hours to live, do desire, in this my extremity, to disburden myself of a great crime; and, having done so, to avow, as before my Maker, my innocence of a greater.

"Twice have I stood at the bar to answer for the slaying of Mr. Garton Hope. On the first occasion, the judge, seeing that no body had been found, decided that I could not be proceeded against. Since then, I have been tried; found guilty of a murder I never committed, and—condemned.

"To-morrow morning, before the sun is fairly up, I am to die. But it will be as a man innocent of a brother man's blood. I now confess however—as one being in the antechamber of death—that I was guilty of wicked perjury when, a year ago, I accused myself of compassing Garton Hope's murder. Why I did this is known only to myself. Were I to reveal my motives it would not save me now.

"Why Garton Hope went away, or whither he bent his steps, I do not know. I only know that I did not kill him; that when I said I did, I lied! God forgive me! and be with me to-morrow!

"Yet one more word, and then—supreme knowledge!

"Within three months of my death, will Garton Hope return to take his place among his fellow-men. *He* will do me justice. Within three months,—and—*I shall know it!* Amen!

"(Signed) HENRY SUTTON LYLE.
"May 4th, 1899."

* * * * *

In the summer of '97, there sat at dinner by an open window, looking out upon an up-river reach of water, three people—two men and a woman—the elder of the former, the most remarkably noticeable of the party.

A thoughtful man—his eyes, dreamy and far-away of expression, indicated that. A man, too, one would imagine, who would both do and suffer more than most men. Not grey, but inclining to it; the full, reddish-brown beard giving an air of masterful dignity to the otherwise super-sensitive features. Add to this that he stood well over six feet, and you have the man in brief—Garton Hope, the millionaire ex-colonist and sheep farmer in the flesh.

The other was just the ordinary "Society" male—to the "ordinary" observer that is—a trifle *dilettante*, more than a trifle selfish, and yet not, on the whole, an altogether bad fellow. Harry Lyle was the poor cadet of a poor "blue blood" family; and as such had to study the main chance, whensoever and wheresoever the opportunity for so doing presented itself. Dapper, opiniative, and not over knowledgeful, he contrived to render himself popular, after a fashion, in his little circle. Yet was all this but as the shell, the rind, the outer cuticle of the man; few people discerning beneath it the real grip and grit of a fine nature, actually existent there.

The lady—but by her own mouth shall she be discovered, it being merely noted that Xenia Brooke was young (two-and-twenty); fair (very); and bewitchingly bubbling over with absolutely infectious laughter—laughter without in it one discordant note or phrase.

"Mr. Hope," she was saying, in reply, evidently, to some observation of his. "You are really and truly going at last to settle down among us—to make London your home?"

"Yes, I think so—that is, if I can but get that which I covet."

"You covetous!" cried Xenia, a merry ripple floating out over the sun-flecked river until it reached the lock upon the other side. "You covetous! Why I don't think that a more generous man exists in all the world than you—saving your presence! Mr. Hope, you are surely joking!"

"No, Miss Brooke I am not," but spite an attempt to carry it off lightly, a keen observer might have detected in Garton Hope's voice a hesitant sadness; in his eyes a more than usual dreaminess of manner. "No, I am not joking. I am tired of roving about the earth, doing the Wandering Jew without the inducement that that uncomfortable person must, I take it, have had."

"And have you decided upon a house, yet? Have you thought about it?"

"I am afraid I must say No, again," he answered her, "I have—well—I have an important affair—important, that is, to me—to arrange first," here he looked steadfastly and earnestly at her; "that done, successfully done, I shall seek a habitation and a home.

Up to this Harry Lyle had kept silence. Dinner over,

Hazel Harlow's adventures grow more exciting every week.

he was now lounging at the window, apparently absorbed in the aquatic panorama passing below.

This last remark, however, of Garton Hope's, stimulated him to the exertion of making comment.

"Thought you had done with business," he said. "Left it behind you at Woolla-Woolla."

"So I have," retorted the other; "but—well, I cannot exactly explain—now."

"Oh! don't apologise, my dear fellow! I'm not in any way curious. I leave all that sort of thing to Xenia—and with very good reason; for I happen to know, being her cousin."

"And, sir, being my cousin, you often take unwarrantable liberties in the way of probing my motives and making yourself generally objectionable!"

"Hear her, Hope! hear her!" cried the young man. "One would imagine that I deserved hanging, at the very least, if all that she says be true."

"As it most certainly is!" said Xenia, with the slightest possible suspicion of a pout.

"Ah, well, I shall take a stroll for an hour, and return when the carriage is ready. I know that you, Xenia, are dying to do the honours of the old Palace; and that Hope is obediently waiting for his chain and muzzle. *Au revoir!*"

The two left behind sat for a few minutes without speaking; and then, on Hope's initiative, they quitted the hotel.

The waiter who had served the party, on their departure found, on the floor under Garton Hope's chair, a morocco leather pocket-book, evidently dropped by that gentleman. He put it on one side for return to its owner later on.

Walking in the direction of the park. The glades and avenues of stately elms and chestnuts were in all their glory, and Garton Hope, at Xenia's side, and slowly pacing the velvety sward under the leafy shadow, deemed earth to be Heaven, desiring no other interpretation.

Ever since his introduction to her the season before he had worshipped the very ground upon which she trod. Time and again had he sought the necessary courage to tell his tale, but had always failed upon the crisis.

When Xenia and her cousin had accepted his invitation to dine with him up the river, he desperately thought that, perchance, some opportunity would be given him for speaking to her—for reaching out towards his heart's desire.

That he was years and years her senior did not occur to him. He was one of those ever-young natures who, young to the end, are at once the admiration and the scorn of the rising generation.

It was done before he well knew it; and she, Xenia, for once in her life was grave and sorrowful beyond recognition.

"Mr. Hope," she said, "you should not! you should not! for I can have but one answer for you! You must not ask me why I refuse you, as I am compelled to do. Nay, I accuse you wrongfully, for you are too knightly to even think of it. I am sorry—very sorry—for you.

"And now let us get back, please, for Harry may, perhaps, be waiting for us."

Disappointed people are ever more keenly alive to shades of meaning in others, than are their more fortunate fellows.

Garton Hope fancied that he could detect in Xenia's casual mentioning of her cousin's name a something verylike to interest, or, perhaps, a deeper feeling.

This notion, rapidly incepted, as rapidly became a fixed idea that grew, and grew with every moment.

At the foot of the hotel steps he lifted his hat, craved pardon for half-an-hour's absence, and turned his face again towards the park.

From that moment nothing was seen or heard of Garton Hope.

The police, and a certain proportion of public opinion, counted the missing man as dead, and this, although no body was found.

Garton Hope had vanished, and that utterly.

* * * * *

Three days after the dinner at Hampton Court, Harry Lyle called at Pont Street and asked for his cousin Xenia.

There was a peculiar look about her, he thought. The merry, irresponsible laughter was gone, completely gone, in its stead being a curious, grave decidedness, a marked disposition to hear all, and to say as little as possible.

After expressing his regretful wonder at Hope's strange disappearance, Lyle stated the object of his visit. It was to formally ask the hand of his cousin. He quite believed that he had her heart; told her so, indeed; and assured her that his was hers for ever.

He was not prepared for that which followed.

She had listened with a silent impassiveness, but when he had ended his pleading she told him that of all men she loved him least.

"Do you know why? Shall I tell you why?" she flung at him, her usually dancing eyes blazing with wrath, her limbs trembling so with passionate excess that he feared she was ill, or—out of her mind. "Well, I *will* tell you. It is because *I believe you to have killed Garton Hope!*"

* * * * *

On the evening of the 8th of June, 1898, a gentleman, well-dressed, and of age five-and-twenty, or thereabouts, descended from a hansom at the door of a certain police-station in the West End, and, entering, asked for the inspector on duty.

"You are looking, I believe," said he, quite collectedly, and in matter-of-fact tones, "for the presumable murderer of Mr. Gordon Hope. Well, *I killed him!*"

You might have knocked down the astonished inspector with a feather.

"Oh, it is quite right! But be good enough, please, to give this," handing some loose silver to an attendant constable, "to the cabby. Thanks! And now, inspector, do your duty."

The still wondering official could hardly take it in that this courteous, refined gentleman was in earnest—was a slayer of men! His common sense seemed to scoff at it.

"Are you sure, sir?" said he; "quite sure, that this isn't a genuine practical joke. If it is, then, although it is a very poor one, I'm disposed to take your word for it and end the game."

"No," said Henry Lyle, "it is not a practical joke, or a game. I met Mr. Hope——"

"Excuse me, sir; but I must caution you that anything you may now say will be used in evidence against you at your trial."

Next week "Hazel Harlow in Newcastle."

"I quite understand that, of course. Well, as I was going to say, I met Mr. Hope in Bushey Park, as I was returning to the hotel, where he, my cousin, Miss Xenia Brooke, and myself had been dining earlier. Mr. Hope and I had words. He accused me of something which I considered disgraceful, but which I do not care to mention, and—*I shot him!*"

"But, sir," said the inspector, "nobody has been found; and although we hold that Mr. Hope has most certainly been murdered, yet I cannot for the life of me see how it could have happened in the way you state."

"That is your affair," said the voluntary prisoner. "I shot him!—that is all I know. As to what became of his body I am as ignorant as you are. With regard to my share in the transaction, perhaps this will convince you. Mr. Hope had in his possession a large morocco leather pocket-book. In this book was a paper I needed. Well, I took the case from him, and—*here it is!*" handing it to the inspector.

As a matter of fact, the pocket-book had been delivered to Lyle by the hotel people, with the idea that Mr. Hope's friend was the proper person to have possession of it until the rightful owner turned up.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the inspector. "So it is." Then, after a bewildered pause: "It will be my duty, Henry Sutton Lyle, to detain you, pending inquiries, as having, on your own confession, killed one Garton Hope, by shooting him with a revolver in Bushey Park, on the 14th of August, 1897."

* * * * *

"*The Queen against Lyle.*"

The issue of the first presentment before a jury, and the result of the actual trial, which took place, at the instance of the Public Prosecutor, three months later, are still fresh in the public mind, and therefore generally known.

With regard to Xenia Brooke's experiences, it is far different.

Completely secluded from Society and the world, she saw no one, from the day of her interview with young Lyle, save her mother. Anything approaching to outside information was not so much as breathed in her presence. It was not that she was exactly mad, or even that her mind was temporarily unhinged. Doctors were puzzled, because that, although this terrible family calamity would, in the nature of things, undoubtedly account for much, it did not act upon her mind and body in the way it should have done, according to the allopathic theory.

Xenia had become, to all intents and purposes, a dumb woman.

One thing only was there capable of rousing her out of her lethargy, and that to a state of frenzy. It was her cousin's name. The danger of speaking it in her hearing was fully realised; but sometimes inadvertently, in an unguarded moment, it would escape her mother's lips, and for days afterwards would Xenia be unapproachable by even that best of friends.

By some means she had contrived to procure a newspaper giving an account of Henry Lyle's condemnation; and it was terrible, horrible even, to witness her exultation.

"Now!" she cried, "Now he will be avenged! Now! now! now! Blood for blood! Harry Lyle for Garton Hope! For once man's justice follows hard after the Almighty's!"

The other friends of the doomed man would have none of his confession of deliberate homicide. His father, General Lyle, V.C., an old Indian veteran, besieged, not alone the Home Office, but the Throne itself.

"He is mad!" he pleaded. "My son is mad! Foolish he may have been—wild, extravagant, even—what young man of spirit is not? but wicked! no! A murderer? NO! He is distraught, I tell you! And in the name of the God of Mercy and of Justice, I ask of you—I demand of you!—not to believe him! and to—have pity upon me!"

But the ears of authority were stopped—the "powers that be" were obstinately deaf to the old man's cry for mercy for his first-born.

Certain press advocates, as representing a large section of the public, spoke strongly for reconsideration. Useless; worse than useless.

If the father's piteous appeal must needs fall to the ground, how could it be that the efforts of the Fourth Estate, powerful as it is, should have it in them to open the door of fate for Henry Lyle?

Of no avail seemed the voice *of* man *with* man *for* man.

So, fearsome, hopeless, it all remained, until the night of the day before that appointed for the last dread exit.

Then a strange thing happened.

At a few minutes before midnight of this same day, an elderly man, white-haired, bowed of shoulder, and wrapped in furs, alighted from the boat train at Charing Cross, and drove immediately to the "Savoy." He was accompanied by one servant, a valet, whose aid was frequently in requisition by reason of his master's feebleness and evident general ill-health.

The gentleman registered at the hotel in the name of Philip Garton; the servant stating for the information of those curious to know, that his master had but now returned from a two years' trip round the world; and that his present state of health was due to fever contracted at Cairo on the way back to England.

Mr. Garton appearing to be well provided with this world's gear, and a suite of apartments on the main floor having been secured for him by telegraph from Paris the day before, the above explanation was accepted as being eminently satisfactory.

Mr. Garton had commissioned his valet to procure everything in the shape of morning and evening newspaper literature.

"Sit down, Barnes," he said, after a light meal, and when he had been placed by his attendant in an armchair by the blazing fire (May of that year was very cold), over which he spread his long thin hands in evident enjoyment. "Sit down, and read me anything that strikes you as being interesting."

Political items, Society doings, public opinion—or rather press opinion—on this, that, and the other occupied the first quarter of an hour.

The hands of the clock on the mantelpiece were nearing "two" when the man read out to the master the following paragraph:

> **It is now definitely announced that the Home Secretary cannot see any reason for interfering with the due course of law in the case of Henry Sutton Lyle, now under sentence of death for the murder of Mr. Garton Hope in Bushey Park, on the 14th of August, 1897.**

The valet will never, so long as he shall live, forget the look of horror and desperate despair such as was on his

Look out for when Hazel Harlow visits your town.

master's face as he struggled to rise from the depths of his chair.

"Barnes! Barnes! It is life or death! Do you hear, man? Life or death! I must go out!—now, man, now! Quick! I say, dress me, or it will be too late!"

Within half-an-hour the night watchman on duty at the Home Office in Whitehall was roused to something like wakefulness by a summons from a police patrol.

A gentleman, accompanied by a man-servant, was in a four-wheeler at the door.

"The Home Secretary's address? I want it! I must have it—at once!"

This was so unusual a request, and at such an unusual hour, that the watchman might well be pardoned for hesitating to comply with it.

A few words, however, spoken in his ear by the gentleman's companion, speedily put an altogether different complexion upon matters.

The address given—fortunately the Minister was in town—the cab dashed away again in the direction of ——— Square.

It was now well past three, and the Secretary's house, when they arrived in front of it, was silent and dark from roof to basement.

The cabby's vigorous ring at the front door bell echoed and re-echoed through house and street.

"What's up, cabby?" said the policeman on the beat, flashing his bull's-eye on the cab and its occupants.

"Gentleman wants the 'ome Secretary. Case o' life an' death, 'e says."

"Oh! well, I'll make 'em hear!" and forthwith the constable began hammering at the door in veritable Viking fashion.

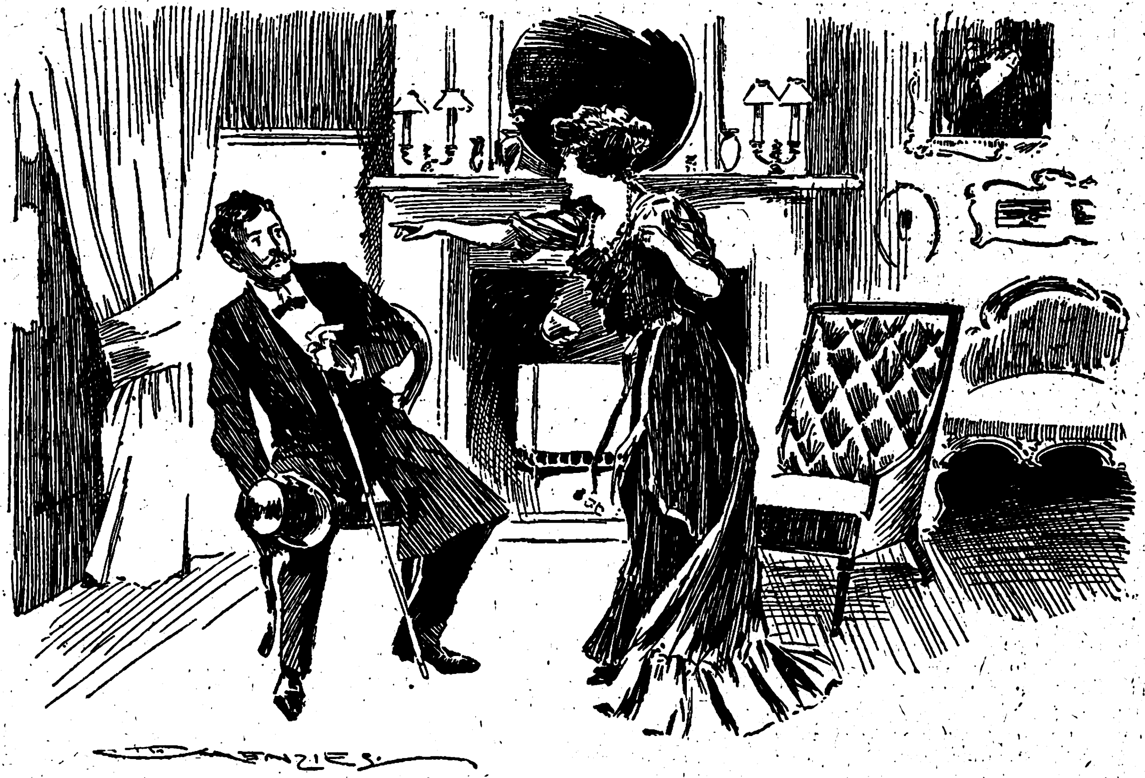
In a minute or two sounds inside were audible, and then lights gleamed from the upper windows, and anon from the fanlight and sidelights of the entrance.

A rattle of bolts and chains, and the door was flung open by a sleepy-looking footman.

Just fifteen minutes later and the cab, with now an additional passenger, was on its way back again to Whitehall, calling on the route at Scotland Yard.

In another hour that same cab might have been seen waiting outside the grey City prison.

What actually took place inside, no man, save the two intimately concerned, and the chief prison officials, will ever know.



"Shall I tell you why?" she flung at him. "Because I believe you to have killed Garton Hope."

Let the Editor hear what you think of "Adventures of an Actress."

The two or three night wanderers in the neighbourhood saw in the early morning three people emerge from the prison gate, get into the cab, and drive away westward.

The next morning's papers had a brief preliminary announcement:

> A stop-press message says that Henry Sutton Lyle, who was to have been executed this morning for the murder of Mr. Garton Hope, has been unconditionally released, by special order of the Home Secretary. The reason given is that Mr. Hope is in London, alive, though far from well. Further details may be expected later on.

* * * * *

Two men sat by the fire in a sitting-room at the Savoy.

"Lyle," said the elder, "will you tell me why you did this thing?"

"Only upon your promise given that you will keep my secret."

"Tell me," was all the other said.

"Well, awhile after you had so mysteriously disappeared, I asked Xenia to marry me. She refused, and not only so, but she deliberately accused me of murdering you! I can only suppose that the horrible suggestion, coming as it did from her lips, had an adverse, or rather perverse, influence for the time being upon my reason; for from that moment, until that day when I walked into the police-station and accused myself of the crime, the persuasion in my own mind that I had really slain you became more and more a fixed conviction. It was only when, so to speak, I came to myself after the catastrophe, that I knew what I had done."

"Ah, well!" sighed Garton Hope. "Your first duty, as is mine, is to thank God that I was in time."

"Yes," replied the other. "I suppose so—I am sure so!—but—I shall never understand, never! Now, tell me why you went away."

"Partly," said Hope, "for the same reason that prompted you to your act of mad self-delusion. *I* also asked Xenia Brooke to marry. Also, she refused me; and I—who had put my all into the scale of her love—could not face the inevitable. I fled, as much from myself as from human ken and human association. It is all, of course, very unreasonable, both my act and yours. But I think it should make us better friends; and if you are of the same mind as I am, you will leave London—England—Europe!—behind you, and come with me to a place I wot of by the waters of the Pacific. There on a new earth, beneath new skies, you and I will lead our new lives. Xenia is for neither of us—we know that. What say you?"

"I will go! Just, however, let me bid farewell to my old dad, and to—no, not to Xenia, and then I will go."

* * * * *

As the *Egyptian*, Pacific Mail steamer, came in sight of the Golden Gate on a glorious morning at the summer end of '99, two gentlemen, one much older than the other, stood by the hurricane deck rail, looking at the rapidly nearing shore.

Said the elder, pointing with his finger landwards: "Was I not wise to persuade you?"

"I was wiser far in the being persuaded," said Henry Lyle.

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COMMONPLACE JIM.

"If Jim wasn't so hopelessly commonplace!" sighed Mary Partridge as she leaned over the garden gate and watched her husband's clumsy figure move heavily down the village street. "And it does seem as though he grew more homely and awkward every day of life," muttered she.

A step on the gravel walk aroused her from her discontented musing, and turning, she met the smiling face and handsome dark eyes of the young clerk who boarded next door.

"Don't look so disconsolate, Mrs. Partridge," said he gaily, disclosing his white teeth in a mocking smile. "Jim is coming home to dinner, isn't he?"

"Of course, Mr. Blake," answered Mary, the colour deepening in her face as she moved back a step.

"I—I was only thinking a bit," continued Mary, forcing a smile.

"Come, Mary, tell me all about it," said he softly. "Is marriage a failure or is it not?"

Mary gave a slight toss of her head, and without a word turned and walked swiftly toward the house.

A complacent smile curved the young man's lips as he proceeded on his way.

"That girl is about as much in love with her middle-aged husband as I am," muttered he.

Indeed, that was the whole truth of the matter. Mary Partridge was not in love with her husband and never had been. Like many another village maiden she had grown weary with the struggle for self-maintenance and had accepted her first good offer of marriage. Jim Partridge was a bachelor of forty, plain looking, steady and industrious, earning the good wages of a mechanic, and the owner of a pretty cottage house. To Mary this seemed almost wealth, and smothering her desire for a more romantic attachment, she had gladly accepted the good fortune that had come to her. A year had passed, and with it the novelty of her comfortable surroundings, and a feeling of discontent had crept into Mary's heart.

Jim's quiet good-nature, his simple, unpretending manners and homely domestic ways had begun to pall upon her.

Her face burned and her heart beat uncomfortably as she hastened into the house with Arthur Blake's words ringing in her ears.

"Is marriage a failure, Mary, or is it not?"

Over and over again Mary asked herself this question as she busied herself about the sunny kitchen, dusted her pretty parlour, and arranged the china and silver upon the snowy cloth of the dinner table.

Suddenly the answer came with swift conviction, and Mary clasped her hands together in mute despair. It was a failure—a miserable failure, she thought bitterly.

To give up for ever her freedom, her liberty of action, her every chance in life, for what? Mary's eyes glanced around the room and answered for her. Yes, she had a pretty home, and Jim was kind to her and loved her more than she deserved, and yet, ah! her life was simply unbearable.

With this thought came an uncontrollable desire to escape from the bonds that held her, to snap the chains that she herself had wrought, and to go away, somewhere, anywhere, only to go—go! As if driven by some invisible power, Mary snatched a hat from its nail and rushed from the house.

Across the well-kept grass-plot at the rear of the cottage Mary sped, out though the gate, and over the wide pasture lot that lay between the lawn and the dusty highway.

The sun shone, the birds sang, the grass was strewn with buttercups and daisies, and the air was fragrant with summer's sweetest perfume, but Mary heeded them not. Breathless and panting, she reached the long stretch of country road just as the village clock struck twelve. Jim would be coming home to dinner and sometimes he came that way, thought Mary, and again that feeling that she must flee from him, from the pretty home, the hateful marriage bonds, urged her footsteps. The gleaming railroad track lay across the road a short distance ahead.

The throbbing of her brain, the beating of her heart, deafened her ears to the approaching train, and swiftly she crossed the track. As she gained the other side she saw Jim's familiar figure coming towards her. Again that curious desire to fly from him took possession of her, and she turned back.

"Mary! What are you about?" cried a man's voice and two strong arms pushed her from the track, and she fell forward upon her face in the dusty road while the train thundered on. Stunned for a few moments, Mary did not move, then with an effort she rose to her feet, wondering at the strange silence about her.

Where was Jim? Her dazed eyes glanced up and down the road and fell at last upon a silent form that lay huddled against the track.

"Oh, Jim, have I killed you?" she cried in agony as she bent over him.

Gathering his head and shoulders within her strong young arms, Mary dragged him into the cool grass beneath the shade of a huge tree.

Save for the slow rise and fall of that broad chest, Jim Partridge lay as one dead, and Mary's repentant tears and the touch of her trembling fingers fell unheeded upon that pale face.

It was but a few minutes, but it seemed hours to Mary in her suspense and remorse, before help arrived and her husband was carried slowly and carefully back to his cottage home.

Through the long night hours, while two physicians were working over Jim's poor bruised body, there awoke in the heart of Mary Partridge a revelation. With horror and disgust she looked back upon her wild impulse of the morning.

"If Jim dies he will have given his life for mine," she murmured, through her sobs, "and no man can do more than that. What am I that I should scorn such a love, or call it commonplace?"

"Your husband will live. He has asked to see you," said the physician's voice.

"A pretty close shave, wasn't it?" whispered Jim, as his wife leaned tenderly over him. "But whatever possessed you to come to meet me this morning, Mary?"

"I cannot tell, Jim, dear," answered Mary, as she bent and kissed him.

Next week "Hazel Harlow in Newcastle."

The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"It is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Felix in vain protests his innocence.

But the cloud of suspicion gathers around him. Meantime, the child Brian has been kidnapped, and Felix is suspected of this too. He discovers a riding whip with some peculiar marks upon it.

CHAPTER XXIV. (*continued*).

He strolled on, his fingers interlaced behind him, his big head drooped to his breast.

Slowly he lounged down the avenue, cleared the gates, threaded a bye-path to the High-Street, and went along it in the direction of Otto Hare's jealously-enclosed domains.

As he strode by Caleb Forster's shop, someone came from the back of the counter and called to him. Dr. Kraft spun about to behold Archibald Geddes.

"Excuse my stopping you, Professor," observed the Scotchman, "but when you were in the other day you let this fall."

The chemist's assistant proffered a tiny roll of discoloured paper.

Kraft peered at it, and then, quivering with an odd nervousness, caught it and drew it out flat. The motion revealed an unmounted photograph of the snap-shot order.

Geddes looked, not at the exposed sheet, but at the German's countenance. Instead of its native pink it had grown white—a drab, slatey-white.

"Thank you," said Joseph Kraft; the words broke jerkily from his twitching mouth, and he crumpled the photograph to a ball. "Thank you," he reiterated, in the same dazed tone—"a—a curiosity, Mr. Geddes—from abroad."

"Interesting, but—but horrible, don't you think?" reiterated the Scotchman, drily.

Kraft glanced up quickly over his glasses.

"A matter of temperament," he answered; "thank you again, Mr. Geddes, and good night."

Joseph Kraft stalked on, the pallor ebbing from his damp skin. Rounding the corner to the cross-roads, he threw up his arms.

"Sakerment!" he cried; "what luck! what teufel's luck! There are eight hundred fools in this verdamdt hamlet and that cursed picture escapes them all, to reach *his* hands!"

CHAPTER XXV.

In which Foley Carries a Box.

"I just wanted to have a trifle of conversation with you, Mr. Forester, touching what I may almost call a—a family matter. So, as I know you breakfast latish, I timed myself to find you over your second cup of tea."

Inspector Brasher deposited a peaked official cap on the horse-hair sofa in the parlour behind Caleb Forester's shop and sat down at the neat table.

The old chemist, still drowsy from the previous evening's debauch at the "Wheatsheaf," ruffled his silver locks and shot an anxious glance at the visitor.

"A—a family matter," he stammered; "I'm afraid I don't understand."

Michael Brasher coughed and stroked his crisp, black beard.

"Well," he said, "it's about an alleged brother-in-law of yours—one Nick or Nicholas Foley, a retired seaman, I am told; a powerful, bullet-headed fellow who has lost an arm."

Caleb Forester pushed away the balance of the meal before him—he had scarcely tasted it.

"Nick Foley is a relation of mine by marriage," was the chemist's answer, "yet for years I have seen little of him, and wish to see less. He has been a rover since boyhood, drinks like a fish, and blusters as if he were a recruiting-sergeant."

The Inspector nodded.

"Mr. Foley asserts that he has but recently come back to Wyresdale," went on Michael Brasher; "within a fortnight or so. Can you give me the exact date of his arrival?"

Caleb started.

"I—I am not aware of that," he faltered, "but as long ago as the—the twenty-second of last month I myself saw him, quite by chance, in the—the evening."

Mr. Brasher made a note of the detail.

"Do you recollect the hour?" queried the Inspector, abstractedly.

"N—no," murmured the chemist; "but it was close on

Look out for when Hazel Harlow visits your town.

midnight. I had been round to the Wheatsheaf Hotel. I have an occasional smoke and glass of claret there, Mr. Brasher."

"An agreeable relaxation," was the calm response; "and by-the-bye, Mr. Forester, when precisely did you happen to pick up this relative of yours? During your return home, I presume it was."

Caleb Forester hesitated. Michael Brasher leaned forward and laid a hand upon the other's coat sleeve.

"Mr. Forester," he observed, "I wish to be your friend, that is, I wish to be more than a friend to your daughter, as you may or may not have suspected. The fact has made me cautious in following the clue which first, in my opinion, connected you with a particular event. Yet duty is duty, and I can do little but provide, for Miss Connie's sake, against wronging you by imperfectly tested conclusions."

The chemist shrank from him, alarmed. Caleb Forester had grown wan and bloodless.

"Now," pursued the Inspector, "I can easily comprehend that you shy at putting the noose round your dead wife's brother's neck. But if, as I infer, you noticed Foley near the cross-roads on the night which was doubtless that of Sir Christopher Dering's murder, it can serve no practical end for you to hold your tongue. Should you not choose to be frank with me I must needs believe you to be an accomplice or an accessory, and treat you as such."

Caleb shuddered and looked askance from side to side of the trim parlour. An atmosphere of his daughter seemed to cling about it. She had laid the table for his belated breakfast; she had set out the flowers which stood on the plaster mantel, and starched the snowy curtains that screened the window. He dare not think of all that Mr. Brasher's threat might mean to him and his.

The grave features of Michael Brasher bent on the chemist a steadfast regard.

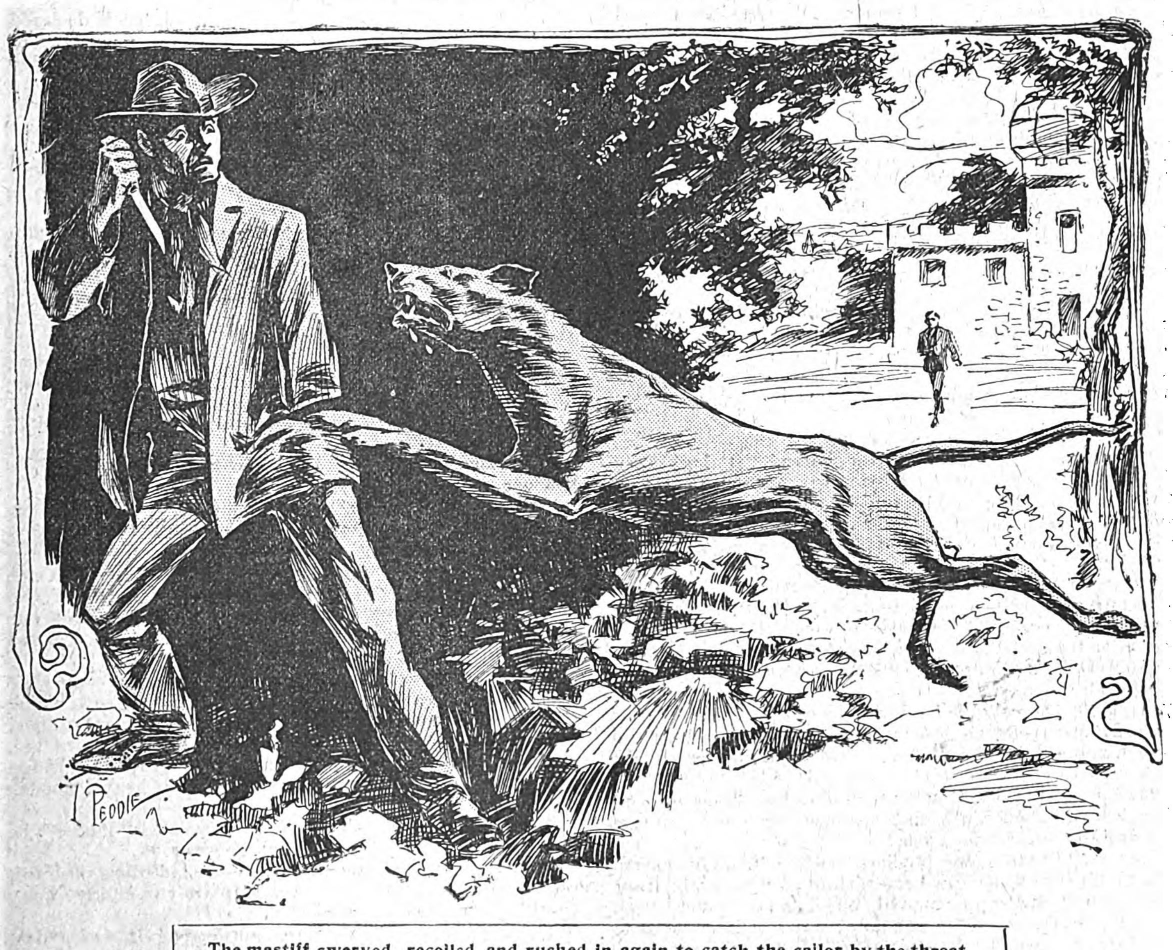
"Am I correct?" demanded the Inspector; "you did see Foley near the cross roads?"

Caleb assented with a sigh and a miserable gesture. "But," he said, "you forget Nicholas has only a single arm—it would have been impossible for him to have——"

Mr. Brasher stowed a leather-bound memorandum-book in his braided skirts.

"It is beyond my province to discuss that," was his curt decision; "let me warn you against referring to the question in any fashion, abroad or to your customers, and especially at the Wheatsheaf."

He reached his cap and prepared to depart, but checked himself, and stepped to Caleb Forester's elbow. The



The mastiff swerved, recoiled, and rushed in again to catch the sailor by the throat.

Let the Editor hear what you think of "Adventures of an Actress."

chemist had begun to pour a modicum of hot water into the flat, unglazed teapot.

"Oh," said the Inspector, "I gather you spoke at the Wheatsheaf awhile since of some service you had been able to do Mr. Felix Dering. May I ask what it was?"

A crash punctuated Michael Brasher's sentence; the teapot shattered itself on the flagged hearth, distributing wet leaves and ruddy fluid over the rug and the polished stone. Caleb muttered an excuse, and stooped to collect the fragments of earthenware; when he rose his withered countenance was firm and cool.

"Why," he answered, "it was I who recommended him to drop in at the Duchester Theatre while the *Colleen Bawn* was being played. But for going that night he might have returned to Wyresdale; and they do say, Mr. Brasher, if he hadn't had a clear alibi he'd have been arrested instead of poor Spencer, whom people fancy you took to throw the real criminal off his guard."

Michael Brasher shrugged a pair of massive shoulders. "It's a pity the public can't do its own police work," he grumbled; "then it'd learn a thing or two. Good-day, Mr. Forester, and recollect a still tongue makes a wise head. You'll hear from me again."

He twisted the latch, strode out, and descended into the shop. As he passed the counter, with its gleaming bottles and glass cases of puffs and sponges, Mr. Brasher paused to salute the grim form of Archibald Geddes.

"You're an early caller, Inspector," vouchsafed the Scotchman, plying a lump of parcel-wax about the wrapper of a prescription.

Michael Brasher assumed a confidential air.

"I've been endeavouring," he said, "to do Miss Forester a sort of service—candidly, to frighten Mr. Forester off his evenings at the Wheatsheaf. It would be a pity if he were apprehended some night; he gets foolish enough for it."

"You could surely strain a point, for Miss Connie's father," snapped Geddes; "and the old chap's innoffensive, at all events."

"I would strain half a dozen," retorted the Inspector, "but I am not omnipotent in Wyresdale, Mr. Geddes. Perhaps, for Miss Forester's sake, you might keep an eye on Mr. F."

And with this Parthian shot, Michael Brasher gained the High Street.

Geddes stared after him jealously.

"I wonder," growled the Scotchman, "if he's been tapping the governor for permission to approach Connie on the score of marriage. Be hanged to him for a solemn ass. Not such an ass, though; Michael Brasher recognises me for his sworn rival and I've done my best to keep that dark."

Unconscious of Mr. Geddes' indignation at his actual penetration and imagined audacity, the Inspector was threading a series of by-paths towards the narrow lane, where, not far from the lodge gates of Dering House, Nicholas Foley's dilapidated cottage sentinelled the grassy margin of the road.

On the low threshold of his abode sat the sailor himself —a briar pipe between his lips, his chin in his palms, and the characteristic slouch hat thrust to the nape of his neck.

Perceiving that Mr. Brasher halted at the clumsy wicket. Nicholas stretched his limbs, resumed an erect position and sauntered down the path.

"Mornin'," he said, and plucked the briar from his mouth to replenish it; "thought I knew the cut of your jib. Have some baccy," he supplemented, offering his pouch "it's real Virginian leaf, and if you don't make no inquires as to how I got it, I won't tell you no lies. But you'll not have a pull at the likes of it often in your life."

Tempted by the appearance of the tobacco, Michael Brasher accepted a pipeful.

"Didn't seem as if we should hit it when we fouled spars at Wyresdale Park wall a week ago," said the sailor, "but I bear no malice, love you. You found I was right about being allowed to set a few snares up yonder."

"I haven't troubled to ask," replied Mr. Brasher, cheerfully, blowing a fragrant cloud, "I accepted your word for it when I learned you were a kind of kith to Caleb Forester. How do your snares work, by the way?—you should be lucky in Wyresdale Park, Mr. Hare preserves a pile of game. But those big dogs he keeps to scare trespassers must make it wild."

"That'll be why I've done precious little yet," said Nicholas, hiding a grin.

"Not easy to set a snare one-handed?" suggested the Inspector, designedly. Nicholas showed a rugged fist.

"I'm not as gammy as I look," he observed, "my five fingers are as useful as your ten, I'll go bail."

"When it comes to tying a knot," demurred Michael Brasher.

The sailor bared his teeth. "These help me out," was his answer, "there ain't many knots I can't do and undo, thread, line and rope."

Brasher fumbled in his pockets.

"I don't mean to argue I dispute your ability," declared the Inspector, "but do you mind my seeing how you contrive; I'd no idea, with your affliction, you could be so smart. No," he broke off, ceasing to rummage, "I've not a bit of string. But a handkerchief might do?"

He produced the article as he spoke, a species of suspense revealing itself in his demeanour. Nicholas Foley seized it, placed an extremity between his teeth, shifted his grip once or twice and, lo, the wisp of linen was knotted into a circle.

"Marvellous!" cried Mr. Brasher; "and what a palm you have—as strong as a gorilla's, you could smash every bone in mine, I guess."

The guileful Inspector extended his arm seductively. Nicholas clutched and squeezed the proffered fingers; his grasp was that of a steel vice.

"Incredible!" ejaculated Michael Brasher; "Mr. Foley, you are a miracle. As a two-handed person I envy you your single one. Thanks for the tobacco, which is all you claim for it. I am due at the station now, but I shall hope to improve your acquaintance."

The sailor waved a flattered adieu with his briar, and Mr. Brasher walked off.

"It's a pretty clue," he said to himself, "but the case is incomplete. Sir Christopher was suffocated by a knotted bandanna, after being stunned by a blow. Forester can prove this fellow to have been near the spot at the time, and he is obviously capable in a physical sense, of the deed. But would that convict him? No, I must root out some more evidence, and then, then for a big success, and possibly a London berth."

Lost in ambitious dreams, he proceeded on his way. He had just rounded the corner of a transverse by-path which shortened the route to the police-depôt, when there stopped at the wicket of the sailor's garden, a small, shrewd lad, clothed with a blue uniform, ornamented by a brass badge and buttons. The new arrival carried a heavy wooden box.

"Can you tell me the road to Wyresdale Park?" he inquired, his accent a pronounced Cockney.

Nicholas surveyed him critically—the lad was a pleasant, red-cheeked youngster. "What ship are you middy of, my cherub?" rejoined the sailor.

The boy deposited his load cautiously. It was a deal casket, three and a quarter feet by eighteen inches, and half as many deep. The lid, pierced with several apertures,

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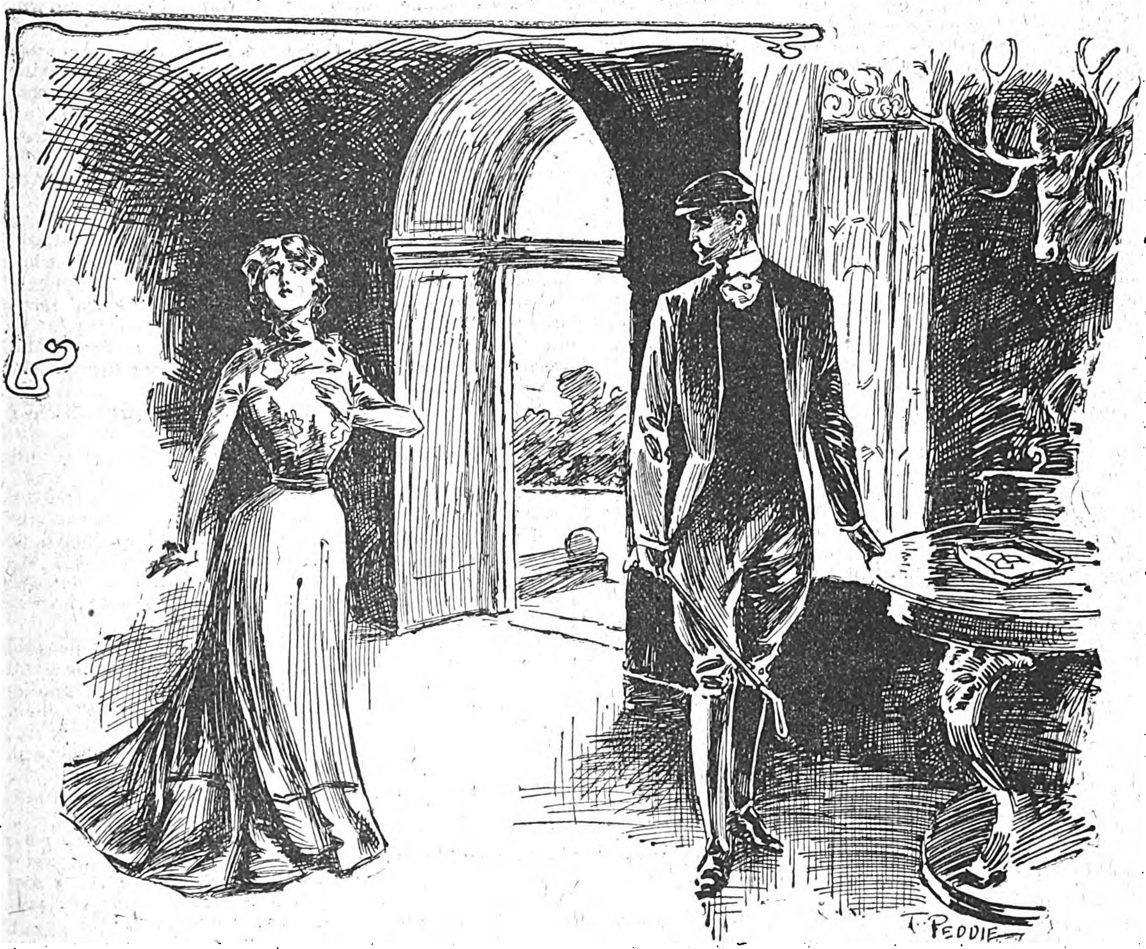

"I owe respect to all women; one only has my heart, and that woman—pardon my frankness, Miss Garland—is not you."

the size of a sixpence, allowed to be seen, at the bottom of these ventilators, a perforated metal lining. The whole of the box was bound by broad bands of tape, lavishly sealed, and supplementing its component nails and screws. On it was a label, addressed in bold written characters.

This side up: with great care. Zoological specimen, alive.

Otto Hare, Esq.,
Wyresdale Park,
Wyresdale, Derbyshire.

"I'm a messenger boy, from London," said the bearer of this coffer, gazing curiously at the one-armed sailor, and noting, with a boyish instinct for the romance of the sea, his tattooed wrist and tanned skin.

Nicholas drew the wicket ajar, rolled through, and lifted the box. "I'm steering that course," he announced, "and you are dead beat, my lad. I'll give you a convoy. Come on—it's just a few cables-length off."

The messenger yielded, and they went on together up the lane. Foley was surreptitiously weighing and shaking the box; but no sound emerged to slake or to whet his inquisitiveness.

"It's a decent distance to send a nest of snakes by a nipper like you," he ventured; "or is it a baby alligator?"

"I don't know what's in the thing," answered the youngster, wiping the perspiration from his brow. "I was to bring it as fast as I could. A hansom to St. Pancras, and second-class fare all the way."

"I reckon them dealers charge the swells any price they choose," pursued Nicholas; "was this out of Jamrach's? I've sold him an odd monkey or so, and a 'strictor or two, in my time."

"It wasn't a dealer that sent me," said the boy, innocently; "I fetched it from a hotel. A gentleman rang up for a messenger to go to Derbyshire with a valuable box, and I was told to take it. A tall, fat gentleman he was—a foreigner—and gave me a sovereign for myself."

Foley whistled. "Kraft," he muttered, and rolled on in silence, still poising the casket critically. His next device was to sniff at it; but the only result appeared to be a discontented shake of the head. Then he listened at the ventilator-holes.

The lad fidgeted. "'Arf time with that," he said. "I was to carry it quite level. You'll be getting me into

Next week "Hazel Harlow in Newcastle."

trouble. I'll take it now, if you don't mind—I'm a lot rested, thank you," he added, softening.

Nicholas returned the box. They were at the extremity of the fine avenue that led to Otto Hare's classic white mansion.

"Bear straight ahead," he instructed, "and you'll twig it. So-long, my lad. You're a trump to obey orders, and you musn't mind an old sailor's freedom."

Colouring at his elder's apology, the messenger pressed forward, and was soon out of sight. Nicholas, left to himself, meditated—and scratched his ear. Suddenly his reflective countenance was illuminated by a broad smile. He slapped his thigh and set off running.

A quick trot brought him to the convenient bough which overhung the park wall. He climbed in and hurried through the plantation to the skirt of the rounded hill where stood the singular tower and the fort-like structure on which he had concentrated such an obstinate attention.

Partially screened by a dense thicket, he kneeled down and examined the turf in front of him. It undulated slightly, and betrayed signs of recent displacement.

Nicholas wrinkled his forehead, then pulled out his clasp-knife, adjusted the blade, and began to dig. He had struck upon the exact spot where, some days before, those shadowy figures from the tower had been interrupted in their unexplained task by the breaking of the branch that had secretly served Nicholas Foley as a means of espionage.

While the sailor worked, a small form emerged stealthily from the door in the base of the tower. Its masculine outlines and scrupulous morning costume marked it for that of the Golden Dwarf. Otto Hare clutched by the collar a great liver-hued mastiff.

Picking up a stone, he tossed it lightly in the direction of the thicket that hid the operations of the sailor. The dog darted after it with a fierce bellow. Foley leapt up, startled. The mastiff swerved, recoiled, and rushed in again, to catch the sailor by the throat. The clasp-knife fell from Nicholas's grasp as he reeled back. He struggled to thrust his thumb into an eye of the creature, but the brute bore him to the ground and worried him.

A moment the Golden Dwarf watched the fight. When he whistled off the dog, Foley remained motionless, the blood streaming from his neck.

A grim smile distorted the Dwarf's face, and he strode away, followed by the reluctant mastiff. The beast's jaws and gleaming fangs were stained by gouts of crimson fluid.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"THAT WOMAN IS NOT YOU."

"MY darling, do not weep so; you will break my heart. And I have never had more need of all my strength and determination, Let me see you smile once—if only to give me courage—or I shall be sorry I met Barbara and asked her to tell you I would be here."

Esther Carew raised her golden head; it had been lying on her folded arms, which were supported by the end of the rustic seat in the Rosery garden.

Her blue eyes were limpid, her fair cheeks wet with tears.

"You don't understand, Felix," she said; "it must be all over between us. For your sake it must."

Felix Dering put a palm on the clustered curls and drew them from Esther's white brow. "Poor child," he murmured; "you are frightened, I can read it in your face. What is the matter?"

Esther gathered his firm fingers in her own tender ones, a terrified glow had dilated her sensitive pupils.

"Dearest," she whispered; "Mr. Hare knows about your—your coming back to Wyresdale that evening; oh, I kept your secret, he did not learn it from me. But he says he could do you an ill-turn and would, if he thought—forgive me, dearest—if he thought you continued to insult me with your attentions."

Her lover started and clenched a brown hand.

"The little asp!" he cried; "so his plan is, by threatening me, to force you into accepting him, But I will spoil the plot, and in a way he does not look for. I will ask Brasher to arrest me, and take my trial like a man. Why should I fear, I am guiltless. Whatever happens, then, you will be free of the Golden Dwarf—he has no hold over you except through me."

Esther sprang and clung to him. "Don't dream of it," she cried; "don't dream of it—I should go mad if you were in prison. Felix, they might kill you, the law sometimes makes mistakes. I couldn't bear the suspense."

Felix clasped her to his breast. "I wish I had never knit our destinies together," he muttered huskily. "Be brave, dear; I cannot protect myself from Hare's vindictiveness by allowing you to tolerate his overtures. But, tell me, did he openly assert his power to prove my presence in Wyresdale on the night of my uncle's death?"

"N—no," faltered Esther; "it was Dr. Kraft who warned me Mr. Hare could do that. Mr. Hare only hinted."

"Dr. Kraft!" exclaimed Felix amazed. "He and the Golden Dwarf are inseparable. Esther, this means mischief of some sort, and I will fathom it. Yet have no alarm on my account; it is not enough to show that I was at Wyresdale on a certain occasion. If Mr. Hare does no more he cannot harrass me much. There is, to be honest, another who may cause me still greater trouble."

He was silent, pondering. "Esther," he said at length, "a malignant fate has hemmed me round with dangers, and I myself am offered—tactfully, skilfully, vaguely—dishonourable terms of escape. I shall not accept them. While I live you are the one woman in the world for me, and rather than prove false, or lose you through cowardice, I would mount the scaffold or enter the convict's cell."

The girl shivered. Her lover's words were deliberate and significant.

Felix stooped and kissed her lips. "Believe in me always, dear," he said; "I will not, as I have been urged to, fly from those who attack me, nor will I fight, if I can help it, a losing battle! And now, good-bye for the present. But, till I bid you, do not abandon hope."

Esther choked down a sob. "You won't leave me a second week with no sign of your existence," she pleaded. "Not that it would be the slightest use asking you to call; mamma wouldn't be at home if you did."

Felix sighed. "I could not think how to get speech of you," he rejoined, "and, indeed, I have been too miserable to bear even your sweet society. If it were not the trick of a poltroon, Esther, I would terminate the imbroglio by a merciful bullet."

A soft clasp stole about Felix Dering's neck, and a pair of piteous orbs looked into his. Felix answered their mute appeal.

"No," he said; "I will not do it—they may hang me if they like. I will die an innocent gentleman, and not a suicide."

He considered a moment.

"You recollect the old hawthorn at the top of the strawberry-bed," he added, "where the robins built last year?"

Esther nodded: she could not speak, the phrase recalled memories of a happy summer, before the shadow of a twin crime had banished the joy of their young romance.

"In the hole at the root," promised Felix, "I will put you a letter twice a week—I can reach it at night from the paddock. And you must post me notes the same way. Farewell, dearest."

Felix snatched a last embrace, and, not daring to glance back, stepped through the hawthorn hedge.

Look out for when Hazel Harlow visits your town.

From the Rosery he turned towards the High Street, strode along its drowsy avenue of shops and entered that of Caleb Forester. Archibald Geddes was behind the counter, his sober countenance bent over the pages of a book—the Scotchman was an indefatigable student. Relinquishing his volume, he looked up; Felix and he had not met since that Sunday when they had contemplated the dismantled window of the strong-room at the police-station, and the chemist's assistant had shown himself so oddly critical of his companion.

"Good morning, sir," said the Scotchman, and waited for the other to speak.

Felix acknowledged the salutation.

"I want to buy or to borrow a magnifying lens, Geddes," he explained; "do you stock such articles?"

Archibald Geddes twisted his thick moustache. "N-no," was his rejoinder; "but I can lend you a decent one I have by me. I use it for botanical purposes."

The Scotchman had recourse to a drawer, produced the lens in its nickel frame, and held it over his thumb. It was a rather powerful glass—enlarging twenty or thirty times.

Felix thanked the owner and accepted the proffered loan of the instrument.

"I will restore it in a day or two," he added.

Geddes wrapped up the glass.

"No word of little Sir Brian yet?" asked the chemist's assistant, passing it across.

"None," responded Felix; "I quite realise what Wyresdale folk think of me, Geddes—you may share their suspicions, for anything I know."

The Scotchman coughed.

"I don't say, Mr. Dering," he conceded, "I find it easy to look upon you in the light of a child-stealer."

Felix put away the borrowed lens and moved to the door.

"I am glad of that," was his melancholy comment; "I imagine, some fine day, Geddes, you'll not regret having tried to think well of me."

He paused for an answer, but as the Scotchman preserved a judicious reticence, took his departure.

Through the hot sunbeams he strode on, by the small and winding roads of the place, to the lodge-gates of Dering House. His shoulders stooped and his head was bowed upon his chest like that of a greybeard. Vainly he strove with the difficulties of his situation—to remain passive seemed madness, to act was to court ruin.

Mechanically he gained the terrace and entered the lofty hall. In the embayed window commanding the lawn, sat Judith Garland. The lustre of the yellow noon picked her out as a handsome silhouette against the panes of the recess.

She rose and came to him—her black train rustled on the polished oak of the floor.

"Ah," she murmured, with the daring affectation of a mutual intelligence that had grown habitual to her in his presence; "I was waiting for you. I couldn't resist your pathetic demeanour during the past week. But Lady Dering has positively tied me to her apron-string. Never mind, we will have our deferred *tête-à-tête* now. Where shall we go—into the conservatory."

The net of her audacious and unwomanly wooing had been well woven, and strengthened by the perception that his life and honour lay, to a mysterious extent, in her power—it had paralysed Felix Dering too long.

He faced her determinedly. "Miss Garland," he said, "I must confess myself at a loss to comprehend this persistent tone on your part. But I should be culpable were I to risk your misinterpretation of my tolerance. I owe respect to all women, one only has my heart, and that woman—pardon my frankness, Miss Garland—is not you."

Judith gasped, and put her hand to her side; a real pang had stricken her at the failure of her immodest plot to entrap him.

"Fool!" she snarled, "and I would have saved you—I would have smoothed the way for you to take my assistance—and my love. You fling me off; then beware, beware! You shall suffer as I suffer."

And darting by him, she vanished in the gloom of the great staircase.

Felix drew a deep breath—the die was cast! He lingered a moment, before gaining his own chamber by the other side of the double flight. There he unwrapped the lens he had borrowed from Geddes, and, out of a locked cabinet, produced the Malacca hunting-crop that had been the dead St. Christopher's.

He poised the glass above the extremity where he had discovered the scratched characters. Without the lens he had been able to read a mutilated sentence, meaning little, yet suggesting much. What would the glass reveal?

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Trail to the Wall.

"So you have been to Paris for a holiday, Mr. Neal Garland? Thanks to the small token of esteem which I presented to you on my last visit, no doubt. Well, I have nothing to say against that. But why did you come back, to-day of all days, and telegraph to my hotel you must see me?"

"Why?" repeated Neal, throwing one leg over the other as he lounged on the corner of the table in Keturah Schwartz's dingy upper parlour, by the ponderous figure of the stout woman herself. "Because you've been here trying to pick Mrs. Schwartz's brains, and I won't have it. I made a bargain with you, and I'll stick to it. But you keep your own side of the fence."

"If you allude," said Dr. Kraft, calmly, "to the fact that I called to ask Mrs. Schwartz about a child I noticed in this house some while ago, I admit the imputation, though I do not comprehend for what reason you have caused me the inconvenience to break a journey North and travel to Pimlico when I was bound for Derbyshire under most important circumstances. Nor do I allow myself to be inconvenienced without making people suffer for it."

And the German smiled cruelly at the odd couple who sat opposite him.

"The reason is," snarled Neal, "you've been on the prowl, and we'll not stand it. We know too much about you for your good, Dr. Kraft, and if you're wise you won't threaten us."

Joseph Kraft's yellow eyes flashed behind his glasses. He gazed thoughtfully out of the window. It was a dull afternoon in Pimlico; the panes were splashed with shower drops.

"Let us exchange information," he said. "Now, I am aware you have certain quite respectable connections, Mr. Garland; that your sister is companion to a Lady Dering, of Wyresdale Park."

The German launched a quick scrutiny at Neal Garland, on whom bewilderment had laid an unmistakeable grip.

"You've been on the prowl there, too, have you?" hissed Neal; "anything else, Dr. Joseph Kraft?"

"Yes," said Kraft; "she is ashamed of you—she denies your existence."

"Ho, ho!" broke out Keturah Schwartz; "I like her impudence."

"Shut up, Keturah!" commanded her peculiar lodger; "come, Kraft, how does my having a sister affect my hold over you or your hold over me?"

Kraft was nonplussed; he had put down a trump card and had been overtrumped.

"Who told you she was my sister?" proceeded Neal; "let's get at the bottom of your prowling. There was

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none aware of it in Wyresdale—except——" he broke off ——"except Foley. Curse him, has he been blabbing?"

An expression of mixed incredulity and alarm flashed across the German's smooth visage. An instant later it regained its humourous cynicism.

"Do not blame your Foley, whoever he may be," said Joseph Kraft, smiling the thin, false smile characteristic of him; "I heard the name by chance, interviewed the lady, and observed the likeness. You gather that I am curious about you, Mr. Garland. Grant it; I have discovered in you the proverbial weasel; I will not hope to catch you asleep."

He got up out of his chair.

"You score, Mr. Garland," he conceded; "since you enter an objection to my inquiries about the child, I will not pursue them. An acquaintance of mine—abroad—desired such a little boy to adopt. But it is of no moment —no moment whatever."

The German brushed the loose sleeve of his frock-coat against his hat—a broad-brimmed silk on this occasion had displaced his soft straw.

"By the way," he added, "if I should want you to convince a certain person—a—a young lady—of Mr. Felix Dering's presence in Wyresdale on a particular night, you could run down, for a consideration, as per our agreement?"

Neal glanced at Mrs. Schwartz, who wrinkled her brows warningly. Joseph Kraft tapped the crown of his hat.

"The consideration," he murmured, "would be substantial."

"I'll be there when I'm required," growled Neal; "and woe betide you, Kraft, if you play any dogs-trick on me."

"I am as guileless as a—a newly-arrived infant," said the German.

He bowed to Keturah Schwartz, nodded cheerfully to Neal, and stepped out of the creaking door with so much address they did not hear him go.

In the squalid thoroughfare beneath, Joseph Kraft's mild self-possession vanished. His saffron pupils contracted, his mouth set, his nostrils drew together. Ferocity was stamped on every line of his features.

"The world is too small, curse it!" he cried; "else how should they have met Foley. The combination is dangerous —I must break it, and without delay. Foley, my friend, you had better have stopped out of Wyresdale. And Mr. Neal Garland, too—but he is useful for the moment. Sakerment, how many flies there are to buzz about such a man as I! Well, they must be crushed, one by one."

He hailed a cab, which swayed under his weight as he mounted into it, and gave the order, "St. Pancras."

At the Midland depot a commissionaire met him with his bag; the German took a ticket, boarded his train, and was whirled Northwards.

It was night when he reached Wyresdale. He left his bag at the station and walked down, under a harvest moon, to the park. Entering by the iron wicket near the tower, he started—his hand had touched something moist and adhesive. Joseph Kraft scanned his finger-tips—they were reddened. The bars of the gate bore clotting smears of a crimson substance—they spattered the wall above and the road outside.

The German pursed his lips and looked about for the continuation of the crimson drops—they stopped suddenly on the earthern kerb. He studied the turf beyond the wicket—there was a distinct trail; he pursued it backwards into the park. *(To be continued.)*

THE STOLEN SKYSCRAPER.

For seven years and a half it remained the most stupendous of mysteries—that perplexing and incredible event which took place on the night of the 28th of June, 1891. Black magic seemed the only possible explanation, and, except those who are Theosophists, we do not believe in black magic any more. I know of two persons, at least, who became violently insane over that night's happenings—or, rather, I suppose their growing madness was precipitated by the event, and in my professional experience I encountered not less than a score of deaths which were indirectly due to the same cause. This is, of course, besides the lives that disappeared utterly with the great office buildings.

The building was known as the "Morrison," and it was the first of the modern iron sky-scrapers to be put up in the South. It stood sixteen stories, or 235 feet high, and occupied a ground space of ninety-seven feet by eighty. It was constructed with a steel skeleton of especial rigidity, covered with the usual shell of brick and terra-cotta, while the first two floors were handsomely finished in stone. Next to it on one side was a paved area, used in connection with a tobacco warehouse; on the other side, and separated by a wide drive, was the Brown Bros. building looking flat and squat beside its towering neighbour. At the rear of the sky-scraper ran a twenty-foot alley.

The erection of the monster was not by any means an operation of pacific industry. Arthur John Morrison, the president of the syndicate which was to put up the building, was well known as an uncompromising and bitter opponent of labour unionism in every form, and it was owing to his influence and assistance that the Cummings lock-out had been persisted in, the year before, to the strikers' discomfiture.

His was a name hated in lodge-rooms, and, as the consequence, the men, while accepting his work, did so with an aggressive spirit of independence, keenly alive for any action that might be constructed into bullying or injustice.

Mr. Morrison had not chosen to let out the work by contract, but was seeing it through himself, and, whether or not he was aware of the feeling among his men, his conduct was certainly not conciliatory. It became known that he was getting his steel girders from the Boekh Iron Co., which was at that time warring with the Amalgamated Brotherhood of Iron and Steel Workers, and a deputation of this order employed upon the building went to remonstrate with him. Mr. Morrison not only refused to listen to what he termed their "dictation," but ordered his foreman to "give these men their time" at once, and to engage others.

This was a declaration of war, and at once every iron-worker, riveter, fitter, and machinist took up his dinner pail and marched home, leaving the half-completed framework looking like an army of dissipated gibbets.

The president not only declined to reinstate the discharged men, but announced his intention of completing his building by the use of "scabs," and in view of the enormity of this conduct, a sympathetic strike was

Hazel Harlow's adventures grow more exciting every week.

ordered by the stone and brick masons and the other unions concerned. Mr. Morrison thereupon instructed his foreman to engage none but non-union labour, and as there was an insufficient supply of this at hand, he imported it from Pennsylvania and New York.

This action aroused the greatest indignation among the strikers and caused a series of small riots which lasted till the completion of the building. On more than one occasion an armed mob attempted to intimidate the imported workmen from landing from the train; one day a high scaffolding fell with three men, and it was rumoured that the ropes had been cut by the strikers. A little later the crowds assumed so threatening an attitude around the big building that the mayor read the riot act and called out half a battalion of military. Happily no lives were lost in the fracas that followed, and the disturbance was smothered though not exactly quieted; but day after day the petty war continued in spite of mayor and police. Under such circumstances the work did not progress with much rapidity, and it was not until the 8th of April, 1891, that the last of the painters and decoraters left the completed building.

To the union men it seemed an additional insult that the building should be called by their enemy's name, but as the "Morrison Building" it was opened on April 24th, and the Bank of Kentucky immediately established its headquarters on the ground floor, offices were quickly let upon the other floors, and though no union elevator man, machinist, or electrician could be induced to work in the building, yet men were found for these posts, and the enterprise seemed to promise every success.

On the night of June 28th. there were many complaints received at the electric light station of defective circuiting and unlighted lamps. Policeman No. 37 passing along his beat in the business portion of the town about one o'clock found that quarter in almost complete darkness.

It was a moonless, cloudy night, and as the officer looked up the unlighted bulk of the Morrison Building could not even be discerned against the black sky. As he approached this edifice, wondering a little at the absence of light, he was suddenly felled by a crashing blow on the back of the head. and he knew no more till he revived in the hospital fifty hours later.

A few minutes after, a sensible tremor of the earth was felt by almost every inhabitant of the city, asleep or awake, and this was instantly followed by a smothered low-toned roar indescribably vast in volume, but dulled as if by distance. The sound was so vague in quality that it was impossible to locate it, but it was so impressive that most persons ascribed it to an earthquake, and many sat up all night in expectation of a second shock. They were certainly justified in their apprehension, for the seismometer at the observatory registered a very considerable vibration.

The few watchmen and night hands, who were almost alone in the down-town city, were most affected by the shock, but the sound appeared so distant that, as no damage was done, none of them went far beyond their doors to investigate in the inky darkness. They supposed it to be an earthquake, since there was absolutely no blast such as must have accompanied a heavy explosion.

But with the earliest dawn the amazing truth stood revealed. The stately building that had towered over the city towered no more. From a distance it might have been supposed that it had collapsed in the night, but it was not so.

An early workman was the first to discover the fact that the Morrison Building was gone bodily, actually spirited away, with not so much as a brick left behind. Where it had stood the ground was level and smooth as the ordinary neglected vacant city lot, strewn with sticks and stones and an occasional rusty tin can.

The man put both hands to his head, in horrid fear that his brain was going. The other buildings stood undisturbed around, the early sun shone clear, a distant clock struck five. Everything was natural and as it should be, except that terribly incomprehensible vacancy.

Two or three other men now appeared on the spot, and they likewise stood petrified with sheer amazement. It is a dreadful thing, and near akin to madness, when you chance upon something that the brain positively refuses to accept in spite of the testimony of the senses. Some approached the spot and poked about cautiously in the air, vaguely fancying that in some mysterious way the building might have become invisible; but there was nothing but thin air.

The excitement of that day was a thing never to be forgotten in the city. All business was suspended, and vast crowds besieged the place, so that a double cordon of ropes and policemen was necessary to keep them back.

The sand-bagged officer had been discovered before this, and no less than five other persons were found in exactly similar condition—all insensible from blows on the skull, and the whole six were found within two hundred yards of each other.

On their recovery not one was able to throw any light on the mystery, and they told an exactly uniform story of having been struck down by an unseen force. Meanwhile the hard-packed clay where the sky-scraper had stood was carefully examined by the municipal authorities and some excavations were undertaken, but there were no traces of even the foundations. The missing building seemed torn out by the roots.

The insurance companies refused to pay policies on the lost building, alleging very plausibly that there was no proof of its destruction, but at the same time the rates of insurance on real estate were raised throughout the city. It was a period of panic for property-holders, and indeed for everyone. The terrible mystery of the whole affair was a thing to prey on the mind, and it was about this time that two women became violently insane unquestionably owing to the prevailing high nervous tension.

A great many persons left the city, and nervous prostration became almost epidemic. A fact afterwards remarked was that the consumption of liquors increased nearly 200 per cent in the week following the disappearance.

Meanwhile the most energetic efforts were being made to solve the mystery. The city offered a reward of 5,000 dollars for the correct explanation, and the Bank of Kentucky, which had lost nearly a quarter of a million in its vanished vaults, supplemented this offer by 10,000 dollars more. Excavations were made to the depth of fifteen or twenty feet where the building had stood without finding the slightest indication that the ground had ever been before disturbed.

Detectives and scientists were equally at a loss. It was suspected that prominent labour chieftains might know something of the secret, but nothing could be gained by this suspicion, for the mode of operation

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could not even be guessed at. The newspapers at last put forward a suggestion that the entire city had been hypnotised by some unknown agency and that the building was really there all the time, and this absurd theory was for some weeks discussed with the greatest seriousness.

At last, and very gradually, the excitement subsided, for the strain was in the truth too great for the public to endure. A gubernatorial election in the fall helped to distract attention, and the mystery never quite recovered its grip. From time to time there have been tentative explanations put forth, but no satisfactory one, and this is almost wonderful since, as I know, there were no less than 350 men in the United States who were in the secret. But that secret remained a secret—up to this day.

Last year I was employed as a volunteer surgeon at the notorious Camp Wykoff, and there I came in contact with a private of volunteers (I do not care to mention the regiment) who was gradually dying of necrosis. He was plainly a man of education and of unusual force—of a rather unscrupulous character, I should judge, but his conversation was interesting, and we came to talk together a good deal. I was able to perform some small services for him, for which he conceived himself under a disproportionate debt of gratitude, and one day he said to me rather drily:

"I can't pay you, doctor, for your kindness, and I can't leave you anything——"

"Don't talk nonsense, Dan!" I said rather brusquely.

"But I can tell you what became of the Morrison Building if you would like to know. I used to see you around the place at that time."

He told me that evening in the great dim hospital tent, where the mingled odours of iodine and tobacco smoke made the hot summer air unbearable.

"I was a workman then in a large labour union," he said, "and I was in the councils of the big chiefs enough to know that they were ready to do almost anything to get even with that man Morrison, and, in fact, we all felt that way. It wasn't the cash in the bank that tempted them, though they didn't let that waste away when it came their way. I don't know who invented the scheme but I believe somebody found out about the cave and they worked it out from that.

"It seems that there is a long cavern running under the place, so that about half the town stands on a shell of earth from thirty to fifty feet thick. This cave is geologically like the Luray Cavern in Virginia and the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky, and it can be entered at a point some miles outside the town. The first I heard of the scheme was when I was ordered from headquarters to hire a hundred of the most reliable union men I knew for secret work at a dollar an hour. Then came a man from New York to show us what to do. We bought an old warehouse a block away from the Morrison Building, and, beginning in the cellar, we tunnelled toward the sky-scraper like a lot of bank robbers.

"I was foreman and had a hundred men under me, but they worked in shifts an hour long, ten men to the shift. We used to cut shafts right down to the top of the cave to drop our dirt out of the way, and it used to make us nervous to see that black gulf down below. But it wasn't long before the union had men working down there too, as we found later.

"In the course of ten days we got under the big structure and our engineers marked out its sides for us. In ten days more we had all the earth under the foundations completely honeycombed with tunnels, so that it seemed as if it must cave in upon us. But the engineers had calculated the strain to a ton, and knew just how far to go. Towards the last we didn't drop the earth through, but stored it up in big cross galleries cut away from under the foundations.

"The shell of earth was, I remember, just about thirty-seven feet thick, the cave below was 270 feet deep, and the building was 235 feet high. Now, while we were tunnelling, a gang of 200 men was working below by the light of great fires. They had heaped a great pile of packed earth forty or fifty feet high, and placed with mathematical exactitude perpendicularly under the position of the building. We could see the light of their fires far, far down in the darkness, when we looked through our dump shafts.

"All was finished by the middle of June; but we waited a couple of weeks for a dark night, and it came on the 28th. We had placed a dozen light charges of rack-a-rock, attached to an electric-light wire, in the tunnels under the big building, and all our men were out of danger and ready for business. We had cut the electric light wires leading to that part of the city, and we had two dozen men with "life-preservers" stationed all round the block instructed to knock down senseless anyone who came near.

"At a little after one we touched it off. There was a very slight explosion, then a dull, rending roar as the giant building broke through its foundation. It was too dark for us to see it; we could only hear the appalling rush of its descent. Yet it seemed to go down slowly, for the sides of the hole were barely large enough to permit its passage, though no doubt our nerves greatly exaggerated the time. Probably it was not more than fifteen seconds before an earthshaking jar announced that it had reached the bed prepared for it at the bottom. In its new position a few feet of its top remained in the bottom of the hole, completely plugging it, while the large chimney reached nearly to the ground level.

"In an instant we were all at work. The big chimney was broken off and the loose earth we had stored was hoisted up with inconceivable rapidity, emptied into the cavity, and packed hard. There were 200 men at work by the light of dark lanterns close to the ground, and with no more noise than a low-toned hum that could not have been heard a hundred yards off. When the hole was filled up and packed down hard we scattered over it a cart-load of rubbish—and the thing was done. It had taken just one hour and thirty-five minutes after firing the shock.

"The strongly-constructed steel frame of the building had prevented it from collapsing, but I heard that it was frightfully twisted and bent. There were three men in it at the time, killed, of course. Half the money found in the bank was divided among us, and the other half went into the fund for the support of strikes. I got £60 as my share.

"After the job was done we got together and took a solemn oath of secrecy, and I believe that it has been faithfully kept till now. All I ask is that you will say nothing till after I am dead. It has been a mystery long enough; it is time that the Morrison gang should learn what was the power that did the thing."

I did not have to wait long, for he died thirteen days later. He gave me no names, and I have revealed none.

Look out for when Hazel Harlow visits your town.

GENTLEMAN PETE.

UNKEMPT—in rags—unutterably wretched.

This was Pete; a vagabond of vagabonds.

In all London none more lost than he, to all sense of personal responsibility and right-doing.

Wretched, did I say? Well, there were times when he seemed and appeared to be as happy as the proverbial sandboy. I venture to think, however, that these moments were rare.

There is not much happiness (of the true sort, I mean) to be found in the gutter, and the gutter it was, that served as Pete's hunting-ground for the article.

His favourite play-place (for he never did work of any kind) was under one or other of the railway arches that span the network of mean streets on the south side of the river. Here would he loaf by the hour together, and generally alone. He was anything but a gregarious child (his age, I fancy, at this particular period was about ten), loving his own society above everything, and giving no encouragement to would-be companions of his own kidney. How he lived was a mystery, though I very much fear that somebody suffered whenever he repleted.

There was a certain big policeman in the neighbourhood (that of the "Elephant and Castle") who knew more about him than a good many.

This man declared it to be his conviction that Pete, though living in a perpetual state of temptation, owing to circumstances, was nevertheless an honest boy—a good boy. This spoke volumes, as coming from a policeman, who, as a rule, are more often than not given to the indulgence of hard thoughts, where such as Pete are concerned.

But that which probably contributed more than anything else, to make the lad a bit of a pet, so to speak, with C 29 was his gentleness, his patient contentedness, his natural good breeding, which, hot or cold, wet weather or fine, always showed to advantage in his dealings (social, not commercial) with people generally.

This was the origin of his nickname, "Gentleman," which was first given him by "C 29." It leaking out, as such things, even the most ordinary, will do, he became, generally, in fact exclusively, known by it in his little circle, both socially and officially. As "Gentleman Pete," therefore, he was, in his little way, a more or less local celebrity.

Pete and his "blue" friend were on such terms that a morning conversation, when "duty" permitted, was the regular thing, and relished, I verily believe, quite as much by one as by the other.

"No, I aint 'ticler 'ungry," said Pete, one wet, cold, miserable morning in November, "leastways not very. Roun' the Boro' Markit, I were, 'afore six. I knows a cove there, a toff as sells things, 'taters, an' greenses, an'—an' turmits—'e guv me a 'doorstep' an' a 'aporth o' tea. I'm orl right." And Pete, to prove his contention, did a "breakdown," with a "cartwheel" as a wind-up.

"Don't look it," remarked C 29 slowly. "Look here, Pete, you just run to No. 1 Smith Street, second turning to the left along the Walworth Road, knock two knocks, and tell my missus I sent you for a bit o' breakfast. Hold hard! I'll put it on a bit o' paper."

The kind-hearted chap wrote a few words on a leaf of his note-book, tore it out, and gave it to Pete, who darted off with it at the "double."

That afternoon, when Constable Jessup went off duty, thoughts of his little friend pressed upon him, to the exclusion of everything else.

It was the same when he sat down to his tea, Mrs. Jessup at length noticing his abstraction, and questioning him as to the cause.

"Can't shake that youngster Pete out of my head," he said, musingly, to his wife in reply to her inquiries. "There seems something wrong about him this last day or two, and, for the life o' me, I can't make it out."

"Pete," said his wife, "is that the boy you sent round here this morning?"

"Yes, that's him."

"Poor little mite. Why, he's all skin-and-bone, Dick. Who, in pity's name, looks after him?"

"Nobody. The street's his home, his mother, and—all he's got."

"Then all I can say is, as it's a sin and a shame as folks as has got tons o' money, and only spends it on their own backs and stummicks, and on making theirselves comfortable, don't do something real good for the poor little street kiddies. I tell you, Dick, I cried my eyes out this morning after the little un' had gone, he did look so dirty, and so as if he wanted a mother!"

"Well," said Dick, "all the talk in the world won't alter things, and selfish gentlefolks 'll go on dancing, and dining, and Monte-Carloing, in spite of all we can say, and in spite of all the little 'uns in London as hasn't a shelter or a rag to cover 'em."

"I'm afraid that's about it," said Mrs. Jessup sorrowfully, "but I do think that if, instead of them giving, as these big people now and again do, so much to libraries, churches, and hospitals, they would take a few of these children in trust for God A'mighty, as gave 'em their money, they'd do more good in six months to make things a little more like 'kingdom come' than ever they will by all the libraries and churches as was ever built!"

"Right you are, Nell," said Dick, "but, meantime, I want to get to the bottom of this mystery of Pete's. P'raps it'll come to me when I'm in bed," and Dick Jessup went to bed accordingly.

His wife by-and-by called out to him, the doors of the two rooms being both half open:

"Dick! I gave the boy that jacket—you know the one I mean—our little Dick's."

"I know—did you?" responded "big" Dick in muffled tones from under the clothes. "I'm glad; it's doing more good than lying idle away there in the drawer."

Dick Jessup and his wife had no children now; the only one, a boy, they had ever had having died when about eight years old, eighteen months before.

It was this which certainly made the lonely mother's heart to be so full of sympathy and tender pity for the little waif whom she had seen that morning for the first time.

She longed to do something for "Gentleman," and when Dick went on duty the next day she set her woman's wit to work to scheme out a plan whereby she could benefit the child.

Shame on you! men and women at ease! Here was a poor, hard-working sister of yours, possessed of about as much "gear" as would serve the majority of you for "scent" and "cigarettes," seeking for some way to do that which you, with all your money and opportunities, never give even a thought to doing. An example to you *now*, depend upon it, she will be a damning witness against you at the great trial of souls!

Next morning C 29 sought the particular arch usually affected by Pete at that hour.

He was not there!

"Rum! he's never hardly missed being here before. I'm getting right down uneasy about it. Well, it's come to something when the likes o' me worrits myself so about the likes o' him. But I can't help it. P'raps he'll turn up later on—we'll see."

But he didn't. "Gentleman Pete," for the time being at any rate, was not to be found.

Then a strange thing happened.

In the afternoon, on his way home from the station, just when he had passed under the railway arch which spans Walworth Road, he was conscious of a touch on his coat, from behind.

Quickly turning, he sees poor "Gentleman"—gasping, white, and, although it was raining hard, and very cold, in his apology for a shirt, with bare feet, and his hair lank and dripping with water.

"Where's your coat?" asked the constable, catching hold of the boy by the shoulder, and speaking a trifle severely. "Where's the coat as my missus give you yesterday?"

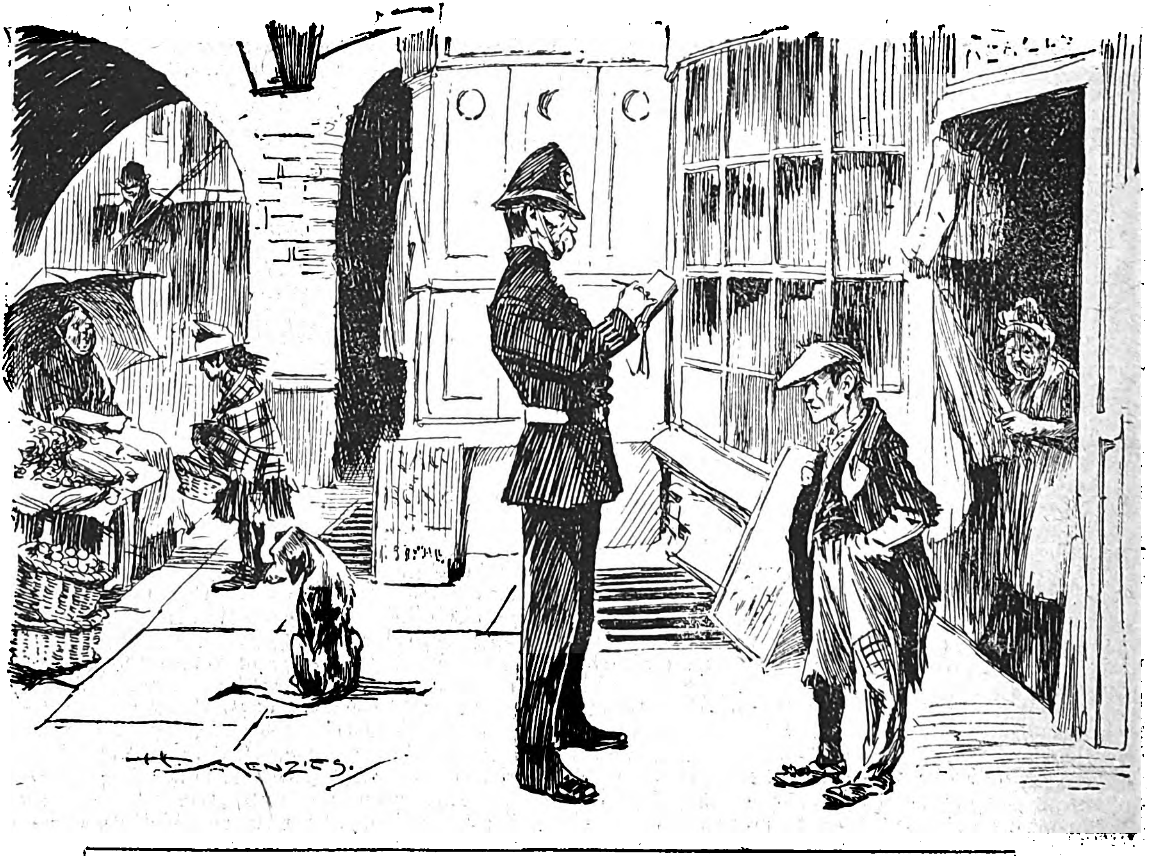
"Please, 'twenty-nine'" (he always called his big friend "twenty-nine"), "they've tuk it away; an' me trotter-cases; an' they'd 'ave tuk my 'britches' if I 'adn't a slipped 'em, an' cut."

"They! Who's they?" asked Dick.

"Pearly Bill an' Sheeny Ike," said Pete, now hardly able to stand from evident exhaustion.

It was then that the good "Samaritan" saw blood issuing from the bosom of the dirty rag which did duty for a shirt.

Without a moment's hesitation, and quite oblivious of the somewhat oppressive curiosity of the growing crowd, the policeman, catching up "Gentleman" in his arms, strode away rapidly in the direction of his own home



The kind-hearted chap wrote a few words on a leaf of his note-book.

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"Here, mother! Here's something for you to do! Put him to bed—little Dick's bed—give him something warm, and when he's tucked in and comfortable, call me."

An hour afterwards, Mrs. Jessup summoned her husband out of the kitchen into the sitting-room, where, in a corner, stood a little cot-bed, never removed since little Dick's death.

"Gentleman's" head lay, with his face a few shade cleaner, on the white pillow, his eyes fixed on the ceiling, and his breath coming in laboured pants.

"Hullo, old chap! what's the matter?" But Mrs. Jessup bid him be careful not to excite the child too much.

"'S that you, 'twenty-nine'?" asked Pete; "why, yer aint got yer 'elmet on, nor yer big coat! Put 'em on!" almost screamed the boy. "Yer'll want 'em, I tells yer! yer'll want 'em!"

"You'd best humour him," said the wife; "go and put 'em on, Dick."

"Well, 'Gentleman,' what is it?" said Dick, when, fully "helmeted" and "coated," he stood again by the bed.

"Now it's orl right! Look a' 'ere, 'twenty-nine,' d'yer want to be a hinspector? Well, do as I tells yer, an' yer'll be one—quick!"

Both husband and wife thought the boy was wandering, but they said nothing.

"Listen!" went on "Gentleman"—but for the gently restraining hand of his nurse he would have raised, or tried to raise himself, up in the bed—"them two I told yer on when yer grabbed me is a'-goin' ter 'do' that big 'ouse on Brixton 'Ill ter-night! You knows the 'ouse—the one as 'as all the red flowers in the winders an' in the gardin'."

"I know," said Dick, now strangely attentive. "Well, 'Gentleman.'"

"Well, they wanted a boy ter go up to the 'ouse an' poison the dorg—that big black 'un. They arstes me; I thought o' you, an' kids 'em I would. Then, like a mug, I drops summat, I couldn't help it, as made 'em wish they 'adn't said nothin'—an'—they bashes me, an' tuk me cloes away, an' locks me up in 'Sheeny's' place. But I done 'em—I done 'em, for I smashes the winder an' bolts—an'—an' tells yer—that's orl!"

White-faced before, he now became deathly—fainted away, in fact.

* * * * *

The rest is a matter of criminal history. When the two night-raiders made their attempt, Constable C 29, with one or two more to help him, received them, and made it impossible for them to disturb the peace of Her Majesty's lieges for some years to come.

* * * * *

The little cot-bed in the front room has a permanent tenant now, for both Dick (a full-blown sergeant for meritorious service rendered at the Brixton Hill burglary and his wife have adopted "Gentleman."

Mrs. Jessup's love for him is wonderful. He seems quite to have taken the place of her lost; though little Dick will, as must needs be, ever have the first place in her heart.

With regard to Dick, I should advise all those who value his good opinion not to speak contemptuously and cruelly of the London street boy, for "I believe," Dick will say, "you know nothing about it, and—I do, for I've had some, and—I likes it."

RALPH ENDERBY.

THE PROFESSOR'S STORY.

I AM a professor—no matter of which special ology. Let it suffice that my wife says I should always confine myself to my profession, as in any other line I am decidedly astray. I confess that I am slightly afflicted with absence of mind, and a proneness to neglect the affairs of everyday life, when I am immersed in deep study. I am, however, occasionally aroused into active interest in the actions of those about me by some of Nature's phenomena.

The whims of the human species, which cause them to do things entirely inconsistent with their general conduct, have always been a subject of scientific consideration with me. I will illustrate my meaning by the following tale, which so plainly proves that a woman is without logic.

Two years ago our coachman and man-of-all-work died, and we found ourselves just at harvest time without a person to conduct the affairs of the stable. I confess I was quite overwhelmed by the mischance, as I had just received an order to write a profound article on jurisprudence, for a scientific magazine, and to set aside the collateral ideas and become a practical groom was somewhat confusing.

My wife told me not to think about anything but my work, and they would manage to get on; but this I felt sure was not to be listened to. I bade the two girls seek assistance from some neighbours, and they did so, but help of the masculine gender was unobtainable. I became very uneasy over the strange situation. The second night after our man's demise I was unable to sleep, as thoughts of the hateful subject obtruded themselves on me. I determined, however, to meet the emergency boldly, and at breakfast I astonished my family by announcing that I would, presently, go to the barn to attend to the requisites of the cattle. I perceived an expression of amusement on the faces of my daughters, and I mentally determined that they thought me incapable of physical labour. I concluded to make them regret their temerity by being very practical. Unfortunately for my resolve, I received some letters while we were at table, among which was an official document from London. It contained valuable data, in the perusal of which I became much interested and am ashamed to say I entirely forgot all about the requirements of the poor animals in the stables.

I was so thoroughly engrossed with the interesting matter in hand, and the collateral ideas it involved,

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that I was oblivious to all surrounding objects, but was somewhat rudely awakened by being seized by the shoulders and shaken violently. Looking up I saw Kitty laughing at me.

Permit me to interpolate here that Kitty is my youngest daughter, and is prone to take more liberties with me than any of my other children. She is very, perhaps abnormally so, quick to learn, but she is very frolicsome, as all young animals should be. I have never had the heart to restrict Kitty in her innocent little foibles; in fact, my wife, in somewhat vulgar vernacular, says:

"You have spoiled Kitty to death."

Many women make these homely figures of speech convey added strength to a sentence. However, as I said, Kitty was laughing heartily, and shaking me as she talked.

"Dad, you are a cruel monster. Do you know it is ten o'clock? I thought that you were going to feed the cattle?"

"Why, my dear," I said with perturbation, "I am so sorry I forgot the poor things. I will make haste to attend to them." She put her little hand on my arm to detain me as I rose.

"Don't worry, you sweet old love; mother, Helen and I watered them and turned them out. You were so absorbed with your papers that we knew you would be liable to put the water in the feed-box, so we did not disturb you; but now you must rouse up and listen to me."

"My dear, I feel terribly self-reproached to think I permitted you and your mother to carry water and—and—feed, while I sat here reading," I began in a deprecatory manner.

"Don't waste time apologising, dad," Kitty interrupted, "we all know you can't help being moony. But listen, there is a man outside who wants to come and work for us; however, he is a stranger, and has no reference. He looks like a person who has seen better days. Mother does not know what to do about hiring him; do try, for once, to be practical, and come out and see him."

"By all means, my dear, by all means," I said, somewhat thrown off my equilibrium by this unexpected turn of affairs. "But first, would you be so kind as to tell me if you see anything of my—er— my eyeglasses?"

The girl's merry laughter floated through the room like a flood of music.

"Oh, you dear, delightful dad!" she said. "Your eyeglasses are on your nose."

Then holding my arm, as if she feared my escape, she led me out on the side veranda, where my wife and Helen stood conversing with a young man, whose personal appearance met with my approbation. He was a fine specimen of youthful vigour. Fully six feet two in height, he must have weighed about one hundred and sixty pounds. His face was smooth, and the features were straight and well shaped. Eyes as blue as an Italian sky looked fearlessly from beneath a cheap hat, which he lifted as I approached, showing his very straight blond hair. I noticed that his hands were brown, but did not look as if he had been reared to do great physical labour. His plain but clean clothing caused me to class him with a reputable farmer's son.

"You—er—I understand you would like to—er—become an—an—assistant of mine?" I asked kindly, not wishing to wound him by using the word servant. His eyes twinkled as he replied:

"I have applied to you for a position as general outdoor servant." I admired his brevity and humility.

"You—er—understand the care of horses, and—er—we have a Jersey cow," I explained. I realised that I was hopelessly out of my depth by the girls' silent laughter.

"I know how to care for animals," he asserted.

"He comes from London," remarked my wife. "I am sure he can do all we require, but he has no references."

"His face is reference enough, my dear," I said, with an assumption of importance I by no means felt.

"We will engage him, but—er—you—er—have not told me your name, young man."

"James McGruger," he stated, looking me straight in the eyes. I approved of that. It appeared honest.

"Well, James, I will show you the stables," I said. "And—er—we might as well go at once." I felt anxious to be back in the library with my papers.

"My dear," said my wife, "you have not said one word about his salary."

"We will arrange about that later," I asserted with dignity; "in the meanwhile, let us see if he can—er—affiliate with his new duties."

My wife gave me a look which told me she felt me incorrigible, and I saw my two girls were convulsed by my innovation from prescribed rules. Even the man had an expression of subdued mirth on his comely face. I thought it best to seem oblivious of this. I suppose I am a little odd at times. I, however, had not wished to humiliate him, as I saw at once he had not always been in this humble position.

I accompanied him to the barn and showed him about, explaining where things were kept as well as I could. I fear I should have come out of the affair in a somewhat ignominious manner if it had not been for Kitty; that girl's faculty for detail is remarkable. She even knew where the curry comb was kept. I saw James stare at her when she showed him where the harness oil was hidden. He evinced surprise, too, when the horses whinnied after her when she left the shed. As Kitty had been rather prone to arrogance, I told her I wished her to be very careful in her mode of speaking to James, as I was sure he had seen better days.

"If you should cause him to feel his menial position he might have recourse to alcoholic liquors, and thus become addicted to the use of stimulating beverages," I said.

"Oh, daddy, why can't you say he might get drunk?" laughingly inquired Kitty, with a happy girl's indifference to a cultivated choice of language. But despite her levity the girl had a very good heart, and she promised to be kind and considerate to our new man. Having attended to these trifles I retired to my study, and was soon immersed in serious work.

Nothing occurred to disturb our tranquility for two days, in fact my wife informed me that the horses had never been so well groomed and the cow gave more milk than usual, over which fact she seemed very jubilant. On the third day I was roused from my labour on a scientific essay on conchology by hearing screams out on the lawn. I hastened forth to ascertain the occasion of the I found my wife and Helen on the veranda watching Kitty who, mounted on her pony, was being carried about the grounds in a most reckless manner. The bridle had broken, and the girl was utterly at the mercy of the savage little beast that I had always been disposed to distrust. While I was standing in a state of

Look out for when Hazel Harlow visits your town.

great perturbation, wondering how I could assist my dear good child, James darted from the barn, and shouting to Kitty to keep her seat, tried to head off the pony, to prevent it from reaching the highway. In some way the ugly brute managed to get the man crowded against the gate-post, then it reared and struck at him with his forepaws. There was a moment of fearful suspense, then James had the creature by the nostrils, and by the exertion of marvellous strength, forced him to the ground. The beast kicked and plunged, and finally made an effort to lie down, at which James told Kitty to jump off, and he fairly held that animal up till she was out of the saddle, and at a safe distance. The man and beast then struggled for supremacy. After a fierce battle the man came off victor. He led the tamed creature up to the veranda and said quietly:

"You can ride him now, miss, he has had enough." Kitty stared at him for a mment.

"How are you, hurt?" she inquired, the first, as usual to perceive that something was wrong. My wife then remarked:

"You are very pale, James; what is the matter?"

"It is nothing," he replied, almost sullenly, "I've just scratched my hand."

"Let me see," commanded Kitty. He hesitated. She went up to him and said softly: "You have just risked your life for me, let me at least sympathise with you."

It seemed to me a very pretty sight, they were both so young and innocent, but I saw my wife shake her head in disapprobation. I did not understand why. Women are so whimsical.

James looked full into Kitty's sympathising face for a moment, then he held out his left hand. A deep, jagged wound had been made on it by the broken bit. We all endeavoured to show our kindly gratitude. My wife tried to alleviate the pain by getting bandages to bind the wound; Kitty and Helen brought lotion by the gallon. I ordered that all labour should be suspended for the day, and asked him if he would like Rollin's "Universal History" to read, as it was the only light book I could think of for the moment.

James got away from us all as soon as he could. When he walked off I noticed that his shoes were broken. I told my wife to give him the money for a new pair when he came for his noonday meal. She did so. After supper she sought me very much troubled. To my surprise and dismay, she said:

"My dear, James is at the door very much intoxicated, and he insists on speaking to you." I hurried outside. There stood James, on the lawn, holding himself up by a tree.

"Sir," he said, "I have come to tell you I must leave to-night."

"Why, James, what have we done to you."

"You have been too good to me."

"I do not understand. Has anyone hurt your feelings? If so it has been unintentionally, for we all like you."

"I ain't worth it," he declared; "you see I am drunk now."

"We will overlook that, my man. We all have faults, and cannot expect perfection in others. You must not go."

"I must," he said. "Oh, you make me feel so mean. You are the best people I have ever seen in my life. Your young ladies speak to me as if I were a prince, and mother—she's been like a mother to me. I never knew there were such women in the world."

Here was a recommendation for us. I felt pleased.

"We like you, James, so stay with us," I said.

"I can't, sir, I can't tell you why, but when I hear them horses whinny after Miss Kitty, I feel choked with thinking. Some day, maybe, you'll know why."

This was all he would say, and he left us that night. About a month later Kitty dashed into my room with a paper.

"Oh, papa," she cried, "read that."

Kitty always insists on having her own way, so with a sigh I pushed aside my documents and took the daily from her hand. She pointed to a paragraph, and I read:

"A well known burglar, named James Lincoln, but known as 'Long James,' was captured last night, with the rest of his gang, as they were *en route* for Liverpool, with a quantity of stolen goods. The leader is a professional, has served three terms in prison, and is one of the hardest specimens of his craft. He has evidently been in a fierce fight lately, as he had a long, jagged wound on his left hand. He will probably be sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment."

"What an escape we have had," I exclaimed.

Kitty burst into tears, saying wildly:

"He was such a handsome fellow, too, and he saved my life."

Meeting my astonished gaze she flew out of the room like a whirlwind. I felt strangely uncomfortable. Kitty was the last person one would have expected to shed tears over a burglar. It seemed to me that we had been standing on the brink of a pit of trouble.

I never felt quite easy about Kitty again until I saw her married to a lawyer dignified enough to protect her from any flightiness. If she had remained single I would not have sought and obtained a pardon for James, as his return to active life again might have been of moment to—well, yes—it might have been of moment to my family, as there is no accounting for the whims of the female sex.

I have proved my hypothesis; women are without logic. They are ruled altogether by emotions of the heart. Kitty proved it by her tears for a burglar.

Let the Editor hear what you think of "Adventures of an Actress."

Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, August 26th. Postcards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Miss Sharpe, c.o. Mr. T. Sharpe, of High Street, Ibstock, Leicester, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

"YOUR son, I hear, is becoming an excellent landscape painter." "He is." "Does he imitate Nature well?" "Imitate Nature! He beats Nature. He can put colours into a landscape that Nature never dreamed of."

*A LADY in the Lake District, having sent an order for a leg of mutton to the butcher who usually supplied the wants of her household, received the following note in reply: "Dear mem, I am sorry I have not killed myself this week, but you can have a leg off my brother."

ETHEL: "When angels come upon earth, mamma, are they in disguise?" Mamma: "Yes, dear; why do you ask?" Ethel: "Because I heard cousin Frank say to papa this morning that you were an angel, and papa said perhaps you were, but that you must be one in disguise."

MISTRESS (to late servant, now married, who has called): "And I hope you are very happy with your husband, Mary?" Mrs. O'Brien (late servant): "Oi am that, ma'am. Whoi, I've been married now close on six months, and in all that toime O'Brien's never been in gaol but twice!"

DURING a dense fog a large river steamer had to cast anchor. A traveller, anxious to go ahead, came to the man at the wheel and asked why they stopped. "Too much fog, can't see the river." "But you can see the stars overhead." "Yes," replied the sailor, "but until the boiler bursts we ain't going that way."

HE was a bad boy, and his father knew it. As soon as he came downstairs in the morning, the poor lad was greeted with a terrific box on the ears. "What's that for?" he cried, "Aw've done nowt wrong yet, have Aw?" "No," answered the father, "but tha soon will be doin', and that's one to be goin' on wi'!"

A YORKSHIRE farmer who had come to London for the first time, was walking along the Strand, filling his pipe, when a boy, selling wax-lights, came up to him with the usual "Lights, sir?" The farmer took a box from the boy, extracted a match, lit his pipe, and handed the box back to the astonished lad, passing on with the remark, "Lor! what a wonnerful place Lunnon is, to be sure!"

A GOOD story is told of the late Lord Chief Justice. One day, while travelling to Scotland, he entered the train at Rugby. There were only four passengers in the carriage, the rest of the seats being occupied by their luggage. Neither attempting to make room for him, he stood up, till at last one began to sulkily shift his luggage, when his lordship blandly remarked, "Pray don't trouble; I am getting out at Scotland."

WIGG: "There is one class of men that whisky never injures." Wagg: "And that is?" Wigg: "The men who leave it alone."

UGLY HUSBAND (snarling): "You married me for better or worse, didn't you?" Wife (hesitatingly): "Yes, but I supposed I would have some variety."

KINGLEY: "Wouldn't you like a copy of my poem on the girl who don't know how to cook?" Binzo: "Thanks, old man, but I've got the original at home."

IT is quite time to call a man absent-minded when, on coming down to breakfast, he kisses the sardine-box and begins operating on his wife's head with the tin-opener.

MISS PRIMROSE: "Don't you give your dog any exercise?" Miss Hollyhock (fondling a fat pug-dog): "Of course; I feed him with chocolates every few minutes just to make him wag his tail."

AUNT NANCY: "Think of the studyin' to be a doctor, eh? Don't you do it." Young Man: "Why not, aunty?" Aunt Nancy: "You can't git no practice till ye git married, and ye can't git married till ye git practice; that's why."

"GOOD morning, Mrs. McCluskey," remarked the neighbour, "you are quite well, I hope?" "Yes, quite well," responded Mrs. McC. "And strong?" "Yes, quite strong." "Then would you mind fetching those two wash-tubs back I lent you some time ago?"

A SMALL boy was detected by a farmer up his apple tree. When he had made the boy come down, the owner began to lecture him on his action. The boy answered him indignantly, "Now, you just count them apples over again before you insinuate that I stole any of them."

HOUSEHOLDER: "I am going to move to the suburbs next Monday, and I'd like you to do the job." Mover: "How many loads?" "I don't know. You moved me once, you may remember." "Yes; I needed three waggons then to get through, but that was some years ago. Have you moved since?" "Yes, indeed, half a dozen times." "Hum! I guess one waggon will carry all you have left."

IT was evening time in one of the London hospitals, and the nurse on duty was giving the little ones their last meal for the day. All, save one, were patiently waiting their turn to be served, the one in question being a little rosy-cheeked convalescent, who was calling lustily for her portion. "Aren't you just a little impatient, Dorothy?" inquired the kindly nurse, with just a tinge of correction in her tone. "No, I'm not!" retorted Dorothy, promptly. "I'm a little she patient!"

TWO Irish labouring bricklayers were working at some houses near Russell Square, and one of them was boasting of the steadiness with which he could carry a load to any height that might be required. The other contested the point, and the conversation ended in a bet that he could not carry him, in his bed, up a ladder to the top of the building. The experiment was made; Pat placed himself in the bed, and his comrade, after a great deal of care and exertion, succeeded in taking him up and bringing him down safely. The loser, without any reflection on the danger he had escaped, observed to the winner, "Well, to be sure, I've lost; but don't you remember about the third storey you made a slip?—I was then in hopes."

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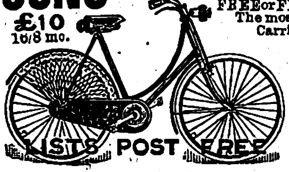

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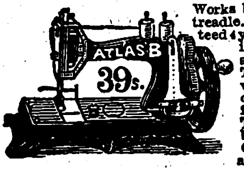

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ONE PENNY

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

With the appearance of the first of the series, "Adventures of an Actress" have "caught on." So much I can tell by the letters I have received from numerous correspondents all over the country. This gives me the more pleasure because I am perfectly convinced that if you like the first story you will be more pleased than ever with those which follow.

The first was, to some extent, necessarily of an introductory kind, while the stories that come after plunge right into the middle of exciting incidents at once. The scene of beautiful Hazel Harlow's adventure in this number is laid at Scarborough. Next week's will find its venue at Newcastle. Readers in these particular towns will be especially interested. Therefore, once more I ask you to kindly recommend these tales to your friends.

⁂

Love, Courtship and Marriage.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

"Doleful Dumps" is eighteen, and very unhappy; do what she may, she never feels happy, and it makes her miserable to see people around her enjoying themselves. She has often tried to have a good time with her sisters, but never succeeds. They are all engaged, but young men seem to give her a wide berth.

No wonder, "Doleful Dumps!" I expect you make everyone miserable who comes near you! I should say your liver is out of order, and you should see a good doctor at once. Go out in the fresh air, walk, bicycle, ride, and take plenty of exercise. Moping never did a girl any good. It is ridiculous to be in the condition you describe at eighteen years of age.

"Army" writes to tell me that she was secretly married by special licence about four months ago. She wants to know if it is right for her to receive money from her husband, and for him to address her as his wife. He says he is coming back soon to take her home, and she is afraid her parents will refuse him. She wants to wear her ring, but does not like to, as she is afraid her fellow workers would suspect that she is married.

Yours is a difficult position, "Army," but I see no reason why you should not receive money from him. He is your husband, although being married secretly makes it difficult for you to realise it. Certainly, he has every right to address you as his wife. I do not see how your parents can refuse to let you go with him, as you certainly are old enough to know your own mind. Why don't you wear your rings on a ribbon round your neck? You will know you are wearing them all the time then, won't you? I hope your marriage will turn out very happily.

You tell me, "A. M. H.," that you are deeply in love with a young Irishman who seems very fond of you, though he has never told you so. You have known him for more than a year, and have been out with him on several occasions, but, although he has been very kind to you, he has never asked you to meet him again, or remarked on what you wear, neither has he ever given you a present. He is twenty-one, and you think it time he thought of a young girl, and you know for a fact that he is not going out with anyone else. There is a young girl who has just come up from the country that he is friendly with, but she does not care for him. You want to know if he is to be your husband, as you have taken to him such a lot more than you have to anyone else.

Well, "A. M. H.," I really do not see how I can tell any more than you can. I do not think, from what you tell me, that you ought to consider he cares for you any more than he does for anyone else, and you can only wait, and time will show whether he is to be anything more than a friend to you. I am glad you like the paper.

Take my advice, "Elinor," and don't rush into marriage without consideration. It is true, as you say, that the old proverb says, "Happy's the wooing that's not long a-doing," and many of those proverbs are very wise; but the circumstances of the present day are different, and it can hardly be considered wise to be "woo'd and married, and a'" in six weeks. If you were relations who had known each other for years, the case might be different; but considering that you did not know him two weeks ago, it is very rash. Postpone it, "Elinor," until you are sure that you know him well enough to be confident that he will prove a suitable partner.

"Trilby" wants to know what she can do to reduce the size of her feet. She is engaged to a young man, and ever since Christmas he has been lame in consequence of her crushing one of his toes while dancing. She adds a postscript to the effect that since the dance he does not seem so fond of her as he was before.

I am afraid you cannot reduce the size of your feet, "Trilby," but you can try and be more careful, can't you? I don't wonder at your lover feeling annoyed, though, of course, it was purely accidental. I hope he will soon be well again.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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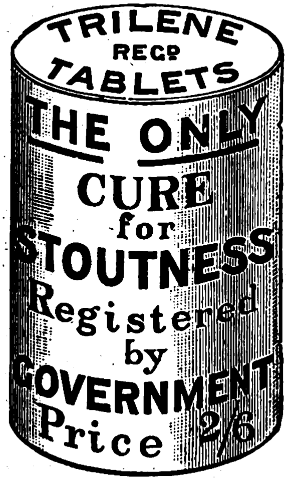

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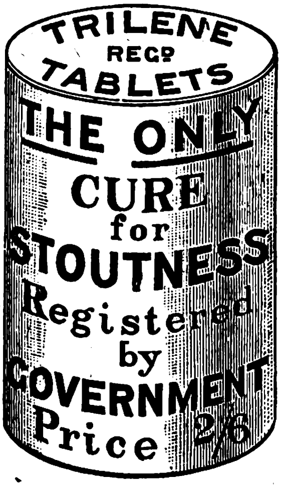

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SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

Mrs. DARNLEV SMITH, Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, writes: "Trilene Tablets have reduced my weight very much. I am so much lighter in every way, and better in health."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.

"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 21lb. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me.

"Yours sincerely, M. A. HEYWOOD."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Risholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mr. WALKER, 236 London Road, Hazelgrove, Stockport, says: "I have used one box and am 14lb. lighter. Send another soon as possible."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. E. ALEXANDER, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They have reduced me quite 2 stone, and I am now quite cured."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Mrs. TAYLOR-ROBINSON, of Tweed Green House, Whalley Range, Manchester, says: "I feel so much lighter and better since taking your Tablets, and am so much thinner that I hardly recognise myself."

Miss A. LONG, of 9 South Parade, Waterford, writes: "Your Tablets have reduced me 14lb."

Miss A. DAWSON, 62 Orchard Street, Weston-super-Mare, says: "Glad to say the Tablets have sufficiently reduced me. I shall always recommend them."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

Mrs. DREW, of 1 Bellevue Gardens, The Nursery, Devizes, writes: "I took Tablets some years ago; they soon reduced me and I have not got stout since. Send me a box for my mother."

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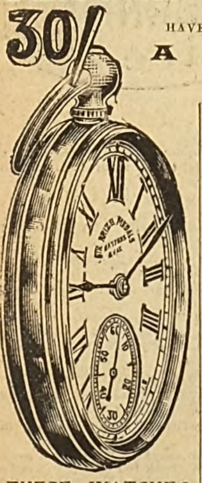

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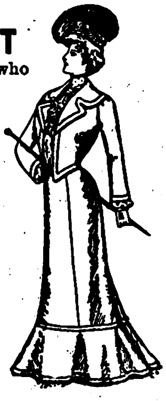

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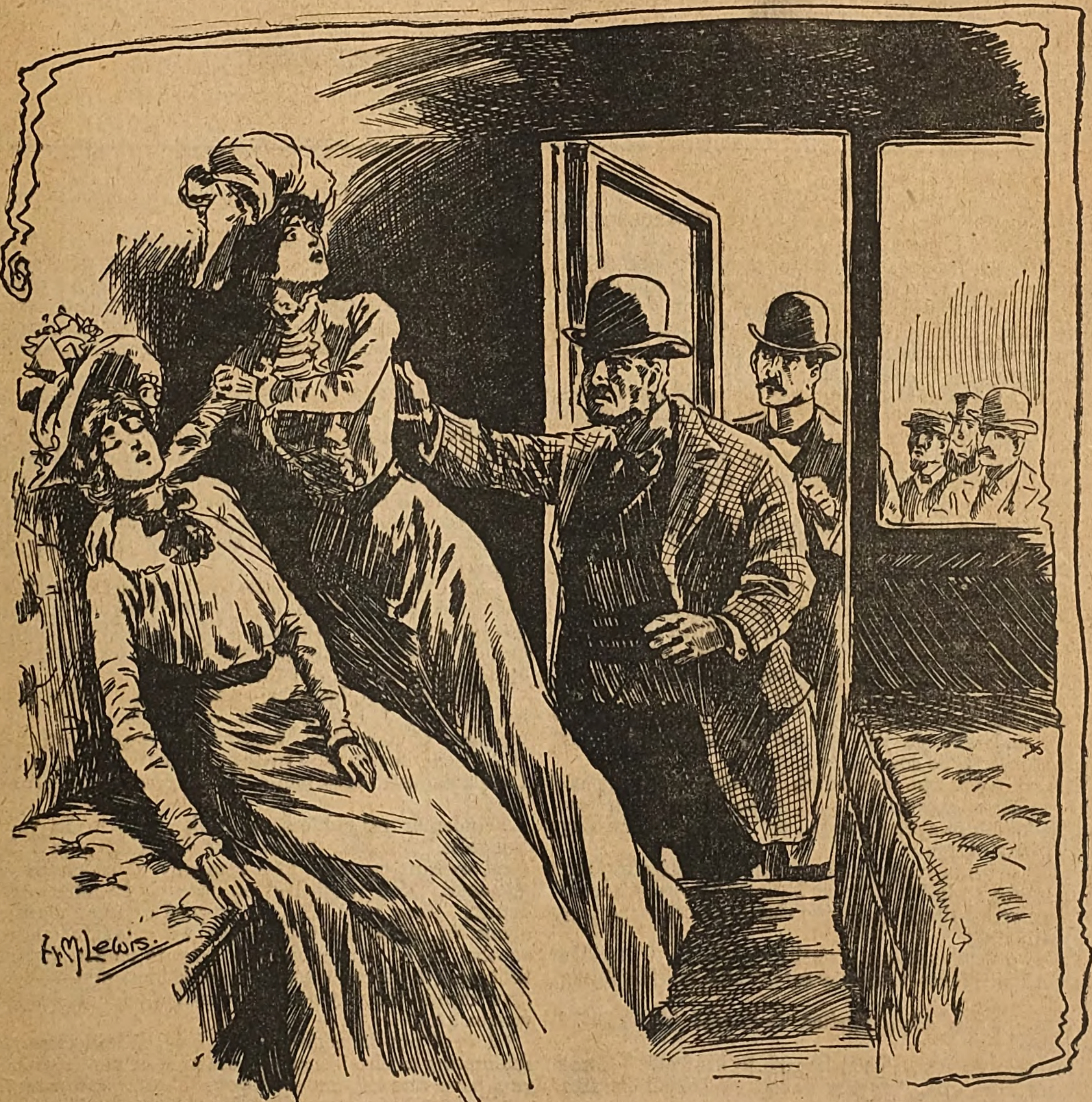

"Help! help!" she cried. "Rescue for Hilda Hatherleigh!"

(See "Adventures of an Actress.")

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STARTLING REVELATIONS OF THE STAGE.

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

IV.—A Baffled Vengeance.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

At a marble-topped table at one of the best restaurants in Sheffield, two men were sitting.

Before each was a stiff tumbler of brandy and water. Both were smoking cigars. Both had the appearance of second or third-rate actors, very much "down on their luck," while in their bloodshot eyes and dissipated unshaven countenances lurked, it would seem, a hundred evil passions.

"And I tell you, Dan," one was saying in a low voice, "I'll get even with Raymond Venables this time, as sure as my name's Stephen Guttridge."

The other took a long pull at the drink before him. "And I'm with you through thick and thin," he answered gutturally.

The fellow called Guttridge leant forward across the little table. "But how are we to start?" he asked. "Have you any plan?"

"*I have!*" suddenly broke in the voice of a third man, sitting, unperceived by the two maudlin conspirators, at a table almost adjoining the one at which they sat.

The effect of a so totally unlooked for interruption was electrifying. The two men swerved round somewhat unsteadily, and gazed at the other.

"Who the dickens are you?" asked Guttridge wrathfully, "and why do you go and thrust yourself into business that is no concern of yours."

The stranger, who was a dark, tall man, with a somewhat sinister expression, and whose right arm was tightly bound in a sling, was in no wise disconcerted by this display of spleen.

"I am someone who can be exceedingly useful to you," he answered; "and as for your business being no concern of mine, well, I think you'll find that it concerns me very closely indeed."

The two men exchanged stealthy glances. Guttridge cast a furtive glance round the *café*, which was fast filling up.

"Have you a down against Raymond Venables?" he muttered.

The other paused. Then he rose to his feet. "Come with me," he said, "to my hotel. We shall be free from interruption there."

The other two rose instantly, and prepared to follow their mysterious new acquaintance. It then became apparent that in addition to his crippled arm the stranger walked with a slight limp, as though suffering from some affection of the right leg.

Few words passed between the trio until the hotel was reached. The stranger then led the way to a private sitting-room, having first of all ordered liquid refreshments to be sent up—a command that evidently agreed entirely with the wishes of the two bibulous conspirators.

When they were alone the stranger bade his guests be seated.

"To whom have I the pleasure of talking?" he said suavely.

Guttridge rose to his feet with a melodramatic gesture, that betokened beyond a doubt a previous theatrical training, and said grandiloquently: "Mr. Daniel Poindexter," indicating his companion with a grand flourish; "Mr. Stephen Guttridge—very much at your service. And to whom have we the honour of addressing ourselves?"

"John Smith," came the cool answer. Guttridge shrugged his shoulders, and by the wink he bestowed on the self-styled member of the powerful "Smith" family, it was evident that he had his own suspicions as to the authenticity of the name.

"And now to business," said Smith. "You asked me whether I had a down on Raymond Venables, manager of the *Good Samaritan* company on tour. Well, I can answer you in the affirmative. Nay, more, I am anxious to give him a fall. I can't speak plainer, can I?"

Poindexter rapped out an oath. "Curse Raymond Venables," he said. "Last year Guttridge and I had good walking-on parts in a company of which he was manager. And he sacked us, because he said we got drunk. More than that, he warned another manager about us, with the result that we couldn't take on another shop. And now he's come to us here in Sheffield, and if we can't get even with him, well——" the man drank thirstily to lend emphasis to his lust for vengeance.

"I see," put in Smith, "you have indeed cause for attempting to give Venables a dressing-down. I suppose you have already matured your plan of campaign?"

"Not yet," answered Guttridge with an assumed air of carelessness; "but——"

"Then if you will put yourselves entirely in my hands," broke in Smith, "I will not only show you how you can get Raymond Venables at your mercy, but also how you will be able to line your pockets at the same time."

Cupidity and re-awakened desire for revenge, fomented by the potations consumed, shone forth from Guttridge's and his comrade's eyes,

"We will follow you to death, if need be," cried Poindexter theatrically.

"Ay, ay," echoed Guttridge.

Smith could hardly restrain himself from bursting out into a loud laugh. The two ex-supers seemed to retain all the flavour of the footlights about their person. Their gestures spoke eloquently of the Adelphi and Drury Lane.

"Then listen carefully," he said. "To-night Raymond Venables, after the performance of his piece, sups with some friends. His lodgings are in East-street, a lonely, unfrequented thoroughfare, of tidy, unpretentious houses. I shall be there at about three a.m., the time when Venables will return. I shall have a vehicle ready. All you will have to do is to lie in wait for him in a doorway, jump out upon him before he has time to shout for help, stun him, and then carry him to my carriage. He will be at our mercy then, beyond recall."

"And you talked about remuneration?" broke in Guttridge eagerly.

"True," answered the other calmly; "but so far you must admit the debt is rather one-sided. If I show you a way how to get the better of your enemy, it is myself who ought to be rewarded."

The faces of the two ex-supers fell. This mysterious Smith had evidently an eye for a bargain.

"Nevertheless," continued Smith, "I will give you £10 apiece, provided that when we have once got Venables in our power you will help me in the furtherance of another little scheme that touches his star, Miss Hilda Hatherleigh!"

"Hilda Hatherleigh," echoed Guttridge in amazement, an expression that was marked as well strongly upon his comrade's face. "Hilda Hatherleigh, the beautiful *ingénue* who has been given the lead in place of Valerie Bellairs! What can you want with her?"

"That is *my* business. All that you need bother yourselves about is whether, for £10 apiece, you are willing to stand in with me, hand and glove. I help you to get hold of Venables, and you help me to get hold of the Hatherleigh. There's no danger. For I've got a plan that will bring the fair Hilda to the net, like a bird, and without any bother at all. Will you accept my offer?"

"We will," the two men cried simultaneously. "You can count on us."

Smith looked closely at his two would-be colleagues in villainy. Could he indeed count upon them? So long as they were not actually hopelessly intoxicated, he believed he could. In their present condition they were just sufficiently primed with "Dutch courage" to make them ready tools. Alcohol was food and drink to them. Under the terrible auspices of brandy these two ex-supers were converted from bombastic cowards into truculent ruffians

And Smith registered a silent vow that not another drop of liquor should cross their lips that night, unaccompanied by food. "Shall we sup?" he said, "then we can discuss with minuteness our plan of campaign." And in this proposition, too, Guttridge and Poindexter found ready acquiescence.

CHAPTER II.

Raymond Venables was in excellent spirits. His supper party had proved most enjoyable, and he was strolling placidly along the deserted streets of Sheffield, smoking a choice cigar, and ruminating over the exceptionally prosperous condition of his exchequer and future prospects.

"That was really a piece of luck at Scarborough," he mused, "when Valerie Bellairs, for some reason or other threw up her engagement and made tracks. I didn't think so at the time. But now that Hazel Harlow has got the lead, why, people buy seats only to see her face. If we go on like this I shall have to make her a good offer to keep her from finding a new and more lucrative shop.

"And she can act, too. Throws herself into it. By Jove! what a beautiful woman she is! If I could only get her to become Mrs. Raymond Venables, why I'd take a theatre in town and run her for all she's worth, which is a good deal.

"Yes, and I love her, too. But she isn't like the ordinary run. There's no stealing a kiss, or taking out to supper, or giving diamonds to Hazel Harlow. She's as straight as she's beautiful, and hang me if I wouldn't give all I'm worth to get her to name the day," from which it will be seen that the manager of *The Good Samaritan* company was about as much in love with his "lead" as it was possible to be.

The rooms that Venables had engaged for his own accommodation had been selected by the manager many years ago on his first visit to the town, and thus he always made a point of securing them whenever business took him to Sheffield.

They were quiet, clean, and above all cheap; for Raymond Venables was ever a man whose first consideration was his pocket.

Without a suspicion of any danger ahead, the manager turned into East Street, his thoughts still fixed upon Hazel Harlow. His hand sought his waistcoat pocket for his latch-key. Suddenly two figures sprang out from the shelter of a doorway. Before Venables could recover from the surprise caused by this unexpected event, one of the men had struck him a heavy blow on the back of the head with a weapon notorious for inflicting a stunning and effective blow—a sandbag.

Venables dropped like a pole-axed bullock. The next instant he was lifted off his feet and borne hastily away, to where a vehicle was drawn up against the kerb.

Without any ceremony the unfortunate manager was driven away through the deserted and dark streets of Sheffield—for it was too early yet for even the first workmen to have set out for the gloomy factories.

The vehicle pulled up at length before a deserted-looking house in a squalid street. The still unconscious manager was lifted out of the conveyance and borne inside the house.

When he recovered consciousness it was to find himself lying upon a pallet, the faint light of the coming dawn striking in through a grimy window above his head. There was only one other occupant of the room, the man "Smith." Of Guttridge and Poindexter there was no trace.

Venables' head ached furiously. "Where am I?" he asked faintly.

"With a friend," answered "Smith" suavely.

Hazel Harlow will be in Newcastle next week.

"Then why was I knocked on the head and brought here?" queried the manager.

"You were certainly knocked on the head," answered "Smith," with ready mendacity, "by a couple of ruffians, from whom I rescued you and brought you here. The accommodation is not of the best, but such as it is you are quite welcome to it."

"But I need trouble you no longer," cried Venables eagerly. "I am deeply grateful to you for having proved my saviour. I cannot trespass upon your hospitality further. Let me return to my own lodgings without delay."

"Smith" held up his hand.

"One moment, sir," he said. "You have been so generous as to rate my services to you as worthy of gratitude. Will you therefore do me a trifling service. As you see, my hand is in a sling, and I cannot write. Will you write a letter for me? I will then see that you reach your lodgings without more ado."

There seemed nothing outrageous in this request, and Venables at once signified his readiness to comply with it. It would be a cheap way out of his dilemma.

"And you will pass me your word as a gentleman not to betray my confidence in you," continued Smith. "I mean, you will not, when you are safe among your friends again, divulge what I shall ask you to write for me?"

"Certainly not," answered Venables.

"Here then is paper. What I want you to write is as follows:

> "Will you accompany the bearer of this note? I am in great distress. It is of the utmost importance to my welfare that you should come in person and alone. Upon your complying with this request hangs, maybe, my life. I cannot explain more.
>
> "R. V."

Venables wrote the note glibly enough until he came to the end. Before adding the two initials he paused, and looked somewhat suspiciously at "Smith." "R. V.," he said. "Why R. V.?"

"Because my name happens to be Ralph Verney," answered "Smith," calmly. "There is no need for you to write my whole name."

Venables was too anxious to escape from his present position to stop to reflect very deeply upon the matter. He had written the note mechanically. His head still ached violently. He only wanted to get away. Hence the irregularities in the proceeding did not touch him very deeply.

"There's your note, then," he said; "and now, sir, may I go? A thousand thanks for your good offices in rescuing me from those footpads. I did not see them distinctly, the scoundrels. One thing, it's quite light now. I shall be able to reach my lodgings without fear of further molestation."

So saying he rose from the pallet that had served for a writing-table, and put his hand in his pocket to assure himself that his latch-key was safe. To his annoyance he found it was gone. A prolonged search failed to reveal it. Ah well, his landlady would be up by the time he got back.

"Smith" accompanied him downstairs. Then for the first time Venables became aware of a fact that he had hitherto disregarded. His rescuer was a well-dressed man, apparently a gentleman. How did he come to be living in that squalid house in a mean Sheffield street? Ah well, it was no business of his. And any how he had escaped from serious injury. It was Shakespeare who said: "There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." With which comforting assurance Raymond Venables made bold to think he could close the incident. Whereas, in reality, it had scarcely begun.

It was nearly seven o'clock when he reached East Street. His landlady's maid-of-all-work was sleepily imparting a show of radiancy to the front door-step as he drew in sight of the house. The girl stared at the actor in amazement.

Venables, annoyed at her vigorous scrutiny, hurried past her and up the narrow stairs that led to his "suite" of rooms, a bed-chamber and parlour connected by a folding-door.

He was by this time thoroughly wearied, as can be well understood, while his head still ached, unpleasantly reminiscent of the "sand-bagging" he had received only a few hours ago.

He had determined to go straight to bed. He opened the door of his sitting-room and entered the apartment with a sigh of relief, that changed to a faint cry of mingled horror and chagrin as he found that even here there was to be no respite from the adventures that the day had ushered in.

Two men, each armed with a pistol, confronted him—unshaven, truculent beings, whose eyes were bloodshot from want of rest and alcohol—whom Raymond Venables instantly recognised as the two theatrical supers whose dismissal he had been instrumental in obtaining the year before.

"What do you two rascals want here?" he began stormily. "I suppose you are the scoundrels who knocked me on the head and stole my latch-key."

"We want revenge, Raymond Venables," answered Guttridge. "You ruined us, we want to ruin you. Don't make a noise, or I shall put a bullet through you."

With all his faults, Venables was no coward. But his heart sank within him as his eye turned first to one and then to the other of his captors. For in their drink-inflamed countenances he read the lust of vengeance. And he was unarmed, and weak from his recent experience. Hopelessly he looked around him with quick, furtive glances, seeking for some loophole of escape.

Guttridge noted his action.

"The first sound that escapes your lips," he said hoarsely, "signs your death-warrant."

CHAPTER III.

It was nine o'clock on the morning of the same day that had opened so inauspiciously for Raymond Venables. Hazel Harlow, or—to give her her stage-name Hilda Hatherleigh, and Jenny Lovelace, sat at breakfast in the lodgings they shared together.

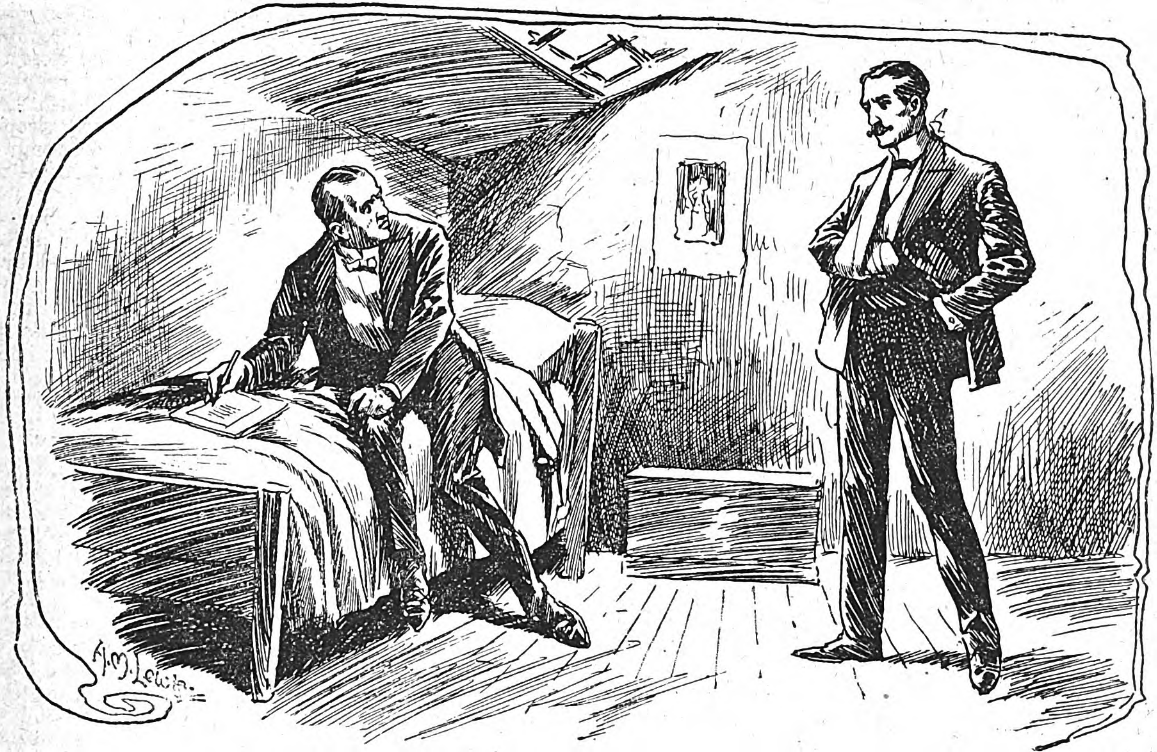
"I tell you what, Hazel," Jenny was saying, "that Mr. Eric Monteith is over head and ears in love with you. He's a nice chap, too. Don't you care for him?"

"Yes," answered Hazel, slowly, "I like him immensely. But I'm not in love with him. And surely no girl ought to marry unless her heart tells her that she has really met her affinity."

Jenny shrugged her shoulders.

"That's all right enough," she said, "and yet there are hundreds of girls in our profession who marry every day without being a bit in love. Why, I know plenty who would marry Raymond Venables to-morrow, if he'd

Hazel Harlow will travel from town to town.



He paused and looked somewhat suspiciously at Smith. "R. V.," he said. "Why R. V.?"

ask them—merely for the chance of getting a part. Yet all the world knows that Master Venables wants to marry his lead, as does every other man who sees her.

Hazel's eyes grew suddenly sad. "It's a terrible thing to be good-looking," she said slowly. "I can't help knowing I am that. To have good looks, and to be upon the stage are synonymous to announcing that you are ready to receive any kind of insult that men care to pay you." Her eyes flashed. "I am going to try and show the world," she said, "that it is possible to be on the stage and still keep oneself unsullied by the world."

Jenny gazed admiringly at her friend. "And I'll stick by you, Hazel," she said fervently.

The conversation then drifted to other topics, the reception of the piece in Sheffield, the prospects of the receipts keeping up.

"I had another proposal last night," said Hazel suddenly, with a smile. "Mr. Clive Pendennis was good enough to offer me his heart and hand."

Jenny burst out laughing. "What an honour!" she cried.

"Yes," answered Hazel, "but I'm slowly getting used to stage methods. It seems to be the correct thing for the men to propose to one in turn. I think they must draw lots as to whose turn is to come next. I expect the property man will be offering himself soon."

At that moment there came a knock at the door, and a maidservant entered with a note upon a salver, which she handed to Hazel.

The note was written in pencil, upon a common piece of notepaper, and enclosed in an envelope upon which was scribbled "Miss Hilda Hatherleigh."

With a growing sense of mystification Hazel read the missive, in the undoubted handwriting of Raymond Venables, which was as follows:

Will you accompany the bearer of this note? I am in great distress. It is of the utmost importance to my welfare that you should come in person and alone. Upon your complying with this request hangs, maybe, my life. I cannot explain more.—R. V.

Hazel read the note through carefully twice. Then she handed it across to Jenny. "What do you make of that?" she said quietly.

Jenny read the few mysterious words as carefully as Hazel had done. "There's no mistaking Venables' handwriting," she said. "I wonder what on earth it means."

Hazel rose to her feet. "Is the bringer of this outside?" she said to the servant.

The maid answered in the affirmative.

"Then tell him I will be ready in a few minutes."

The servant retired.

"You mean to go, Hazel?" cried Jenny.

"I cannot do otherwise than go," came the quiet answer. "Raymond Venables is not the sort of man to write a note like that for nothing. I am absolutely at a loss to understand what has happened. But it is plainly my duty to help him if I can."

"Then I will come with you!"

"But the note says 'come alone.'"

Jenny's face fell. "And supposing something should happen to you?" she said.

"I am not afraid," answered Hazel lightly. "I am anxious to know what can have happened to Mr. Venables. It must be that he has met with an accident that necessitates his sending for someone in whom he trusts. I ought to feel proud that he has chosen me to be the means of helping him out of a difficulty."

Thus spoke Hazel, with all the confiding unsophistication of a pure-hearted girl. Not even the terrible experiences she had undergone since her embarkation upon the troubled sea of theatrical life had been able to destroy her trust in human nature. The plausible would always find a ready prey in Hazel Harlow. Yet it was not folly that prompted her to turn a ready ear to the appeals of those who, for all she knew to the contrary, were the most flagrant charlatans. It was merely a superabundance of the milk of human kindness, that and a total inexperience of the dark places of the world around her.

The bearer of the note from Venables turned out to be a rather seedy-looking individual, about whose person there seemed indefinably to cling a faint flavour of the footlights. It was in fact our old friend Guttridge.

"Has Mr. Venables met with an accident?" asked Hazel.

Guttridge nodded.

"Do you know what he wants me for?"

"I only know I was to bring you the note and wait for an answer," answered the ex-super promptly.

"Then you can take me to Mr. Venables?" went on the girl.

"At once, miss."

It did not seem as if there was anything else to be got out of the man, and Hazel prepared at once to accompany him. The fact that the note was indubitably in Venables' handwriting lulled any initiatory suspicions as to its genuineness to rest.

And so the curiously assorted pair set out together. Yet neither observed that Jenny Lovelace had slipped out of the house after them and was quietly following behind them. "Hazel never thinks of danger," the girl muttered to herself, "and there is something about this I don't quite understand."

In the meanwhile Guttridge led his fair companion along the now crowded streets, and down towards that part of the town that lies above the harbour—a district inhabited for the most part by the poorer classes of dock-labourers. Hazel's wonderment increased as she followed her guide. What business could have brought Raymond Venables to such a neighbourhood?

Suddenly Guttridge came to a halt, and, pausing before the door of a gloomy-looking house, gave a peculiar knock. The door was at once thrown open, and a voice said, "Come in."

Guttridge made a sign for Hazel to enter. Stifling a swift pang of apprehension, the girl obeyed his directions.

A man was standing behind the door, evidently he who had thrown it open. "Will you go upstairs, Miss?" he said. "The first door on the left on the top of the stairs."

Mechanically Hazel began to mount the rickety stairs, her wonderment increasing with every upward step. What on earth could be the meaning of this performance? Nothing but the assurance she had received, in the handwriting of Raymond Venables, could reconcile Hazel to the continuation of an adventure that savoured so much of apparently useless melodrama. And yet she could not believe that there was anything approaching danger in her mysterious mission.

She paused for a moment before opening the door at the top of the stairs. Then curiosity overcame her doubts. She quietly turned the handle, to find herself a moment later in a small, barely furnished apartment, in which was a man, standing with his back towards the door, and with bowed head.

Of Raymond Venables there was no sign. The next instant the door behind her closed sharply. She was alone in the chamber with the unknown man, who wheeled round at the sound of the closing door to disclose the hated personality of Horace Caldecott, *alias* Smith, *alias* Ralph Verney—the one man in all the world whom Hazel had reason to fear and loathe.

For a moment Hazel could not believe the evidence of her own senses. It could not be true. She put her hands to her eyes to shut out the hated apparition. Then she turned to the door and tried to open it. It was locked from the outside.

"Once more!" said Caldecott in a low voice; "once more we meet face to face, sweet Hazel. You didn't think to find me in Sheffield. It just shows you what love can do. How quietly you walked into the trap. And now I've got you I don't mean to let you go as I did before."

A low moan came from the girl's lips. This, then, was the meaning of Raymond Venables' note. It had been prompted by Caldecott. How? Surely the manager was not so great a villain as to seek the ruin of the girl he had pretended to love.

Yet, in the face of existing circumstances, all speculation as to Venables' complicity in the affair was useless. The fact that remained poignantly, horribly obvious, was that she, Hazel Harlow, was in the clutches of as unprincipled a villain as had ever laid siege to the heart of a pure and innocent maiden.

"By a foul plot you have lured me here, Mr. Caldecott," the girl said bravely, "even as on a former occasion you tried to entrap me. Yet what can you do? You must know that I can never care for you, indeed I despise you more thoroughly than I do anyone else in the world——"

"Enough," broke in Caldecott roughly. "You should know sufficient of me by this time, to understand that I have made up my mind to possess you, and keep my word I will. Fair means failed, there were only foul ones left. And now I'll tell you what I am going to do. Either you marry me at once, or I take you straight back to Harlow Farm and your father. It will be the same thing in the end anyhow. For your father's only desire is for you to become Mrs. Caldecott, and reign at the Hall. Consent to come with me quietly, to throw up this absurd idea of going on with a stage life, and you shall have my word of honour as a gentleman to be unmolested further. Think, Hazel, what I offer you—a life of ease, with everything that money can offer you, in exchange for the hardships that must be yours if you persist in a theatrical career."

Hazel Harlow is in Sheffield this week.

"You need say no more," broke in Hazel. "I had sooner starve in the streets than be your wife, Mr. Caldecott."

The girl's unflinching demeanour and decisively-worded answer, roused a veritable demon of baffled rage and passion in Caldecott's breast. With an oath he sprang forward and drew forth from his pocket a handkerchief—he no longer wore his arm in a sling, it had evidently been a blind to enable him to procure Venables' assistance, as we have seen—into which, with amazing rapidity, he emptied the contents of a small phial.

Before Hazel had had time to realise his purpose, before the scream of terror that rose to her lips could become articulate, the sickening odour of chloroform filled her nostrils. The next moment she had fallen forward into her captor's arms, insensible.

In the meanwhile, Jenny Lovelace had succeeded in following Hazel and Guttridge to the house where the event narrated above, had been enacted. The girl, determined on following Hazel's movements closely, had taken up a position at the end of the street, from whence she could keep an eye upon the building that held Hazel and the mystery surrounding Raymond Venables.

For some time the girl watched without her vigilance being in any way rewarded. Suddenly the door of the house opened and a man issued forth—the same man that had brought Venables' note to Hazel. He hurried away, evidently intent on some errand. Jenny vacillated. Should she follow him, or remain where she was. She decided on the latter course of action.

Five minutes passed away. Then suddenly the sound of carriage wheels echoed along the dingy street. The next moment a cab drew up opposite the door of the house that contained Hazel Harlow and what else Jenny could only conjecture.

But conjecture soon gave way to certainty. The man who alighted from the vehicle to re-enter the house was he that had left it only a short time previously—Guttridge, in fact—though Jenny did not know his name.

In a few moments the house door opened again. Three men appeared, two of them bearing the figure of a girl, whom one horrified glance assured Jenny to be Hazel herself, and insensible. Of Venables there was no sign. The inert body was deposited inside the cab.

One of the three men, evidently a person of more importance than Guttridge and his colleague, entered the vehicle. The next moment the cabman had whipped up his horse, and Jenny realised that Hazel must have been the victim of foul play.

Jenny's agony of mind can be well imagined. She was torn between two courses—the one to go as fast as possible for aid, the other to keep the cab containing Hazel and the unknown abductor in view.

She came to the conclusion that the last course of action would after all be the best. Were she once to lose sight of the vehicle, of what use would it be for her to endeavour to effect a rescue? Sheffield was a big place, and Jenny had but a cursory knowledge of the town. She would have, therefore, to trust to the actual testimony of her own eyes as a guide to the identification of Hazel's unknown destination.

Luckily for Jenny the cab-horse that drew the vehicle she was following had long passed its prime. Its best attempt at a gallop was but a sorry jog-trot, so that the young actress had but little difficulty in keeping her quarry in view

It soon became evident that the destination of the cab lay towards the railway station. Jenny's mystification and fear began to deepen. What *could* be the motive of the unknown man who had so callously carried away the star of the travelling company?

Yet she registered a silent oath that she would at all costs keep her quarry in view. Upon her, weak woman that she was, hung, for all she knew to the contrary, Hazel Harlow's very life itself.

CHAPTER IV.

"Have you taken up Mr. Venables' lunch, yet?"

It was nearly one o'clock. The actor-manager's landlady was addressing her small domestic, who looked up with a scared face and at last said:

"Mr. Venables came back at about seven o'clock. An hour or so later two gentlemen came out of 'is room. I haven't seen 'im since."

The landlady stared in blankest amazement at her diminutive help.

"Do you mean to say that Mr. Venables didn't come back till seven o'clock this morning?" she cried. "And whatever d'ye mean about two gents, a-coming out of his room at eight. You must be dreaming."

The maid, realising that she had kept her tit-bits of information too long, began to whimper.

"Sr'help me, it's true!" she said.

The landlady treated her to a withering stare and hurried upstairs to Venables' apartment and knocked vigorously at the door. No answer was vouchsafed. She tried the door. It was locked. Again she knocked, her growing anxiety as to her lodger's safety lending vigour to her knuckles. "Sposin' he's ill," she murmured.

Silence still rewarded her summons. She hurried downstairs and sought out her husband. "Coppock," she said, "come up to Mr. Venables' room and see if you can open the door. I've scraped all the skin off my knuckles, and I can't make him hear. Something must be the matter."

Thus adjured, Captain Coppock, of the mercantile marine, rose to his full height of five foot five and followed his wife with all the pompous roll his short legs could assume.

Following his wife's commands, he proceeded to pound vigorously at the door of the lodger's chamber, accompanying the manual exercise with a fine display of nautical "Yo ho, there's" and other seamanlike expressions. Yet his efforts were no more attended with success than his wife's had been.

"He's either blind to the world or in Davy Jones' locker," said the seaman conclusively.

Mrs. Coppock gave vent to a faint scream. "Not dead, Nathaniel!" she gasped. "We must break the door open."

The gallant seaman rolled up his sleeves, drew back a few paces, and with a fine disregard of consequences hurled himself, shoulder first, at the door. The sound of splintering woodwork was followed by the unceremonious entrance into the room of the human battering-ram, as the door, its lock burst asunder, flew open.

The sight that awaited the captain and his wife, while it proved conclusively the justification of their course of action, was so startling in its entire unexpectedness, that it literally took their breath away and left them standing

Hazel Harlow will be in Newcastle next week.

speechless and incapable of action side by side in their lodger's room.

Upon the bed lay Raymond Venables, like a trussed fowl. An improvised gag was in his mouth. The sheets and blankets of his bed had been used as thongs to bind him to the couch itself. No wonder that he had been unable to answer his landlady's summons.

Captain Coppock came to his senses first. He strode forward, and, with quick, dexterous fingers, began to unbind the knots that cut so cruelly into Venables' flesh. In a few minutes the prisoner was free.

For a few moments the actor was so cramped he could only sit still and try to induce renewed feelings of life into his limbs. Then he found his tongue.

"I have been the victim of a base plot," he said vindictively. "I got back here at about seven o'clock to find that my latch-key had been stolen and two men had got got into my room here. They threatened to kill me, and finally bound me up like this."

"Well, I'm blowed!" ejaculated Captain Coppock.

"Well, to be sure," echoed his better half, more faintly astonished. The recent apparent incoherence of her youthful domestic became more obvious. If only the girl had given voice to what she had seen before so long an interval had elapsed.

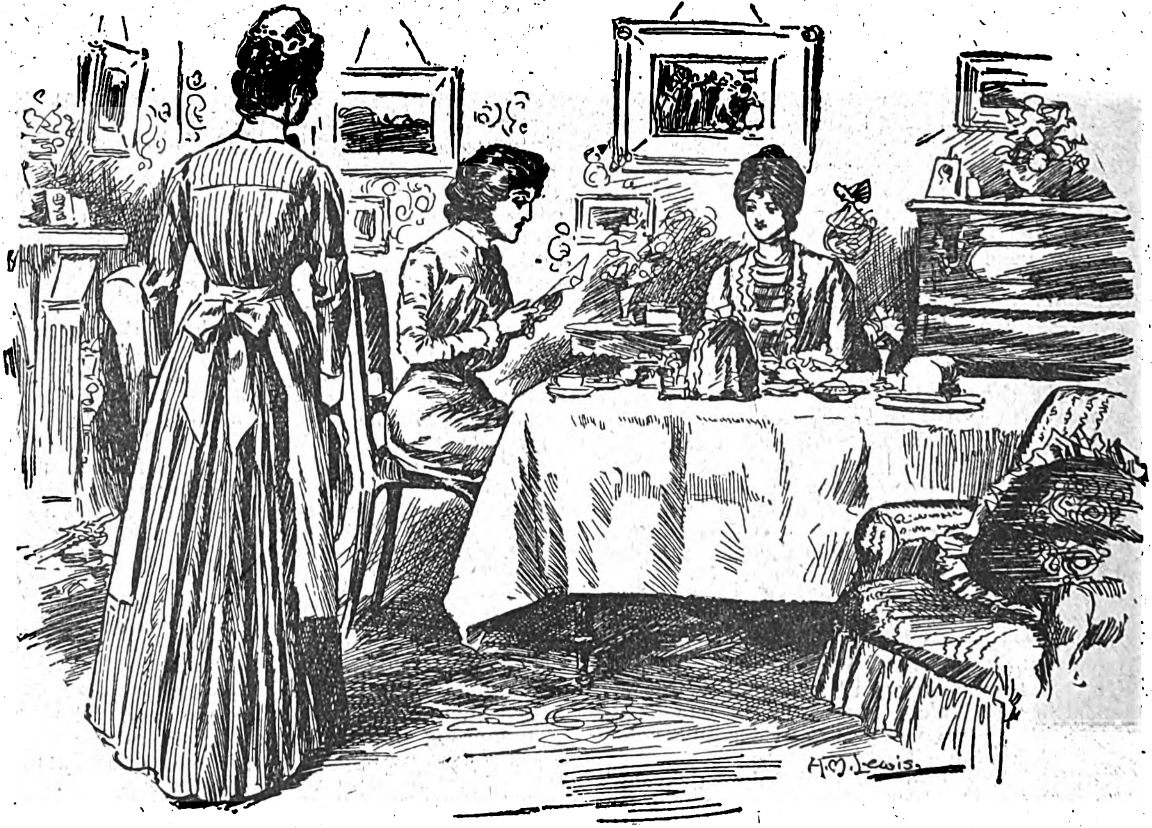
Smarting as he was, both from a sense of injured dignity and physical pain, Raymond Venables felt that he could not bear to remain under the commiserating eyes of his landlady and her husband, neither did he care to take them further into his confidence and relate the whole history of his adventures since his supper-party of the night before.

For nearly four hours he had lain helpless on his bed. He determined to go out and obtain some lunch, and then pay a call on Hazel. Little did he dream how intimately was his own recent adventure bound up with the fate of his leading lady.

He ate but a poor lunch. The appearance of the two ex-supers, and the revenge they had taken, coupled with the mysterious connection of the man "Ralph Verney" with the affair, were events each one of which was surely sufficient to account for the manager's loss of appetite.

As regards the hasty penning of the note for "Verney," Venables was beginning to think that he had been more anxious to buy his freedom, at any cost, than prudence really dictated. Supposing that the note covered some sinister design on the part of the stranger. "Confound it," said Raymond Venables, "I've never had a more uncomfortable day in my life before."

He left the restaurant and hurried round to Hazel's lodgings. Just as he reached the house a man came down the few steps that led up to the front door.



With a growing sense of mystification, Hazel read the missive.

Hazel Harlow will travel from town to town.

"Mr. Eric Monteith," muttered the manager, "the man that was always dangling after Hazel at Scarborough. I wonder what he's after."

No sooner did Monteith's eyes light upon Venables' figure than the young man hastened up to the manager.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Venables," he said, "can you tell me where Miss Harlow is?"

The manager answered rather stiffly.

"No, Mr. Monteith," he said, "I cannot," and would have passed on, but the other stopped him.

"Wait a moment, Mr. Venables," he said, "I think this is in your handwriting," and he thrust the note the actor had written that morning for the pseudo Ralph Verney, the note which had led Hazel into so serious a predicament.

Venables went white to the lips.

"In heaven's name," he gasped, "where did you find that?"

"On Miss Harlow's sitting-room table."

"On Miss Harlow's table!" echoed the other faintly, the sweat standing out on his forehead in great beads, "Then there's foul play somewhere!"

"Foul play! What d'ye mean?"

Eric spoke roughly, but Venables was in no state of mind to resent his tone.

"I can't tell you the story in the street," he answered. "Come inside Miss Harlow's room, and I'll tell you every thing I know."

And in a few moments the two men were seated in Hazel's sitting-room, and Eric grew sick with horror as he listened to the story we know already, and in which he could see, with fatal distinctness, the hand of the villain, Horace Caldecott. Once before he had tried a fall with Caldecott, and had come off victorious. But this time the scoundrel had stolen a march upon him. He gnashed his teeth together in impotent fury and agony of mind. And Venables, as he watched his hearer's face, realised that the careless desire for freedom that had made him write the fatal note, had perhaps cost him not only his leading lady, but his honour and all hopes of making Hazel his wife as well. Could nothing be done to bring the scoundrel Caldecott to book?

CHAPTER V.

Horace Caldecott sat, white-faced and sullen, in one corner of the vehicle he had chartered to bear away the unconscious Hazel to her fate.

As the cab rolled slowly onward, and as the girl began to show no signs of returning consciousness, his exultation in the fact that he at last held her in his power began to be tempered with feelings of apprehension.

He had no desire for her to regain consciousness until they were on the train that would bear them away from Sheffield towards London. And yet supposing that he had been too liberal with the use of the chloroform! How still she lay! Yet how beautiful she was. Caldecott's black eyes gloated on every line of her white face, every curve of her glorious figure. "By heaven, but I won't lose her now," he muttered hoarsely. "I'd sell my soul for her."

But he had little time for sentiment just then. The cab had turned into the station enclosure and pulled up with a jerk. In a moment Caldecott had opened the cab-door and leapt outside.

"I'll be back in a minute," he said to the Jehu, "my wife's still unconscious. I will go and get our tickets and some brandy. If she doesn't recover I shall have to get someone to help me get her into the train. Just keep your eye on her. And cabby"—the villain's voice sank to a confidential whisper—"it's as well to warn you that if she does come to herself she may be violent, and say all sorts of extravagant things. You must keep her quiet somehow. I'll square with you when I come back."

The cabman touched his hat. He supposed it was merely a repetition of a story that was too painfully common, a young wife addicted to drink, and a husband who had to bear the brunt of the sad state of affairs. Ah, well, it was no business of his. There was no fear of the girl coming round as the husband had suggested. She was evidently dead drunk.

Thus musing, he gathered up his reins and sat motionless on his box, awaiting Caldecott's return.

The latter hurried away to the booking-office and bought two first-class tickets to London. There was a train due out in about ten minutes. Once get Hazel safely aboard and he felt he could snap his fingers in the face of any chance of losing her. "There's no Mr. Eric Monteith on the spot now to come to spoil sport," he muttered to himself. "You're mine now, Hazel. Ay, and will be body and soul ere long," and the fierce light of a devilish passion burnt in his eyes.

Not five minutes had elapsed from the time when he had left the cab, and all his business was concluded. Nothing now remained but to get Hazel on to the train with as little fuss as possible. It would merely be a case of "palm-oil," that, and a continuance of the glib plausibilities at which Horace Caldecott was such an adept.

He retraced his steps to the vehicle. The man was quietly seated on the box. Everything seemed as he had left it. Caldecott's heart began to beat with quicker pulsations in anticipation of the triumph in store, the triumph over Hazel Harlow and the loathing she bore him. For Caldecott's passion had made him blind. He saw no obstacles in the path of his desires, he saw only the goal ahead, the end he had longed for so ardently, with all the baseness of a soul already depraved and hardened beyond belief.

He opened the door of the cab. The next instant he had staggered back as though struck in the face by a whip. "I must be dreaming," he murmured hoarsely. *For there were two women in the cab!* The one was beyond doubt Hazel, and just as he had left her, still white, mute, and unconscious, the other was a small, dark-featured woman, pretty in a way, whose right arm was round Hazel, and whose bosom pillowed the beautiful head of Caldecott's victim.

It was no dream. Caldecott realised that in a moment. He thrust his head inside the cab. "Woman!" he muttered hoarsely, "how dare you intrude thus upon my wife's privacy? Leave the cab this instant, or I summon the police."

"Your wife!" answered the girl, in whom my readers will doubtless recognise the intrepid Jenny. "Your wife!" and the scorn in her voice lashed the man's understanding. "Villain! Abductor! Do you think you can carry off Hilda Hatherleigh, the idol of Sheffield, so easily? Why, I followed you. I slipped inside the cab while you were gone, and now, unless you take to your heels, I will scream for help. And then you will be lynched!"

There was something in the girl's voice that made

Caldecott realise that she meant every word she had said. A murderous light sprang up in his eyes. Baffled rage and lust fought for mastery in his voice, as he said almost incoherently: "Get out of the cab. I'll kill you if you don't get out, I say!"

The commotion had by this time aroused the attention of the lethargic driver of the cab, who clambered off his box, and, with great astonishment visible on his countenance, came to Caldecott's side just to hear the latter's last remark.

"What's up?" he said. "Has she turned obstreperous?"

Caldecott looked fixedly at the man. He determined on making one last effort to get rid of Hazel's unknown champion.

"There's a fool of a woman who says my wife's not drunk," he whispered rapidly. "She's got inside the cab. I'll give you a hundred pounds if you'll get her out. My train goes in a few minutes. I must catch it. A hundred pounds, I say!"

The cabman rapped out an oath. A hundred pounds was a lot of money. And if— He tore open the cab door, and prepared to pull Jenny out by main force. But he had reckoned without his host.

Jenny determined on playing her trump card. Flinging her arms tightly round Hazel, she gave vent to a scream that rang out with startling distinctness. "Help Help!" she yelled. "Rescue for Hilda Hatherleigh!"

For a moment Caldecott stood petrified with amazement. Then his astonishment gave way to fear. He knew that the scales had turned against him now. He had played his stake and lost—lost through the cursed interference of a chit of a girl.

He gave one swift glance around him. From every side people hurried up, drawn to the spot by Jenny's frenzied screams—porters, passengers, policemen, pedestrians passing outside the station, all dashed towards the unexpected centre of attraction, the harmless-looking cab inside the station precincts.

The next moment Caldecott took to his heels. Fear lent him wings. The London train was moving out of the station as he raced down the platform. He flung open a carriage door and tumbled pell-mell inside. To his intense relief it was empty. He was safe from pursuit now.

Safe from pursuit! This then was the end of the scheme he had elaborated so carefully. For the third time he had been foiled in his attempt to abduct Hazel Harlow. In vain the subtle use he had made of the two ex-supers and their childish desire for revenge against Raymond Venables; in vain the cunning way in which he had coerced the manager to be the unconscious tool for Hazel's abduction; in vain the further details of the vile plot he had nursed so carefully towards completion.

And now he was further away from Hazel than ever. Yet that very fact made him wish to possess her all the more. "I'll have her yet," he muttered, as pale and savage-eyed, he sat in the corner of the carriage. "I'll have her yet!"

* * * * *

"What is to be done?" cried Raymond Venables, half beside himself. "What can I do to retrieve the hideous blunder of which I have been guilty? Why, Mr. Monteith, I'd give my soul to be able to save Hazel Harlow."

Eric did not answer for a minute or so. Such wild expressions of sentiment, coming from the lips of the man who had, unwittingly, yet surely betrayed Hazel into the hands of her enemy, were distasteful in the extreme to his quiet steadfast nature.

"We must communicate with the police," he said at last. "I don't see what else we can do. Every hole and corner of Sheffield must be ransacked. Huge rewards must be offered. It's terrible to think how much precious time has been wasted."

At that moment an interruption occurred. The noise as of a vehicle drawing up outside the door, accompanied by the sound as of a great concourse of people following after it fell on the ears of the two men. They rushed to the window which was open. A strange sight awaited them.

A cab, drawn by a miserably thin horse, had stopped at the door. Following the vehicle was a crowd of men and women that seemed to fill the narrow street.

The next moment the cab door opened. A girl got out, supporting on her arm another female figure. A dozen or so of the bystanders thronged round this couple, all evidently anxious only to offer assistance.

One glance told Eric and his comrade who the two girls were.

"Hazel Harlow and Jenny Lovelace!" cried Venables.

And thus was Hazel Harlow brought back to her friends, in triumph like a Queen.

CHAPTER VI.

The theatre was packed to suffocation that night.

The story of "Hilda Hatherleigh's" attempted abduction, and the dramatic way in which she had been rescued by Miss Lovelace, had got about all over Sheffield. Everyone was anxious to convey to the beautiful young actress genuine and hearty expressions of congratulations for her escape.

Before the rise of the curtain, Raymond Venables went in front. A roar of applause greeted the manager's appearance in front of the footlights.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said. "I have come here before the commencement of our play as the mouthpiece of Miss Hilda Hatherleigh. I regret to say that Miss Hatherleigh will be unable to appear in her *role* to-night, as she is suffering from a severe nervous shock due to the terrible experience she has gone through to-day, and has been expressly forbidden by medical orders from acting to-night. She hopes that you will forgive her non-appearance, and thanks you most heartily for the generous way in which you have shown sympathy for her accident." With which Venables gracefully withdrew.

The disappointment of the audience at the non-appearance of the new and beautiful star was tempered somewhat by the fact that Jenny Lovelace, whose name had figured largely in everyone's mouth that evening, appeared as usual. The young girl received a tremendous ovation, which, if anyone deserved she assuredly did, for she had behaved with wonderful bravery and presence of mind.

[The next place on the tour list of *The Good Samaritan* company was Newcastle. Here Hazel Harlow was to encounter an adventure of a quite different calibre to the one related in this issue of Short Stories; but one that was to be scarcely less terrible in its danger to her existence as an actress.]

Hazel Harlow is in Sheffield this week.

A Mercenary Motive.

ARTHUR LESLIE laid on the table the new Society paper at which he had been glancing, and stared thoughtfully at the opposite end of his comfortably-furnished study. He remained so long in that attitude that his cigar went out, and the wind passing gently through the open window scattered the written sheets of foolscap one by one over the floor.

Leslie did not purchase Society weeklies as a rule, and it would have puzzled all his friends to understand why he descended to such a frivolity on the present occasion. Leslie would have been equally at a loss to give any other answer than his favourite one of "fate."

He had only read one paragraph—that which gave a few details about a grand reception in Piccadilly; in it he had read about the beautiful Lady Carstone, together with some observations by the writer on the surprising fact that the lovely and comparatively youthful widow should remain in her present position when she might have half a dozen titled and desirable bachelors or widowers for the asking—or, as the writer remarked with an attempt at wit, "for merely permitting herself to be asked."

It was this paragraph which had brought on Leslie's meditative mood. It was not his wish to go back over the past. It was an integral part of his creed not to sorrow over that which is dead; but he could not help himself this time, for memory proved stronger than will.

Arthur Leslie, F.R.S., etc., although only thirty-five, had earned a great reputation in the world of science as an electrical expert. He had been one of the few men keen enough to recognise in the early days of the science that electricity was the power of the future. He had devoted himself to it, and by dint of hard work had gained his present position. He was known among his friends as a grave, matter-of-fact scientist, quite above the smaller things of life, and almost entirely devoid of humour. No one had ever seen him laugh; and although in his lectures there was an occasional witticism it was far more akin to sarcasm than humour. Had those friends been able to follow Leslie's present thoughts they would have found in it an explanation of his hardness.

His mind carried him back twelve years, when he was struggling to earn a living in an office during the day, and working hard during every spare moment and far into the night at his favourite study—electricity—and at the other subjects necessary to pass an examination at London University. He had already attracted some attention by his contributions on electrical appliances in technical journals, but the object of his ambition seemed well nigh unattainable, and in moments of discouragement he felt inclined to give up entirely, and resign himself to the life of a clerk in a commercial firm.

Then came to Arthur Leslie a period which comes to most men who try to rise in life—a period of intense discouragement, when everything goes wrong, or seems to, and when the very sight of favourite books or tools makes him feel sick. At that moment it requires but another straw of failure to send a man wrong for ever; at that moment he is ready to clutch at anything to save himself.

It was when Arthur Leslie had reached this stage that he was brought into contact with Mr. Stevens and his daughter Marian.

At the urgent request of a friend, who gave him a ticket, he attended a conversazione at one of the learned societies. He was standing listlessly in a corner, gazing, with feelings of bitterness, at the apparently happy people who thronged the hall, "Come with me, quick!"

He was hurried towards a gentleman whom he knew to be an authority on electrical engineering, who, after a few words of introduction and greeting, told Leslie that he wished to introduce him to someone who wished to make his acquaintance and might help him in return. A moment later, the wondering young man was shaking hands with a gentleman about fifty years of age.

"I have read several of your contributions to the electrical papers, Mr. Leslie," said the gentleman, "and I was much pleased with them. I made enquiry this evening in order to find out if you were here; hence our meeting. I think you can help me."

Leslie was more astonished than ever. He had been told that the stranger might help him.

"I am an amateur in electricity—which means that I study it and work at it for amusement," said the gentleman apologetically. "I am trying to perfect an idea for a new dynamo; if I can realise my idea I shall revolutionise electrical engineering. Now, there was a passage in your last article which struck me very forcibly, and it leads me to think that if we joined hands we can complete the invention. I am rich, and willing to pay for the help you give me; but of course the invention is mine, and the new dynamo will bear my name."

Leslie uttered a few half audible words, and Mr. Stevens continued:

"Come to my house and have lunch with me to-morrow, then we can talk quietly."

This was Leslie's chance. He was not perfect; and he resolved to cling to Mr. Stevens like a parasite and without scruple in order to lift himself from his present position.

Leslie accepted the invitation, and at the table he met Marian.

Although they were unable to accomplish the desired object, the two men evolved other ideas, and Leslie visited Mr. Stevens at least once a week. The greater part of the time occupied by his visit was spent in the study or laboratory with Mr. Stevens, but he never failed to have

Hazel Harlow will be in Newcastle next week.

a few minutes with Marian; and by the termination of his third visit he had determined to win her, and was more set upon conquering in the domain of Cupid than in the kingdom of electricity.

Marian was enchanting, and willing to receive Leslie's advances. At last he ventured upon a definite expression of his love; Marian listened with evident pleasure, but gave no definite reply—only bidding him wait. This was enough for Leslie, who now felt that he was within reasonable distance of happiness.

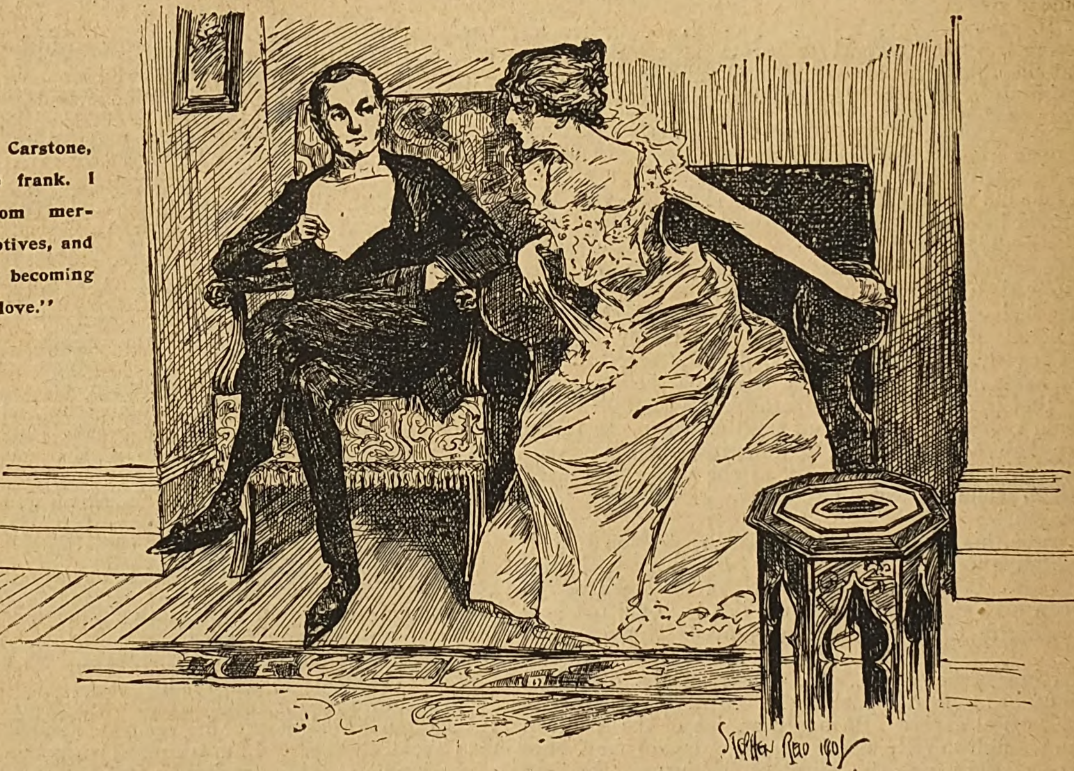
His connection with Stevens had been profitable to him, and he had been able to throw up his situation and live on the results of his pen and sundry commissions which he had received from engineering firms on the strength of Stevens' recommendations. He had gradually given up studying for the London University examination, and was taking life more easily, confident in his ability and with the hope of sharing the wealth of Mr. Stevens when he should marry Marian. For there was now no doubt that the young lady was distinctly encouraging him.

They had pleasant interviews in her father's house, they met in the Park and at Picture galleries, as well as at some Society gatherings to which he contrived to get an invitation; and at all these gatherings he spoke to her with a tenderness and freedom that seemingly left no doubt as to his feelings, while Marian raised his hopes to the level of certainty, and set his heart beating at a rapid rate by a drooping of the eyes, coquettish speeches, and glances, and other feminine wiles.

"I am going away to Neuenahr," she said to him suddenly one August afternoon, just as he had taken advantage of the fact that they were alone to begin an incoherent request for her hand.

He stopped abruptly; he had several times been on the point of making this request, which he regarded as a mere formality—for, he argued, she knew that he loved her and that she loved him—but he had delayed his request for some unknown reason. That she should now stop him so coolly with the information that she was going abroad for a holiday, sent a chill through him.

"But—when you return, Marian," he stammered, "may I hope— Your affection, your love, will not change? When you return, I may claim you?"



"Lady Carstone, let us be frank. I began from mercenary motives, and ended by becoming madly in love."

"Of course, you foolish boy," she returned lightly. "I shall be away for six weeks, and everything will go on again just as usual when I come back."

He leant forward as if to kiss her; she half drew back to avoid it, but apparently changed her mind and permitted the embrace.

Although vexed that she should be out of his reach for the next six weeks, Leslie was exultant in the thought that he had won the prize. His days of struggling poverty were over, and he could look forward to a life free from those cares which accompany want of money and the necessity to earn one's living.

By the end of the first week he found that he missed the girl more than he had believed possible. He had wished to correspond during the interval, but she had laughingly said that absence makes the heart grow fonder, and that it would be best not to enter into correspondence while she was away.

Leslie was busy with work for Mr. Stevens and others, so it was not because his mind was unoccupied that he

Hazel Harlow will travel from town to town.

longed for a letter or some token of remembrance from Marian. Why was he thus troubled? This question occurred to him one morning during the second week after the postman had passed his door, and the answer which came to him startled him and made him pace up and down the room.

"Yes," he said, half aloud, as he resumed his seat a few minutes later, but not to work. "I am in love with Marian! I began to court her because I thought it was the high road to worldly advancement, and only for that reason; and I find that I am caught in the meshes, and that I have gradually and unconsciously come to love her.

"In my own eyes I am a mean-spirited wretch for having tried to win a girl for her money; but I believe that she thinks me sincere. And I am sincere now. I was sorely tried when this temptation came to me, and I was weak enough to yield. I hate myself for it now, and I swear that my love for her shall act as the spur to endeavour, and as the guide to keep me in the path of nobility and honourable conduct. The life of ease which I had mapped out for myself shall give place to a life of work, and I will make a name for myself that will be honoured throughout the country, and which she will be proud to bear!"

This awakening marked a new era in the life of Arthur Leslie, and he set to work with an energy and a determination even greater than he had exhibited in the old "office" days. His love had brought back nobility of purpose, and he eagerly awaited the return of Marian to ask her to promise that she would wed him when he was able to offer her a worthy position.

"I will not ask her to marry me now, as I wish to avoid all semblance of mercenary motive. And I feel sure that she will wait for me."

Marian came back, and he took the earliest opportunity of seeking an interview with her. She welcomed him coldly, and displayed her left hand in such a way that he should see a ring on the third finger.

"What does that mean?" he asked hoarsely.

"I am engaged to be married to Sir Thomas Carstone, Mr. Leslie," she replied frigidly.

"But your promise to me?"

"Oh, that was—— Of course, we were only having a little fun together," she said with a laugh, although her cheeks coloured slightly. "You must have known that with my money I could marry a title."

Arthur Leslie left the house without exchanging another word with Marian Stevens. She was a heartless coquette, he said to himself, but he had no right to complain; he had played with her, so the reward was a just one, and the fact that he now really loved her could not be taken into consideration.

It was a severe lesson, but Leslie was now strong enough to learn it and take it aright. It had taught him that whatever he did should be done from honest motives, and that any other line of conduct would sooner or later meet with a fitting reward.

At the end of seven years, Arthur Leslie had reached a point which was very near to the summit of his ambition. He had gained a University degree, he had been elected Fellow of a famous society—one of the few distinctions that can only be gained by merit—he was a professor, and his income was larger than he had ever dreamt that it could be. It was even mooted that, in spite of his youth, he would soon receive the honour of knighthood in recognition of his services to science.

Many a woman would gladly have shared the fortunes of the clever scientist, but it was currently believed that he was a woman-hater. He was courteous to ladies when thrown in contact with them, but he never sought their society, and never indulged in pretty compliments. He heard from time to time of Lady Carstone, and knew that she was a widow. He saw her occasionally at some social gathering, but he invariably avoided her. It was as nearly as possible seven years after her marriage with Sir Thomas that he was brought face to face with her and spoke to her.

He could not avoid it this time, for the hostess had deliberately conducted him to her. He had to talk to her, and she asked him to explain some natural phenomena, and gradually contrived to get him to a recess where they could talk without interruption.

"Professor Leslie," she said with assumed frankness, "I did you a great wrong some years ago, and I have never ceased to regret it. I married for position instead of love."

Leslie looked at her curiously. He was accustomed to analytical methods, and although he could not claim to possess a very close knowledge of feminine ways, yet he was sufficiently a student of human nature to be able to penetrate below the surface of her words. He was able to look calmly on the past, and he had long since recognised that the girl had never cared for him, and had only been playing with him. Lady Carstone's words amused and yet irritated him; he was amused at this attempt to capture a man who could give her a far more important position in Society than the old man she had wedded, and he was irritated by the daring attempt.

"When did you discover that, Lady Carstone?" he asked, keeping his voice and features under perfect control. "Was it before or after your marriage that you discovered you were in love?"

It was a cruel thrust, but he could not resist it. As he had half expected, she evaded the question.

"Have I not said that I married for position instead of love?"

She felt that he was judging her correctly, and she was uncomfortable. Her attempt had failed, and she wished to escape the consequences of defeat. She rose to go, but he detained her.

"Lady Carstone, let us be frank. I began from mercenary motives, and ended by becoming madly in love. The girl I loved was only amusing herself with me, and never loved me. She wanted a position then—and she wants it now My love died a natural death as the result of the awakening, but the experience made a nobler man of me. I am not the only being who is capable of learning a lesson."

They parted, and he had never spoken to her since.

That was five years ago, yet she was still Lady Carstone, although he knew that the writer in the Society paper was correct when he said that she might have any one of at least half a dozen titled men. Had she discovered that she really loved the man with whom she had flirted? And if so——?

"No, no!" murmured Leslie, as he laid down his cigar and picked up the scattered sheets of his lecture for the Royal Institution. "The girl I loved was not the Marian Stevens who married Sir Thomas Carstone, but a Marian Stevens who existed only in my own brain. If it had been otherwise——."

Tell your friends about Hazel Harlow.

J. Brewster Fisher

Miss Letitia's Trousseau.

LETITIA HOUGHTON was going to be married; consequently many of her dear feminine friends said it was a shame, a scandal, for Letitia to think of such folly at her time of life. These same authorities declared she was fifty-five years old, adding there was no fool like an old one.

Letitia was on the sunny side of forty-five, but did not look as if she were forty, being handsome, with a pretty home, a tidy income, a kind heart, and a sound head.

The beneficiaries of her bounty had become accustomed to consider her a spinster, too confirmed a devotee to single blessedness to change her state. What right had that old thing to be taken in by an impecunious adventurer, when she had friends of her lifetime who naturally expected—she had no kinspeople—to be remembered in her will; not that they were mercenary, but that they had a sort of claim upon her.

Remarks of this kind were freely indulged in when the invitations were received. Twenty-five or thirty women talking at once is rather confusing, and as the speakers became excited the comments became more personal and assumed an ill-natured turn. It was at a church sewing circle, and tongues were flying faster than needles.

An exceedingly pretty and richly dressed woman, a guest of the society, now took up the cudgels in defence of the absent.

"Ladies, ladies, is this a modern school for scandal, or a church society held in the basement of a sacred edifice? You all have cause to be grateful to Letitia; why should you speak of her so bitterly now, because she exercises the right we have all claimed?"

Mrs. Alyn Alden was a leader of society, whose dictum made or unmade a newcomer entering the charmed circle. Mrs. Jennie, as Mrs. Alden was generally called, was a power, and with promptitude they proceeded to eat their words with marvellous celerity.

Mrs. Jennie smiled and bade them good morning. On the way to Miss Letitia's she made a gesture as if she had touched an ill-smelling weed.

"What a power of harm such women can do at times! I do not pose as a reformer, but I really would like to recall the ducking-stool for their benefit. Poor Letitia! I hope she has not chosen unwisely."

Her musings ceased as the coachman drew rein before the pretty, old-fashioned garden of the Houghtons. Mrs. Jennie was met in the yard by the bride-elect, whose fresh and fair complexion had defied the ravages of time. With her bright hazel eyes and wavy light brown hair she might have passed for thirty-five at most.

"Come into the house, Jennie; it's lovely out here amongst the flowers, but I have some things I wish to show you; the dress has come; I am too old to be married in white satin, so I selected a pink brocade trimmed with lace. I have never had so many pretty clothes made at one time in my life, for I never needed to. I don't think I'm envious, but when I saw all my friends' handsome outfits it occurred to me that it would be an inducement to marry. Do you not like it?"

"But where did you meet the man you expect to marry, Letitia? I would not give my life into the keeping of an utter stranger."

"You needn't be uneasy about me; he's a very pleasant man, and I'm positive we will get on well together; as for love, we are not young people, and have said nothing about that, but we will do well enough as friends. Do you notice that black and gold visiting silk, Jennie?"

Mrs. Jennie perceived that the bride-to-be preferred to talk about her clothes instead of the man she had promised to marry, and made no other effort to drag him into the conversation. Miss Letitia brought every article for Mrs. Jennie's inspection.

"Do stay to lunch; I've so much to tell you yet! I want it understood that I meant what I said when I wrote on the cards I didn't want any presents; please make your friends understand that, will you? I know that they will want to give me presents; you can't know how glad I am that I am liked, Jennie."

Mrs. Alden would not shake Miss Letitia's faith in the professions of friendship she believed sincere, but when their spiteful comments were recalled it angered her afresh with them.

For that purpose, Mrs. Jennie drove back by the church, where she found the society dispersing. She did not alight, but told them of Miss Letitia's wish.

She of the sharp tongue gave a shrill little cackle and said:

"That means we must give them without fail. She's afraid we won't give anything, and takes that means to make sure."

"Was that the reason you had 'No flowers' on the cards when your daughter graduated? Letitia's bouquet was weighted with a jewelled butterfly. So glad you enlightened me. I have wondered why that clause was inserted, but had no idea it meant exactly opposite to what it said. It is never too late to learn—wisdom. Good-morning; I must go home."

Mrs. Ponsonby gazed after the carriage, and said to her dear familiar friend:

"Mrs. Alden does have the knack of taking one by surprise; she confuses a person so. Of course, I didn't mean—that is, I didn't intend to own——"

"That you look that way of assuring Sophy a number of bouquets and presents? I thought you didn't mean to say that, dear, did you?" suggested the friend sweetly.

* * * * *

Miss Letitia's wedding day had arrived. She was looking extremely handsome and accepted the effusive compliments of her friends in apparently good faith; they declared she did not look a day over forty.

As yet the groom had not made his appearance; Miss Letitia had excused herself a moment or two, but as the minutes lengthened into an hour without her returning, significant glances were exchanged and the buzz of many voices was heard.

It is astonishing how much pleasure some people derive from the distress or mortification of their friends. Mrs. Ponsonby and her *coterie* were insinuating that something was wrong, voicing pity which their eyes and countenances belied.

Thoroughly exasperated, Mrs. Jennie was about to give a crushing retort, when Miss Letitia reappeared.

She was slightly pale, her demeanour a mixture of regret and dignity, while a blending of defiance was depicted in her erect attitude.

"I've had a telegram from Mr. Langworthy; business of a family nature, which I shall not be at liberty to divulge indiscriminately, compels him to start for Europe as he sent the message off; consequently there will be no wedding to-night. That need not interfere with our enjoyment of the supper; the presents will be returned to their donors to-morrow. Mr. Alden, will you see me to the table? The minister will take you, Jennie."

Her astounding revelations called forth a chorus of "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" and a dozen excited women began to ply her with questions, protesting against her returning the presents, but she waived them aside.

She gave her guests no time to discuss her affairs in groups, but marched them into the dining-room, some wearing, from the undiminished pangs of curiosity, an expression as if they were being led to instant execution.

Miss Letitia was the life of the party, and the theory that she had been jilted did not gain ground; her explanation was accepted as true—as far as it went. More than one face became blank when Miss Letitia said:

"Jennie, be sure to come round to-morrow and help me to pack those presents; some are so—valuable I will not be satisfied until they are returned; fortunately all are labelled."

"I will come with pleasure, Letitia," replied Mrs. Alden, while Mrs. Ponsonby whispered dolefully: "If she would ask me!"

Early next morning Mrs. Jennie accordingly put in her appearance, finding her friend in exceedingly good spirits.

While tying up a gaudy plated cake-stand, a gift from Mrs. Ponsonby, Mrs. Alden said:

"Letitia, why return the presents? Were you in earnest when you said there was not much likelihood of there being a marriage?"

Miss Letitia was bending over the bed, replacing a handsome silver ladle in its velvet box.

The constrained position may have been the cause of her heightened colour. Her face, as she turned towards Mrs. Alden, wore conflicting expressions; triumph, shame, and over all a half-sad, half-defiant look. Her first words were apparently irrelevant:

"I've learned much, Jennie," she said, as she folded a dozen fine thread-cambric handkerchiefs, and placed them with lingering regret in the costly box they came in; "how exquisite these are, and like the donor! Oh, yes, I was saying how much I had learned since I had sent out those tickets. I've always had a too-confiding disposition, and, while I'm not now a cynic, I've had eye-openers, plenty of them.

"Going about to different stores, riding windy days, veiled, on the cars, have given me an insight into people's character that has been both painful and profitable; I needn't tell you whom I mean, for I see you know. I'm not a sentimental fool; the only regret is self-contempt that I've been taken in by them so long, but I've never outgrown a girlish pleasure in being liked.

"You had your husband and children, and I never begrudged wives and mothers their happiness, for my life had been a healthy, happy one, and so completely am I a spinster that I believe I was born one; I've never seen the man I have ever imagined I could fancy, but there was one thing I did want."

Mrs. Alden had listened sympathetically; as Miss Letitia paused for breath she ventured to speak.

"What was that, Letitia?"

"You may laugh, Jennie, if you wish, but that was no more nor less than a trousseau!"

"What? Do you mean that——"

"I mean, and I know it will go no further, that I couldn't have a trousseau without a marriage, and that was why I sent out cards. Don't you understand, Jennie? The marriage could not take place—because there was no bridegroom at all; now it's out."

For once Mrs. Alden was surprised beyond the power of expression, but when she did recover, her merry laughter was delightful to hear and was joined by Letitia.

"What a good joke!" gasped Mrs. Jennie. "Wouldn't it make the Richmond dames open their eyes? It shall go no further, though I would like Alyn to know, if you have no objection. What would Mrs. Ponsonby say?"

"Embellish it until we wouldn't know it; but there's one thing she won't enjoy any more—expectations of sharing my fortune. I shall leave my money as a fund for old maids' trousseaux."

Hazel Harlow will be in Newcastle next week.

The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer,"
"A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"IT is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Felix in vain protests his innocence.

But the cloud of suspicion gathers around him. Meantime, the child Brian has been kidnapped, and Felix is suspected of this too. He discovers a riding whip with some peculiar marks upon it.

One day an old sailor named Foley is attacked by Otto Hare's dogs.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MR. GEDDES DRESSES A WOUND.

"I AM sorry I offended you, Miss Connie, but, after all, there's reason in the way I look at it. If Brasher is the man, you are being unjust to me; if Brasher is not the man, you are being cruel to him."

The firm tones of Archibald Geddes trembled a little, but he twisted his thick moustache with a dauntless air, and his brown eyes surveyed reprovingly the flushed countenance of Constance Forester as she stood on the short flight of steps that descended from the parlour to the shop at the end of the counter. The pharmacy was aglow with its half-dozen of incandescent gas-jets—a radiant blot on the cool summer night that shadowed the High Street.

Connie tossed her head—it was a favourite gesture. The Scotchman ignored this sign of wilfulness. Connie bit her lip.

"Mr. Geddes," she murmured, plucking at the neat cuff of her blouse; "you are not a bit kind. As though I hadn't to think of father!"

Geddes frowned. "And I ask, Miss Connie," he retorted, "what I asked the other evening; how far is your anxiety for Mr. Forester to take you? I am aware you don't love the Inspector, but that doesn't guarantee you won't make up your mind to become Mrs. Brasher."

"Oh," cried Constance Forester; "you are horrid, Mr. Geddes. I suppose you mean I could marry someone I didn't care for."

The chemist's assistant put out his hand, clasped the fingers of the indignant speaker and drew her from her elevated position to the shelter of the screen that hid the dispensing-table.

"You've a stout heart and an unselfish spirit, Miss Connie," he said, gazing at her ardently, "and you're afraid Brasher might bring your father into this eternal murder case of his. To protect Mr. Forester by retaining your influence over the Inspector you'd grant him privilege after privilege till he'd have cause to consider you his property before you woke up to your danger."

Connie stifled a sob. "Father and Mr. Brasher were together for quite a while yesterday," she faltered, "and father was in a terrible state when the Inspector went. I—I mustn't offend Mr. Brasher; I daren't—he called to warn me that night, but you'd been so cross with me I wouldn't explain."

"Warn you about what?" inquired Geddes, and coughed to disguise the repentance in his voice.

"About letting father go to the 'Wheatsheaf,'" answered Connie; "he—he will talk so much, and Mr. Brasher says it will get us into trouble. Mr. Brasher owned he had no business to tell me—but—but he said even police-officers had their weaknesses and I was his."

Archibald Geddes whistled. "By jove!" commented the Scotchman; "he's sentimental—a thing I shouldn't have given him credit for. My poor Connie—pardon the liberty, Miss Forester, the word just slipped out, not but what it tasted better without the Miss—I am a brute, and you have a difficult game to play. Yet if—if I could but be certain you liked me a trifle more than Brasher, I would contrive to endure his visits."

Connie blushed to her pretty brows and sought, not too determinedly, to release herself. "Mr. Geddes," she whispered, "please, please, don't be foolish!"

Geddes sighed and dropped the small fingers. "I'm a great ass, that's true!" he muttered.

Constance Forester retreated a few paces and smiled bewitchingly. "How absurd" she said, "to wonder if I care for you more than for the Inspector! I wouldn't object if he never entered the shop again. And I'm sure I'm perpetually out here talking to you. So you must be very stupid or very jealous."

"I—I am!" cried the Scotchman; "I'm jealous of the ground you walk on, the air you breathe. And all the time I know I'm an idiot."

"Then you must be stupid," decided Connie, as she escaped up the adjacent stair; "awfully stupid—for you've no need to be—to be jealous."

Archibald Geddes started—the expression on Connie's bright features made him spring to her; his pulses hammering, and his tongue hugging the roof of his mouth.

Hazel Harlow will travel from town to town.

"Connie!" he began—and stopped; there was a heavy footfall in the shop behind him. He choked down a sulphurous observation and turned, while Constance Forester darted through the swing door that led to the house.

Propped against the counter and swaying unsteadily, his sunburned visage wan, his hands crimsoned, his throat bound with a rough-spotted bandanna, was Nicholas Foley. At sight of Nicholas he reeled forward and staggered into the recess at the back of the dispensary screen.

"'Scuse my running for harbour, messmate," gasped the sailor, "but I'm under a flag of distress, and I thought it was you in charge. I don't savvy a regular doctor—he'd be a heap too curious. But you can caulk this hole and rig a bit of regulation canvas over it, can't you?"

With this nautical preface he unwrapped the bandanna from his neck. Geddes recoiled; Foley's throat was well-nigh hidden by dried blood, his shirt-neck and wisp of tie clotted into a gory mass, and united to his coat-collar.

"A nip from a piratical land-shark of a prowling cur done that," added Nicholas, "set on it was—by a misbegotten imp as I'd pay out if his walls cleared the main-top of a four-master, and had a mongrel to every yard of wall. The brute's teeth missed my weasand and my big pipes, I reckon, or I'd have been a dead 'un by now. The tyke was healthy, so I won't hurt if you stop out the dust."

The Scotchman, studying the sailor in a quiet, characteristic fashion, reached to a glass jar, filled it with water from a tap at his elbow, measured into it a quantity of carbolic acid, and got a sponge out of a drawer.

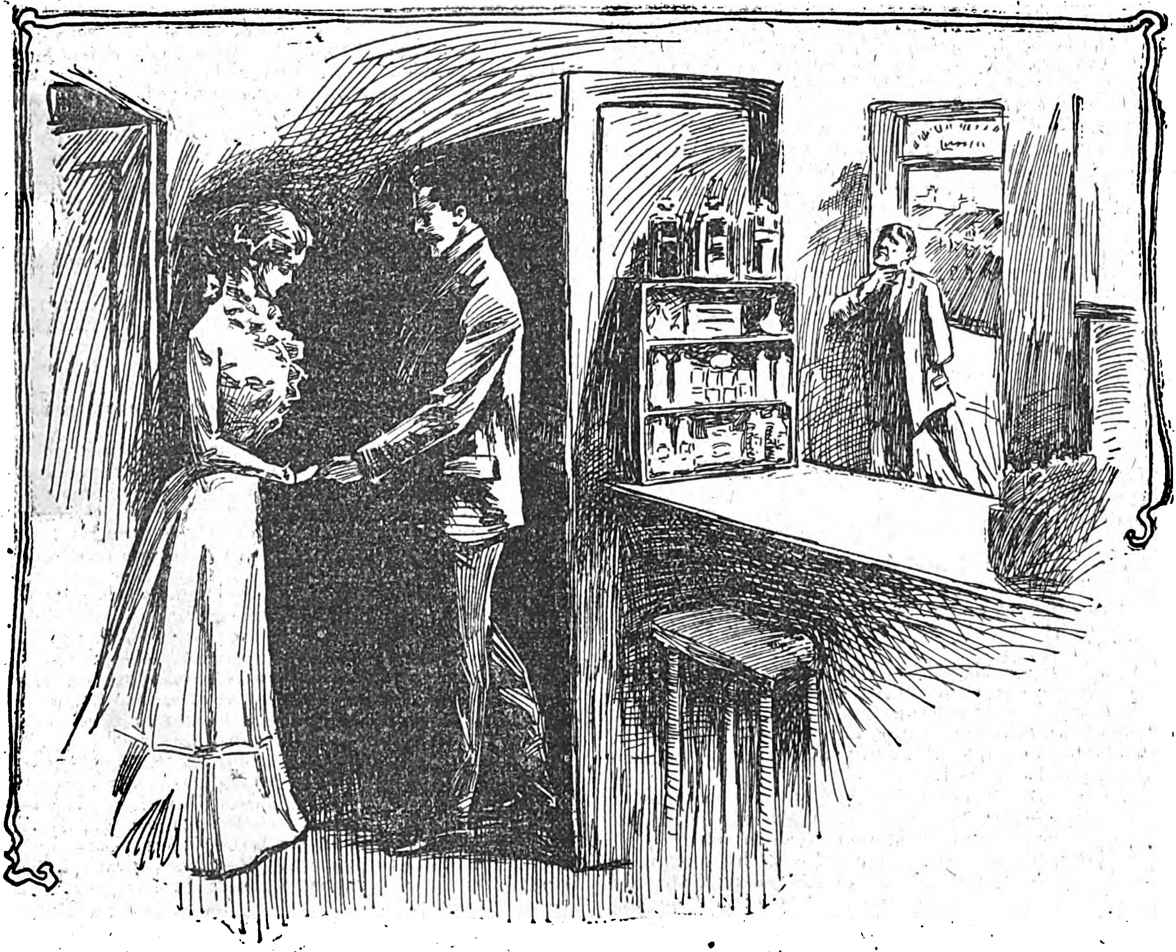
"I expect you're safe enough," he allowed, "but you ought to get a doctor as soon as possible. However, I'll wash it clean and bandage it."

"Finish the job, messmate," instructed the sailor, "I'm not going to be patched by nobody but you, you settled my malary when I first struck this cursed village, and you'll take a telling about an ill-convenient question. No, fix me up and charge me what's fair."

Thoughtfully Geddes proceeded to do as he was bidden. He sponged off the clotted blood, showing the lacerated wounds on right and left, between the tcarotid arteries and the pharynx.

"You had a narrow shave," observed the operator.

"I'll bet he fancies me stiff before this," snarled Foley, leaning back in the chair the Scotchman had placed, "he made sure the throat was torn out of me, and strolled away so's I could die at my leisure—the lily-livered ape."



"Connie," he began—and stopped; there was a heavy footfall in the shop behind him.

Tell your friends about Hazel Harlow

"Who—who was the blackguard?" queried Geddes casually.

Nicholas winked. "Keep her large, mate," he advised, as the Scotchman plied the sponge, "that's my affair. Push on with the swabbing."

Geddes shrugged his shoulders, rinsed out the sponge and laid it by. Emptying some colourless fluid into a compounding-glass, he added, by weight, a proportion of a yellow powder and mixed them.

"What's that?" desired the sailor, "smells like grog."

"Collodion," said the chemist's assistant—"gun-cotton dissolved in ether and iodoform. To skin the wounds and help them to heal quickly."

"You're the skipper for my money," remarked Nicholas, "clap it on."

Geddes selected a camel's-hair brush from his stock and painted the lotion over the lacerated surfaces of his client's tanned neck.

"Smarts a trifle," decided Nicholas, "but give me a medicine as grips. Does that finish me?"

"Not yet," answered the Scotchman, "you must be bandaged."

He slipped behind the counter, pulled out a drawer, and selected several rolls of a stout woven material, varying in width. Returning with these, he prepared and applied a couple of scientific wrappings. The sailor rose from his seat a much more comfortable person than he had entered it.

"And the price?" said Nicholas briefly, resuming his coat.

"Three and six," answered Geddes, with equal curtness.

His customer thanked him, paid, and strode to the exit, but only to halt and recross to the counter.

"Give me a hail in the morning," he said, "I'll go on the sick list for a day or two and mine's a lonely tack. And, harkee, you can bring me a doctor, Dr. Joseph Kraft, the Dutch beggar, at Mr.—Otto—Hare's."

He lent the Golden Dwarf's name a tremendous but peculiar emphasis.

"Come along with him to-morrow," pursued Foley, as he filled and lighted his briar; "be certain to come with him, messmate. Drop round about eight bells of the first dog-watch—four o'clock in the afternoon."

The sailor lowered his harsh bass to a confidential undertone.

"If you weren't there," he admitted, "I'd as lief not see him. As for the doctor, he'll toddle round when he knows who's in the sick bay—oh, yes, he make all sail for my moorings, you bet."

And with a complicated twitch of his mahogany visage, Nicholas lurched out of the Wyresdale Pharmacy.

Archibald Geddes began to dispose of his apparatus. He was absorbed by a multitude of singular reflections.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Your Mother Confides You to Me."

"Well, any news of the fool? Don't grin at me in that confounded fashion, but come to the point. Is he dead or alive?"

Joseph Kraft laid his soft straw hat upon the writing-table in his private room at Wyresdale Park, set down near the cage of tropical birds, and contemplated the fretful pose of the Golden Dwarf. Otto Hare wore a frock coat of dark grey, and a gleaming silk. In the costume he looked more like a miniature than ever.

"My dear Hare," said the German; "you were once puzzled to decide if I were your familiar demon or your fairy godfather. You seem unable to dispense with me in either role."

Otto Hare winced. "Have your say out," he retorted, as he flung himself into the leather-covered lounge hard by; "yet please recollect that my guests will be missing me, and that I must get back to the garden."

Kraft surveyed his patron with a bland tolerance. "So far," said the German, "there is no word of Foley. If he is in his cottage, he refuses to answer, or is incapable of doing it, for I called at the wretched place about noon. I have since communicated with the police, not, of course, telling them we know who is the victim. But our conduct must be scrupulous to a degree, or we shall suffer for it."

"You will allow them to poke about *there!*" gasped the Golden Dwarf.

"They can overhaul the locality to their heart's content," responded Kraft; "there is nothing to suggest that the occurrence was other than an unfortunate accident. As a matter of fact, the fellow was hot on a dangerous scent, but I have rendered all safe, and, with a snare or two artistically disposed at the spot, it will seem as if Foley had been attacked when exercising the privilege you were imprudent enough to grant him. Still, if he is killed, and a coroner should cross-examine you, my poor friend, you may be much worried."

"I'll take my chance of that," answered Otto Hare; "in my case, I trust I have revenged Cerberus."

Joseph Kraft pushed a huge finger at the bars of the neighbouring cage and chirruped to his favourites.

"You are an odd person, Hare," he decided; "for the sake of a defunct mongrel you jeopardise—what do you not jeopardise; yourself, myself, the work of two years. I confess to you, when I discovered that crimson trail last night, and ascertained to what it led, I had thoughts of taking to my heels as I was. But a certain native courage prevented me, as you know."

The German faced about and linked his hands behind his back. "To be frank," he added, "your vindictiveness has not served us badly. Had Foley completed his—his terrestrial explorations, the worst might have happened. Yet it would have been cleverer to see that the job was thoroughly done."

"I haven't your cold blood, Kraft," said the Golden Dwarf, rising; "we must hope the work finished itself. Are you coming down to be agreeable? The snobs of half a county are collected on my lawn; you should not miss studying them."

Kraft settled to his writing-table, in his plump fingers a fat note-book he had produced from a safe between the windows of the apartment.

"I want to make some memoranda," he explained; "by the way, you are doing as I recommended and showing them round the——"

Hare paused irresolutely. "Is it as wise as you imagine it to be?" he queried. His small hands fidgeted with a jewelled repeater; the costly timepiece struck the second quarter after four—a faint, musical chime.

"It would be madness to neglect the chance," asserted the German; "they believe you to be an enigma and the possessor of enigmas. You must teach them to circulate commonplace explanations of your secrets. I am positive any other plan would be sheer idiocy. You would choose to open Wyresdale Park to the vulgar herd. You can but balance recklessness by audacity."

The Golden Dwarf flicked the dust from his patent-leather boots. "As you will," was his answer, and pushing the door ajar, he stepped through it. A glance backward showed him that the German had commenced to scribble—long lines of a firm black cipher fell from his pen as it travelled over the pages of the note-book. With a petulant gesture, Otto Hare went on downstairs into the sunshine and sweet air of the great lawns which girdled his splendid mansion.

Disrespectfully as he had spoken of them, the Golden Dwarf had prepared a royal reception for the guests at the garden-party, in connection with which Mrs. Carew's services had been requisitioned. A blue and white marquee fluttered its scallopped canvas just before the house; there was the usual bevy of nondescript seats about it—garden chairs, wicker lounges, and bamboo settees, screened by fixed umbrellas, like vast mushrooms.

Round these hovered a little throng of smartly-dressed women and politely bored men, engaged in the consumption of ices, exotic fruits and French sweetmeats, with champagne and claret "cups" in delicate glass, or tea and coffee in egg-shell china.

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In sight of the classic portico, under which the Golden Dwarf stood, an artificial lake spread out a picturesque sheet of water, and on it there plied luxurious barges, rowed by attendants in livery and freighted by trim figures in summer toilettes, or weary masculine forms in scrupulously correct attire. The music of a Hungarian band floated towards Otto Hare from an unseen angle of the lawn; it was playing a melodious Strauss waltz. He hummed the romantic theme as he took stock of his unconscious visitors.

Suddenly his gaze rested upon the object of his search—the figure of Esther Carew, slender, graceful, shy, in a sweeping gown of tucked and snowy chiffon. Her fair tresses were coiled high on her head, beneath a big white hat—all white tulle and blush roses. But her blue eyes were downcast, her sensitive mouth grave and tremulous. She comprehended but too well the significance of the glances that played about her; she was on exhibition to half a county as the probable wife of Otto Hare, the famous Golden Dwarf, the lord of Wyresdale Park and seventy thousand a year.

Otto Hare regarded the despondent expression of her young countenance for a moment or two. Then he crossed the yielding turf to her side.

"I trust, Miss Carew," he observed softly, "you are finding your afternoon in my domains a pleasant one?"

Esther shivered. The sound of his voice, thin and rather harsh, never failed to produce in her a spasm of revulsion.

"It is very beautiful, Mr. Hare," she answered, studying the rich prospect presented by the fine mansion, with its double terrace, symmetrical wings, and lush green frame of lawns and woodlands.

"I am glad you feel it so," murmured her companion, "and now, will you allow me to give you the first glimpse at something not exactly beautiful, but interesting. I told you when we met in the road that I had seen you from my watch-tower. Dr. Kraft has advised me to throw it open today; let me take you to it? Stay, I will ask your mother's permission to carry you off."

He stepped over the sward towards the active form of Mrs. Carew, who, clad in purple and black lace, was discharging her function of hostess with much diplomacy. Returning, an ill-disguised but well-bred sneer on his handsome face—for he read the ambitious widow like a book—the Golden Dwarf bowed in his graceful, foreign style.

"Your mother confides you to me, Miss Carew," he said; "I assure you I appreciate the compliment."

He moved on in the direction of the plantations at the right of the house. Reluctantly, Esther walked by him.

"Some people, I daresay," declared her escort, "have heard of my watch-tower. No doubt it is regarded as one of my mysteries. You will find the explanation of its enigma quite simple."

The sentences were casual enough, yet they seemed to be spoken with an odd amount of hesitation and anxiety. Otto Hare had interlaced his small fingers and was striding along beside the figure in the white frock. Soon there sprang to view, above a copse of low shrubs, the rounded hill, supporting, on a green slope, the fort-like structure and its taller appendage.

The Golden Dwarf did not approach the squat portal in the base of the tower, but led the way up an inclined plane of concrete to a much larger and more pretentious entrance.

This he unlocked, and, leaving it wide, as if to afford admission to any wandering member of the garden-party, motioned Esther to pass in.

She obeyed, and threading a narrow corridor and a second entrance, discovered herself under the lofty, dome-shaped roof of the tower. In the curious tapering erection there was swung, from a powerful cross-bar and girders, a huge telescope.

"You see," said Otto Hare, with a shrill, awkward laugh, "my watch-tower is nothing but an observatory. To prove the instrument genuine I will venture to show you the sun—the orb of day is hardly so fascinating as the moon, but no other object is visible at four o'clock in summer. Zorn!"

At the call a man of middle age, lean and stooping, advanced to them with a noiseless tread. His complexion was ashen-grey, his pupils dull and yet alert, his stiff hair, diversified by silver threads, was cut brush-fashion, and rose rigidly from his skull.

Prefixing an apology to Esther, the Golden Dwarf addressed the new-comer in German. He answered by a shrewd nod and a quiet salutation. Reaching to a couple of pivoted wheels, he began to adjust the great tube and the sliding roof.

This proceeding finished, Otto Hare stooped to peer through the eye-piece. Esther watched him languidly.

Suddenly she started and glanced about her. A look of amazement sprang into her face, and she strained every sense in an acute attention. An unlikely—it seemed, in that place, an impossible!—sound had fallen upon her ears.

CHAPTER XXX.

INSPECTOR BRASHER IS SURPRISED.

"PROFESSOR KRAFT, sir? I fancy he is in the garden with Mr. Hare, but I'll make sure."

"Thank you," said Archibald Geddes, and stepped into the ornate reception hall of Wryesdale Park. It was the first time the Scotchman had entered so magnificent a private dwelling. Pillars of yellow marble flanked the door-way and carried the splendid staircase, covered with inch-thick Afghan carpet, worthy of a palace.

A great window, filled by curiously-frosted glass, lighted the hall and sent long rays of afternoon sunshine to rest on huge rainbow vases and pieces of exquisite bronze. Swinging-lamps of verd-antique depended from finely-wrought brackets of metal—electric, by their sealed globes and delicate cords.

The chemist's assistant followed the liveried attendant into a small ante-chamber, no less princely in its treatment than the hall without. Here he was left alone. Costly rugs—to relieve the polished parquetry under foot—antique but luxurious furniture, rare pictures, and unique curios surrounded the observant Geddes. At length a sharp inspiration escaped his lips.

"No wonder Mr. Hare is called the Golden Dwarf," muttered the critic; "a king might be proud of a house like this."

As he spoke the words a vague impulse made the Scotchman turn—Joseph Kraft had stepped noiselessly into the apartment—his saffron pupils gleaming behind his spectacles, his perpetual smile upon his thin mouth.

"Well, my dear Mr. Geddes," he murmured, "and what can I do for you?"

Archibald Geddes coughed. "I ought to apologise, Professor," said the Scotchman, "for calling you away from the festivities I notice are in progress."

"Not at all, not at all," answered Kraft, with smooth politeness; "I was at work in my room—I do not take kindly to social pleasures. But I am quite at your service, Mr. Geddes."

Geddes acknowledged the compliment. "I am much obliged," he conceded; "but it isn't myself I represent. I have come on behalf of an odd acquaintance of mine, one Foley, who has been injured—by the bite of a dog."

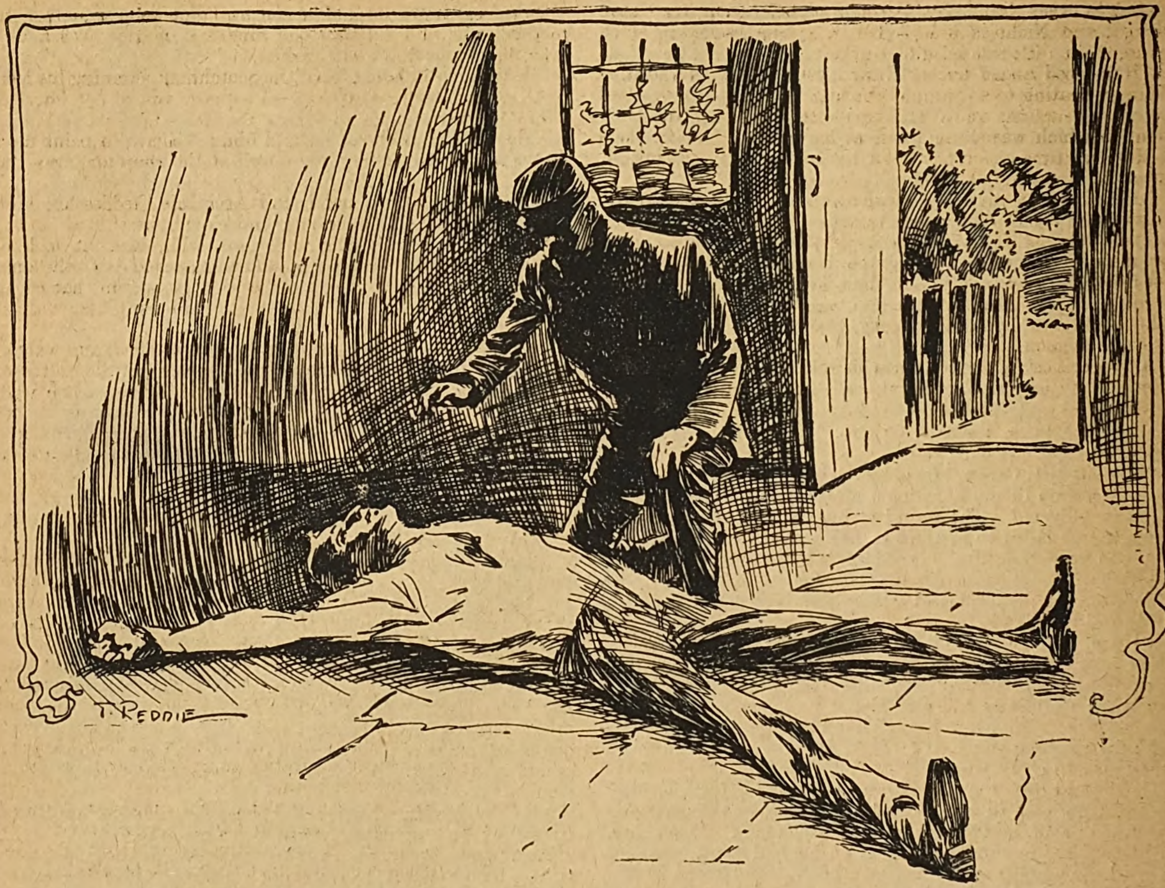
The glances of both Kraft and Geddes met, but neither flinched. Yet the deep-seated glow in the former's glittering orbs seemed to brighten and scintillate.

"He called at our shop last night," went on the Scotchman, "much lacerated about the throat, but with none of the principal arteries cut. I bandaged him, providing against septic inflammation, and advised him to consult a doctor. He replied by a request to bring you round this afternoon—he was sure you would accede to his wish for a visit when you learned who your patient was."

Joseph Kraft nodded, his air heavily sympathetic. "The poor fellow was right," he said; "I met him years ago and found him a rough diamond. I will see him by all means, in—in an hour or two."

Geddes twisted his moustache. "Foley expressed a desire that I should accompany you, Professor," he observed—"I believe I promised to do so."

Hazel Harlow will be in Newcastle next week.



The figure of Nicholas Foley lay prone upon the floor motionless.

The German looked down over the lenses of the glittering spectacles he wore, and his brows twitched. "In that case," he decided, "we will go there at once, to save your time, Mr. Geddes—the shop will need you, no doubt. Allow me just to get my hat."

He smiled amiably, withdrew, and mounted the great stair to the storey where was situated his private room. Sitting at his table, he wrote a short prescription, folded, and laid it by. Then he stalked to his safe, and produced, from an inner drawer, a sealed coffer of some foreign wood. Out of it he lifted a rude earthenware pot, containing a whitish paste.

With the tip of a chemical spoon he took a pellet of the paste, dropped it into a small phial, and poured half a dozen drops of water on it. The pellet dissolved, and the fluid became clear. The German washed the spoon, restored the pot and the wooden casket to their place, and secreted the phial in a pocket of his vest. Satisfied with this procedure, he picked up the prescription he had written, locked his room, and descended to the chamber where Archibald Geddes awaited him.

Together they walked out, traversed a corner of the lawn towards the head of the avenue, and strolled down it to the drowsy lane which opened on to the cross-roads almost opposite the by-way on whose grassy margin was perched the ruinous cottage of Nicholas Foley.

At this point Joseph Kraft paused, and brought out the slip of paper he had fetched from his room.

"I know something of Foley's constitution," said the German, "he was subject to malaria when we encountered years back. That must be taken count of. You might get this made up and join me at his place."

Geddes frowned. "I think I told you, Professor," he demurred, "that I promised Foley I'd accompany you. He appeared, if I may be so frank, to entertain a sort of reluctance to interview you without a witness."

Kraft indulged in a humorous grimace. "Doubtless," he said, "the poor fellow has lost too much blood and was fanciful. But I respect your fidelity to an agreement, Mr. Geddes. We will go to Master Foley by the High Street, and I will remain at the shop till you have compounded my prescription."

The chemist's assistant fell in with the proposition, and in silence the couple gained the threshold of the Wyresdale Pharmacy. Archibald Geddes strode to his dispensary corner—a few moments later he had put up the required mixture—in a ten-ounce bottle of the usual type.

Carrying it himself, he joined the stalwart form of the Professor, and they completed the journey to the roadside cottage.

Geddes knocked at the tarred plank entrance and observed, a second afterwards, that a dingy print curtain at one of the casements stirred—the sailor was on his guard, no doubt

Hazel Harlow will travel from town to town.

against a visit from the German alone. Soon the latch clicked, and Nicholas Foley, clad in a blue bedgown, stood before them. He saluted with a grin.

"Half-speed ahead and starboard your helm," he adjured them, retreating to a cramped sleeping-chamber. They acted on his instructions and found themselves entering an apartment in which was slung a canvas hammock. On the slack of this maritime couch the sailor took his seat, motioning his guests to a bench by the wall.

"Heard about my—my accident, Doctor?" he queried; "I was sure you'd want to look me up. Not that I needed you to caulk the leak I sprung, my friend there has done as much for me. But I'm wondering about what'll become of me, not being able to do odd jobs in the village for an honest living. I think I ought to bring an action against the lubber whose tyke fouled me. What do you say, Doctor; I set a lot of store by your opinion."

A hypocritical whine stole into his voice—it arrested Geddes' attention by its palpable hypocrisy. The chemist's assistant studied the two; Kraft preserved his amiable expression, but there were beads of moisture on his pink brow and cheeks. Nicholas Foley was radiant with suppressed malice. The Scotchman felt that some mysterious duel was in progress under his eyes.

"It occurred locally then?" asked Kraft, putting his plump finger-tips together.

Foley assented. "Close to your show," he said, rubbing an unshaven jaw. Kraft affected to consider the matter.

"I should approach him for compensation," agreed the German; "but not in a hostile spirit."

"Think I'd get decent treatment?" pursued the sailor. "He'd have to fight me if he didn't. Some Duchester lawyer might help me with the case, when I'd had a chance to explain what a dashed queer case it was."

"I should have recourse to personal negotiations first," said Joseph Kraft, biting his nails; "I would lend you all possible assistance, and—and mention your difficulty to Mr. Hare—he is rich and has, in addition, local influence."

"Right you are," cried Nicholas, as he rolled into his hammock; "it's a bargain—hullo, matey, what's that?" He was looking at the bottle held by Archibald Geddes.

"A mixture Professor Kraft advises," said the chemist's assistant.

"I gave Mr. Geddes a trifling prescription," added the German, "which he made up and brought. You will require a little care if you are not to be troubled by the bite Mr. Geddes has bandaged so cleverly."

The sailor made a motion to the package. "Put it up yourself at the shop?" he demanded.

Geddes answered in the affirmative. "You'll be none the worse for it, if I may offer an opinion," said the Scotchman.

Kraft took the bottle, stripped the wrapping, uncorked it clumsily, and tasted the contents on his thumb. "It wouldn't hurt a baby," he announced; "and it's rather pleasant than otherwise. Here, Mr. Geddes, give him a dose."

He turned away, smiling, and Archibald Geddes obeyed the request. The chemist's assistant did not see that he was pocketing a minute phial—empty. When that phial had been brought from Wyresdale Park it had been full.

"*Au revoir,*" said Joseph Kraft, as he stepped towards the threshold of the cottage; "I will look you up in a day or two, and we can discuss your prospects of compensation, Foley. Meanwhile, consider yourself under my care. To our next meeting, Mr. Geddes."

With this farewell the German parted; the saffron pupils behind his spectacles twinkled keenly—he might almost have been amused.

The sailor chuckled. "Much obliged to you, Mr. Geddes," he observed; "since that's your name—you've saved me handsome, and I'm your humble for it. Stay and have some grog."

Geddes dissented. "I must get back to the shop," was his objection. "I'll run round this evening for a chat. But I can't stop now."

Foley composed himself to sleep. "You'll be welcome," he responded; "and I'll pass the time in a snooze. When do I tipple some more of that medicine?"

"In a couple of hours," said the Scotchman, donning his hat; "expect me about ten o'clock—I suppose you're not short of grub?"

"Not much," Nicholas assured him; "barrin' it pains me a bit to eat. Don't miss your watch at the shop for me—I'm O.K."

He waved a brown hand, and Archibald Geddes left him. Foley got out of his hammock and closed the shutter at the casement—the slant beams of the westering sun annoyed him.

Some while after the Scotchman had hastened down the lane, a woman approached the wicket of the cottage and passed up the walk. Her dark hair, proud features, and smart dress were those of Judith Garland.

She raised the latch, found the door unfastened, and walked in. The kitchen was not tenanted, she peeped at the bedroom. The powerful form of the sailor, his blanket thrown to the floor, tossed in his hammock. He sat up suddenly, blinking at her.

Judith entered. "You will be surprised to see me, Mr. Foley," she began, "but I wanted to speak to you privately—about—about Mr. Dering and my brother."

Foley nodded—a dazed, uncertain gesture, as though the words she used were familiar enough but imperfectly comprehended. His visitor drew nearer.

"You arranged with my brother," she said, "to keep silence on the matter of Mr. Dering's presence in Wyresdale the night of his uncle's death. Well," she added, with a restrained excitement, "I wish you to speak out, do you hear?—to speak out and ruin him. I will give you five pounds to go to Inspector Brasher and say all you know. You won't betray me, of course, or Neal, but be sure you convince him about Mr. Dering. Be cautious and crafty, and you need say very little."

Foley slipped to the floor, showing his teeth in a horrible grin, just as Judith, her eager adjuration completed, produced from her purse a crisp new five-pound note.

"Kraft," he cried, snatching at half of a suggestive word in her sentence; "Kraft! Yes, you Dutch beggar, what have you got in them boxes? I see you moseying about the forehold last night; it was my watch on deck. Be reasonable, you fool, and I won't split."

Judith sprang to the door of the bedroom, alarmed by his demeanour. He made a vicious dash at her.

"Come from Kraft, do you?" he yelled, with a rapid change in his delirium. "Then make all sail back and tell him he's to pay up double. Think I'll be gnawed cheap by his infernal imp's mongrels? Not by a durned sight—not for every Kraft in Christendom! Pay, you Dutch swab, pay!"

The sailor's speech ceased abruptly, and he gasped, clutching at his throat.

Terrified, Judith darted from the apartment and fled, by way of the meadows and the adjacent footpath, in the direction of Dering House. Her plan to avenge herself upon Felix Dering had encountered a strange and unexpected check.

Had she glanced back when she reached the knoll at the top of the footpath, she would have perceived the tall outline of Inspector Brasher—far off, yet deliberately approaching the cottage she had left in so precipitate a fashion.

Some minutes later, Michael Brasher threaded the garden walk and knocked at the plank door. It swung before him, and the Inspector mounted the step. As Judith had done, he peered into the kitchen, then into the sleeping-chamber.

An exclamation broke from him—the figure of Nicholas Foley lay prone upon the floor, contorted yet motionless. Mr. Brasher hurried to lean over it. The sailor was warm, but no breath stirred his deep chest—death had seized him in an almost frightfully sudden grasp.

A footfall on the threshold of the chamber made the Inspector face about. The new arrival was Felix Dering!

(*To be continued.*)

Tell your friends about Hazel Harlow.

John Gile, Monomaniac.

By SCOTT L. LITCHFIELD.

The incident I am about to relate came to my knowledge when I was first taken on as a partner in the then flourishing law firm of Routledge, Kerr and Co. Since that time the then once great firm has outlived its prosperity, and has been pushed into the background by younger and more enterprising houses.

We had offices in Leadenhall Street, in a tall, gaunt old building, whose windows looked out on the busy street with a stare of superiority. Long, dusty rooms and sparsely furnished offices presented an uninviting aspect to those who had no particular business with us; but we were of considerable importance in those days, and our pigeon-holes were stuffed full of the secrets of people of quality.

Mr. Routledge had been very good to me, and partly to my attention to business and partly to his indulgence, I owed my advancement until at last I was acknowledged as one on the firm.

John Gile had long been a client of Routledge Kerr and Co., and we younger ones knew much about him, from the stories which went through the office.

John Gile was the son of an enormously wealthy manufacturer of Leeds. He had been educated to that extent which wealth can educate, and at last had inherited his father's enormous fortune. His education, like that of the majority of wealthy men's only sons, had not been in any particular direction, and he had grown up as he chose, imbibing that which pleased him best, until at last, now that he was a middle-aged man, whose "future" was already on the wane, he had earned the nickname of "monomaniac," on account of certain idiosyncrasies which I shall describe later. He had been a wanderer, long years elapsing between the short scraps of news which would come from him—now in Egypt, now in India or Australia, or from some equally far-away foreign country. Sometimes queries were made concerning his whereabouts, but not often, for he had few acquaintances, and no friends apparently, unless the firm could be called his friend. He had been here and there, but mostly in places famous for their artistic past and the examples of unexcelled art which still existed in them—some of it placed on exhibition for the benefit of everyone, and some of it buried in the country villages undiscovered by the connoisseur. For John Gile was a collector, a searcher, a finder, and a buyer all in one. Those who knew him said his opinions on matters of artistic merit were second to none, and spoke of his own private collection in tones of awe, as something of great value and beauty. He was, in short, a peculiar old man, whose heart was cold with the frost of years, and whose mind was wrapped up in admiration of his own hobby. He collected all sorts of rare and beautiful things, but cameos were his idols. Let him hear of a rare or curious specimen, be it ever so far away, and he was never at peace until he held it in his hand; and if it was a gem, never satisfied until he could call it his own. The history of cameos was to him as the A B C is to a schoolboy, and when the cockles of his heart were warm he would discourse learnedly on the beautiful tints of this specimen or the delicate workmanship of that. It was he who purchased at a fabulous price a part of the famous Gonzaga collection, and it was said his home in Warwickshire was a veritable museum of art; so you may imagine my satisfaction when one morning Mr. Routledge called me into his private office and said:

"Mr. Burgoyne, there are some matters of importance concerning the property of John Gile on which we must have his opinion immediately; and as he has at last returned to his home, for good I hope, Mr. Kerr, I think it would be best for you to run down and see him about it."

"All right, sir," I said, and immediately made myself ready for the long journey. As the business which brought about my acquaintance with John Gile does not in any respect concern this story, I will not enlarge upon it. Suffice it to say, after a long and tiresome journey, covered with dust and wearied by the jolting of the cars, and the jostling of the crowd, I arrived at the little town of M——. I procured a conveyance, and in the dusk of a late October afternoon was driven to the door of Gile's house.

The house, viewed from the outside, was an unpretentious affair, and gave little evidence of the wealth of the occupant; a low, rambling old structure, betokening some age, and composed of all sorts of architecture, ancient and modern, and covered at the front by creeping vines whose leaves had begun to change in colour as the evenings of autumn had crept upon them. I made my way up to the massive door, and, ringing the bell, stood waiting upon the stoop. A motherly-looking sub-

Hazel Harlow is in Sheffield this week.

stantial woman, who afterwards proved to be the housekeeper, opened the door, and upon reading my card, said:

"Oh, yes, Mr. Burgoyne, Mr. Gile is expecting you, and has given orders that you should be shown to you room immediately. We dine in half an hour."

And bustling along before me she led the way up a broad carven flight of stairs to a wide and spacious chamber, and leaving me with a cheery admonition that dinner would be served shortly, hurried away to attend to her household duties. Finishing my toilet, I made the best of my way to the lower floor, and opening a door on the right of the hallway, found myself in a lofty room, the walls of which were covered with pictures and the niches and corners were filled with cabinets and bits of statuary. Before a blazing fire on one side of the room sat the man whose personality we at the office had often wondered over. He glanced up at my entrance, and, rising, advanced to meet me. John Gile had been a handsome man, and the inroads of age had not sufficed to eliminate all the attractions from his person. A clear, dark eye, a firm mouth, and the wide and heavy nose so common to lovers of art, were the most prominent features. He greeted me cordially.

"Mr. Burgoyne, I am pleased that Routledge, Kerr and Co. have respected my inclination for agreeable people, and sent you to see me."

He said this with so much earnestness that I was forced to believe that he meant what he said.

We dined, and after dinner, at which he proved a most agreeable and entertaining companion, we went back to the big room in which I had first met him. We lighted our pipes, and settled ourselves before the blazing fire, when he said

"Judging from your conversation at dinner, I should say you are a man who is somewhat interested in matters of art, and know something about them."

Thanking him for the implied compliment I acquiesced.

"If that is the case," he continued, "I will show you some of my cameos."

At the voicing of the word his whole manner changed: he enthused from the plain commonplace man of travel to a devotee of a goddess whose worship always is complete,

"Mr. Gile," I said, "I shall consider myself extremely favoured if I may see even a part of the famous collection I have heard so much about, for I am, as you have guessed, an ardent though uneducated admirer of the beautiful."

"Say no more," he returned; "I shall be delighted to show you my treasures."

Reaching a little steel-bound chest from the table which stood at his elbow, he opened it with a key of intricate workmanship, and commenced to lay out tray after tray of unique and wonderful gems. Onyx and pietra dura, lapis luzuli and shell, the sardonyx red of the Bull's Mouth, and the delicate pink of the Queen's Conch, exquisite and varied in detail and beauty.

"This," he said, "is an excellent Saolini, the lines of which are finer than a hair." He laid it down, and, picking up another, continued: "And here we have a Girometti of the first water, while this Giovanni Dies, with its wonderful colouring, is especially worthy of notice."

"I suppose you have your favourite, Mr. Gile?" I questioned.

His eyes lit up as he said:

"Oh, yes, to be sure, and I will show it to you;" and reaching carefully into the bottommost tray, he drew forth a specimen, the possession of which I envy him to this day. It was of Chaldean onyx, the background of a heavy delft blue, and the upper strata of pure and creamy white. The stone itself was a gem, but the carving—oh! the carving!—shall I ever forget it?

A face of power, infinite, yet hampered by a touch of sensuality, looked out at me from the delicate sculpture; clear cut, and every linament standing out in an individuality whose likeness I had never witnessed. Oh! the beauty, the strength of it, and such a little thing, scarce an inch in diameter, and half as much in thickness, yet all the passions and ambitions of human life gathered together within its outlines.

I sighed as I handed it back to the man who, all the time I had held it, had watched me with jealousy in his every expression.

"You are fortunate," I said; "it must have cost you an enormous sum."

"Well," he said, "it cost me these," and he held up his right hand, which was minus the first and second fingers. I suppose my face expressed my curiosity, for he said:

"I see you are interested, and if you care to hear how I came by this stone, I will tell you the story.

"In the year 1855, shortly after the death of Belline, il Passatore, who had been the scourge of Naples for years, his wife, Ysa, a most remarkable woman, by the way, had been driven into Sicily; there, at the head of a band of Cammora, which had degenerated into a herd of bloodthirsty banditti, she was terrorising the city of Syracuse and its environs. I happened to be in that locality, searching as usual for what could be found in the way of cameos.

"Sicily, you know, is the home of shell work, and some of my most beautiful and valued specimens I have come across in the cabins of the country folk of that beautiful country. No doubt my name and condition were well known to the people thereabout, although I was not aware of the fact.

"One afternoon my landlady came to me as I sat beneath the great lime tree in the courtyard, and, bowing low, said:

"'A gentleman to see you, Excellency.'

"'Who is he?' I asked.

"For answer she handed me a card on which was written, 'Guiseppe Felozzi.'

"'Show him in,' I said.

"The woman bowed, withdrew, and shortly returned, ushering in a tall, dark stranger, whose attire convinced me he was a man of the world. His face was Italian, his eyes black as sloes, the eyebrows meeting above, and his speech suave and correct.

"Saluting me, he said:

"'Signor Gile, I have heard of your penchant for old-time gems, as who has not, and have that to tell which may prove of interest to you.'

"He said it so nicely, I was convinced of his good-nature, and asked him to sit down and smoke. This he did, and after lighting his cigarette, which he preferred to roll himself after the usual Italian fashion, he said:

"'I am an admirer of these beautiful things myself, but alas! my means are not equal to my desires, so——' and he shrugged his shoulders expressively.

Hazel Harlow will be in Newcastle next week.

"'There is a certain signora,' said my visitor, 'living in the suburb of L——, the sole surviving member of a once powerful family, who has been reduced to the disposal of her personal jewels. This delicate task she has confided to me as a trusted friend. Among the jewels is an onyx of Chaldea, carved by the hand of Meldhor, the Babylonian, bearing the head of Baaltis. This treasure came into her possession through a long line of succession dating from the time of the Medici, whose people brought it from Egypt. It is superb, it is unique, *magnifique!* Alas! that I may not own it myself; but my entire possessions are not one half of its value, so, signor, I offer you this opportunity.'

"I did not hesitate. Madmanlike, I leaped to my feet and breathlessly said: 'Let us go to it. Come, show me the way.'

"The Italian smiled.

"'You are enthusiastic, signor; but come, it is not so far.'

"He arose, and leading the way, we passed through the house. In the hall I picked up a blackthorn which I carried more from habit than from need.

"Conversing pleasantly, Signor Felozzi led the way up out of the village into the hills which surround it; but I must have proved a sorry companion, for my mind was full of the wonder which I was to see; yet I had time to think, as we left the town, that Thomas Hurd, the only man I know in all Europe, was expected to arrive in Syracuse that afternoon, and I should not be there to receive him. But that did not bear a penny-weight against the fact that I was to see the dream of my lifetime—a genuine Babylonian cameo—and besides I would return shortly.

"For an hour we journeyed, and I was beginning to be impatient when my conductor said:

"'Ah! we have arrived,' and almost before I was aware we had turned a corner, and, standing in a cleft of the hill I perceived a substantial house, whose portals were open, but which seemed to be deserted. It had evidently been a villa of some importance in its time, for over the door was emblazoned a coat of arms, though time and countless storms had nearly obliterated it. We reached the threshold.

"'Enter,' said Felozzi.

"I stepped through the doorway, and found myself in a hall of goodly dimensions. The door closed behind me and Felozzi stepping in front of me, said:

"'Signor, you were an easy victim!'

"Like a flash the memory of Ysa and her band of robbers swept through my mind, and I realised that I had been trapped. Feeling that resistance was hopeless, for Guiseppe had already placed a silver whistle to his lips, and had blown a summons to his minions, still, I backed up against the wall, and holding my cudgel at *tiercel*, awaited developments. There was a sound of opening doors, and a hurry a feet, and I was surrounded by a crowd of dark-browed ruffians, each carrying in his belt a weapon of some sort.

"'Signor,' said Felozzi, 'do not be foolish. Submit quietly, and no harm shall come to you.'

"'I believed you once and I will not again. You are a liar, Guiseppe!' I cried, lost in a fury of rage.

"His face darkened, and the sinister brows contracted until his face was wrinkled and distraught.

"'Seize him, Antinne!' he cried, 'here you, Luigi, Bartholomew, quick, disarm him, that he may no longer taunt you.'

"They rushed, and I met them (I had learned the quarter-staff at Rugby), point down, then, with a quick one, two, three, so many of them sprawled on the paved floor.

"That made them ugly, and those still standing drew long wicked knives at their belts and rushed again. I guess it would have fared badly with me if something hadn't happened which, so far as I was concerned, was entirely unexpected. I had my back against the wall, my club aloft, the ruffians grouped about me looking for an opening. Guiseppe was crying them on, and things looked bad for me, when a side door was thrown open, and a tall woman with flowing hair rushed into the hall with a two-handed sword in her hands. She came to a full stop when her eyes fell on us, and cried:

"'Guiseppe, what means this? Must I be forced to take the brand to preserve quiet about my own apartments? Get thee hence!'

"No answer, no movement!

"Quick as a thought the great sword went up. I would not have thought that she could do it, and darting forward, she brought it down upon the outstretched arm of the foremost bandit, so that his severed arm fell with a thud to the pavement, and the man stood a full minute before he spun round and dropped beside his arm.

"Again the sword went up, but I stood alone before her, for all the rest had vanished; then I said a hasty prayer, for I thought my time had come, I having no chance with so formidable a weapon.

"'Who are you to disturb me, Ysa Cammorista?' and not waiting for an answer, down came the mighty blade; but I leaped aside, and the sword, catching on my blackthorn, shore it into two pieces.

"'Now,' said I, 'is the time,' but she did not strike again. Looking up at her I saw her mood had changed.

"'Follow me,' she said; and turning her back to me, she went through the still open doorway. Meekly I obeyed.

"She was still walking away from me when I entered the door behind her, and did not pause until she had returned the sword to its place on the wall whence she had snatched it in her fury; then, seating herself in an immense carved chair, at the farther end of the room, she gazed at me where I stood by the door.

"She beckoned to me and I advanced; but the room was a long one, and before I stood at the foot of the throne I had a chance to scrutinise this strange woman. She was beautiful beyond a doubt—I, as a connoisseur in art, felt sure of it—but—there was no soul in her face; her eyes looked forth from their portals speculatively calm, notwithstanding the outbreak of a moment since.

"'John Gile,' she said, 'you were very near to death, do you know it?'

"I bowed.

"'Ransom, John Gile, ransom,' she continued. 'What say you? Ten thousand pounds is the figure, and perchance your friends neglect to send it, so then will I send them a remembrance of you in the shape of an ear, a nose, or a finger.'

"I stared; I had not anticipated anything like that.

"You called Guiseppe a liar. You did him an injustice, signor, for that which he told you is true; and neither am I a liar, as you will find. See, here is the gem,' and loosening her bodice, she drew forth and handed me the cameo, still warm with its contact with her bosom.

"Guiseppe had not lied; and I could have clasped him

Hazel Harlow will travel from town to town.

to my bosom in thankfulness, evil plight as I was in, at the sight out. I fondled it, I caressed it; I carried it to my lips, little dreaming its evil secret, while that inexorable woman gazed at me, a smile of scorn at my enthusiasm wreathing her lips.

"'And yet,' she said, 'if your friends prove faithful, and send your ransom, then will I give it to you!'

"I stood in amazement. Who could have imagined such a proposition? Ten thousand pounds! The Baaltis cameo! What could I do?

"'I will tell you what I will do. I will write a note to Thomas Hurd, Syracuse. He surely must have arrived. I will tell him to send the money. The paltry money! How can it compare with so priceless a treasure?'

"I did it. They locked me in a strong-walled room where I had nought to do but feed my mind on the memory of that one look at the beautiful gem. I waited a week. No word from Syracuse! I waited another week. Still no word. What could it mean?

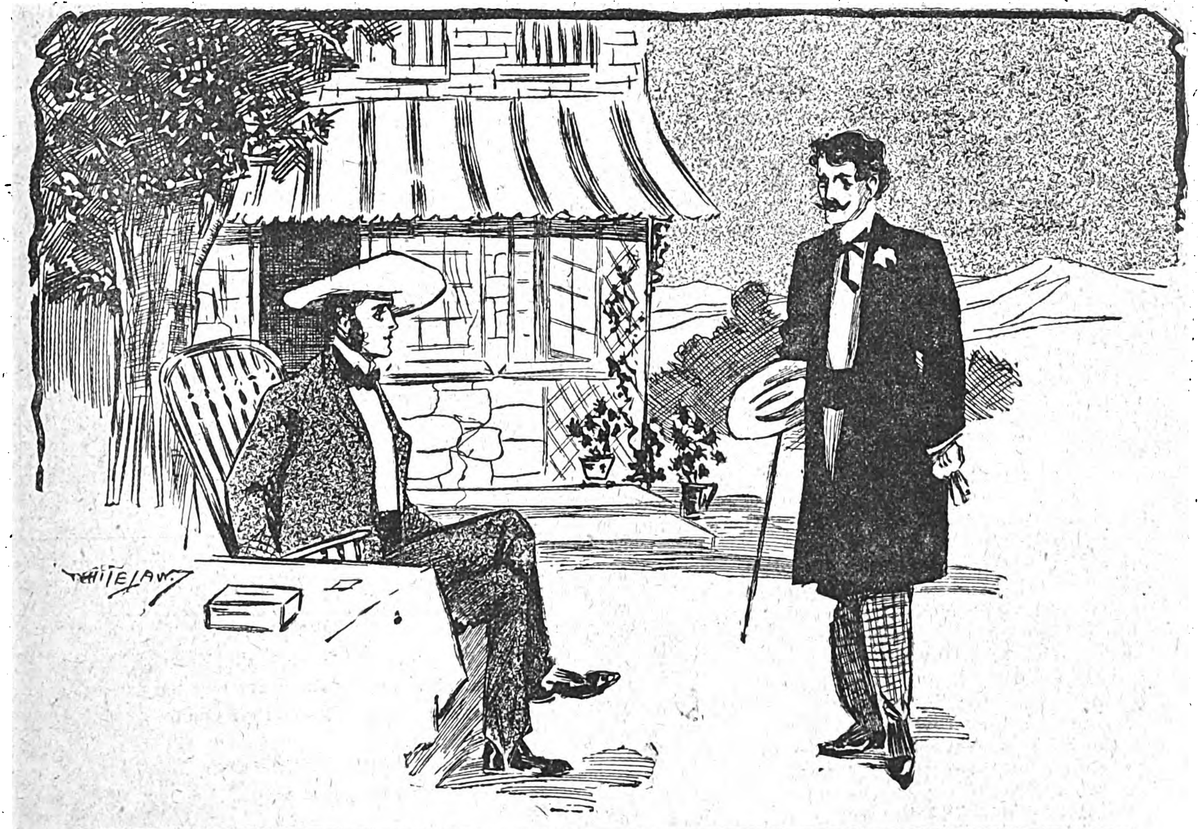
"Then they cut off the index finger of my right hand," he held up his hand, "and sent it to the city.

"Gods above! how I longed to get at the cowardly curs; but in their superiority of numbers they held me over the block while the butcher did his work. Another week, and silence; then they took the next finger and sent it. Curses on them! The power which strengthens man in times of adversity alone knows how I endured it! And still the time fled by, and the third week was almost at an end, when one night—it rained that night in Sicily—I heard my door unlocked, and, rising from my couch in the corner, stood face to face with Ysa. Her beautiful figure was draped in black, and she held her light aloft; her features were troubled, I thought. That thought maybe the indulgence which comes from the contemplation of beauty. Be it as it may, she stood before me, and around her neck was the chain which held my idol.

"'Signor Gile,' she said, 'another week is almost gone, and as we have had no word from your friend, it marks the loping off of another of your members. Still, I am much inclined to save you this further humiliation. How easy for me to give you freedom! My heart has been touched by your courage and fortitude. Will you accept freedom, and pledge your word to secrecy concerning my whereabouts? Will you?'

"Freedom was before me.

"'Let me look at the cameo, Cammorista.' Quietly she drew out the bauble, and as its beauty broke upon my vision, its glorious workmanship, its subtle lines, its exquisite colours, my mind was made up



"Signor Gile, I have heard of your penchant for old time gems."

Tell your friends about Hazel Harlow.

"'May I take the cameo, Ysa Cammorista?' I asked boldly, for I felt she was in a gentle mood, and perhaps might sell it to me. For a moment she gazed at me, and then came her answer:

"'Nay!'

"'Then I will wait,' I said quietly.

"'Thou art a fool!' she said, 'and still it is well worth waiting for a long time.' She held it close to her eyes, turning it over and over in her hand, when suddenly she exclaimed:

"'Corpo di Bacco! What is this?' I looked up, but none too quick to see the terrible thing which followed.

"As she held it close before her face she touched the delicate spring which old Melchior had concealed so cleverly among its dainty convolutions, hundreds of years before, the head of Baaltis flew back, a red consuming flame poured forth; she uttered a hideous cry, and clutching her eyes fell to the floor. The room was filled with phosphoric fumes, the atmosphere was horrible. I groped and stumbled to the door, and threw it open; a flood of fresh air poured in and dissipated the racuous vapours, and the opening of the door showed the way to liberty. But I paused. Ysa still lay prone upon she floor. From her grasp I wrenched the cameo, still reeking with the foul fumes of phosphorus. I stepped acoss my prison's threshold and listened. All was silent. I stepped out entirely, and tiptoed along the hallway, pausing here and there to see if I had been discovered, forward again until I reached the door. Then carefully a couple of hundred paces—they must have slept the sleep of the stones that night—until at last I drew a breath of relief and broke into a run. How I ran through the darkness and rain, over rocks and through ditches, now up, now down, until the welcome lights of Syracuse rewarded my straining eye. Hurrying through the city, I entered my house. The good old housekeeper, with many pious ejaculations and thanks to the saints for my return, stared at me as one who sees a ghost.

"'The Signor Hurd!' she exclaimed, in answer to my impatient question, 'why he but arrived to-day, and was so fatigued he went immediately to bed. He did not even look at his mail.'

"'The mail? Oh, yes, give it to me. Donna Marie, I will hand it to him.'

"'Ah! thank you,' she said, as she passed me the numerous packages and letters.

"I only gave him part of them before leaving Syracuse the next morning, carrying with me the Baaltis cameo, whose secret cavity was thoroughly cleansed of the substance which no one knows who had put it there, or how many years ago."

"How about the flame, Mr. Gile?" I asked.

"Well," he said, handing me the cameo again, "you will find that besides the cavity beneath the white head of Baaltis, the golden setting which surrounds the entire stone is hollow. This tiny canal had an opening into the larger cavity, and was filled with oxygen. The spring which opens the top cover also opens the canal, and the pure oxygen rushing forth, instantaneously ignited the piece of phosphorus, thus generating the horrid vapour whose agency led me to freedom."

He paused and re-lit his pipe, then continued

"In the spring I was at Rome during the carnival. A woman, bent and drawn and blind, stopped and asked for alms. It was Ysa Cammorista."

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Hazel Harlow is in Sheffield this week.

TOM THE HOOLIGAN.

TOM THE HOOLIGAN was a terror to the neighbourhood which he honoured with his presence.

Accompanied by choice spirits of his own calibre, he nightly paraded the streets in the slum which he called home. It was not a promising looking vicinity; but the inhabitants, despite their deadly poverty, were peaceful souls enough; and Tom and his gang created a nightly panic amongst them.

Old people and young girls were special prey of the Hooligans. They were nightly treated to rough horseplay, which usually ended in a street fray of more or less severe description, wherein respectable working men of the district confronted the Hooligans, and were more often than not, defeated by them.

Tom was a born leader. In another class of life and in more favourable circumstances he might have arrived at considerable fame. As it was, his gang adored him, and would have followed him with confidence and courage wherever he might choose to lead them. He led them into divers strange paths, and the terror in the neighbourhood grew apace.

The police were on the alert; but Tom had been accustomed from his cradle to eluding even that astute body, and though members of his gang had at one time and another fallen into the clutches of the law, Tom remained at large.

He was a gaunt, lean young fellow, of shambling gait, and shabby appearance, with, on the other hand, certain keenness of his eyes, and alertness in his bearing, which perhaps accounted for his undisputed leadership.

Tom the Hooligan was a masterful individual. It was a misfortune for the community that his energies were so unfortunately misdirected.

The doings of his gang came to a climax on a certain afternoon when London went mad over some of its returning troops. The occasion was the Hooligans' opportunity, and they made the most of it—with the result that many heads were broken, and other more or less serious injuries inflicted upon harmless citizens.

But the harmless citizens were not alone in their affliction; Tom himself was knocked down in one of the rushes which he had ordered, and when he was with difficulty extricated from the trampling of the mob he was found to be in no condition for the police-station. There was nothing for it, but to put him into an ambulance and trundle him off to the nearest hospital, the burly policeman who accompanied him relieving his feelings by making many incisive remarks to his victim as the they went on their way.

At the hospital gates some of the gang who had walked disconsolately beside him were turned back, but not before Tom had called to them:

"Come and see me in this 'ere bloomin' 'orspital. We'll make the coves wot's 'ere sit up a bit. They won't want none of us agin!"

Tom's tone was defiant, and the policeman thought it advisable to drop a whispered hint to the house surgeon as to the ungovernable nature of the patient he was admitting.

"Nobody can't do nothing with them 'Ooligans," he said despondingly. "I'm sorry to a' brought 'im in, sir—he'll give you a deal o' trouble; but there warn't nothing for it."

"Oh, it's all right," the surgeon answered cheerily. "Ward discipline will be a little experience for the young gentleman," and he glanced across at Tom, who lay scowling on the ambulance, aware that he was being discussed, but unable to catch the words.

Tom's head was dressed, his other wounds attended to in the surgery, the storm of bad language, groans, and cries he hurled at the house surgeon making that young gentleman say pleasantly: "Look here, my fine fellow, you'll have to curb your tongue a bit in the ward. Sister doesn't allow that sort of thing."

"Sister!" Tom snorted. "'Oo's *Sister?* I ain't goin' to do nothin' to please a bloomin' lot o' wimmen—not me! Don't you make no mistake about that!"

The house surgeon smiled pleasantly again, but said nothing.

"I ain't one as can be easy made to do what I don't choose," Tom muttered sulkily, as he was lifted on the stretcher. "There will be some in the ward sorry as ever they see me afore I'm done," he added darkly. "No bally wimmen don't manage Tom the Hooligan, not much!"

The end of this speech was lost upon his hearers, as the stretcher was hoisted up and carried across the courtyard into the big accident ward.

The lights of the ward as he was borne into it dazzled Tom's eyes. He caught a glimpse of lines of beds, and heard a clear voice say:

"No. 17 bed, please," and his next impression was of being laid upon something singularly soft and pleasant, and covered with a blanket. Tom had never in the course of his life lain upon a bed of this description before, his customary resting-place was a bundle of shavings and straw; and his aching limbs sank gratefully into the comfortable mattress. Screens stood round the bed, and after a few moments somebody came round the screens and stood beside him, a small lady, in a dark blue dress, with spotless cap and apron, and a pair of quiet grey eyes which twinkled a little as they met Tom's defiant glance.

She held a paper in her hand, and a pen.

"Will you tell me your name and address, please?" she said.

Tom's first instinct was to snort and decline. It was really to his own intense surprise that he found himself meekly giving the information wanted.

"Nurse is coming now to wash you," she said next. "After that, I daresay you will get a nice sleep."

"Wash me!" Tom jerked himself up in bed, thereby giving himself excruciating pain. "I don't want no washing. I——" he was about to launch forth on a stream of profanity, but the grey eyes that watched him seemed, as he afterwards expressed it, "ter take all the bloomin' sperrit out of a chap;" and he fell silent.

The small lady smiled at him. Her smile was very charming.

"Oh," she said, "you will feel ever so much more comfortable after nurse has washed you. It is a rule here, you know; and I am sure *you* will understand that we have to do what our leaders tell us."

The stress on the *you* appealed to Tom. *She* knew, at any rate, that he was accustomed to lead people. An answering smile stole over his sulky visage.

Tell your friends about Hazel Harlow.

"Well," he said loftily, "I don't mind letting her have a go at me."

Perhaps Nurse Blake did not altogether enjoy the operation of washing the redoubtable Hooligan. His remonstrances were many; his language at times more forcible than polite; and when she had finished her thankless task and removed the screens, she said:

"Well, Seventeen, I don't know what Sister will say to you."

"'Oo cares what Sister says?" he shouted after her "'Oo is Sister?"

The man in the next bed looked at him and grinned.

"You'll soon find that out, my man. Sister's the boss o' this ward, and she don't stand no nonsense—you make no mistakes about it."

Tom laughed ironically and loudly.

"Not quite so much noise, here," said a soft voice, beside him—a voice that was very soft, and yet—and yet—Tom felt most unaccountably like a naughty little boy. He glanced up angrily. His eyes met again those cool grey ones with their twinkle of humour.

"I like everybody to be as cheerful and jolly as possible," the soft voice went on, "but I am sure you will understand, Seventeen, that we must not have noisy laughing and talking. One or two people are very bad in here, you see. I am sure you will give us no trouble."

Her eyes were full of faith in him, which surprised Tom. Nobody had ever believed anything good of him as far as he could remember in the whole course of his life. He had always lived up to the reputation of being a dog with a bad name.

"I don't want to give no trouble," he muttered—which was odd, considering his dark threats of upsetting the ward. "I only wants ter be left in peace."

"Yes; you must have a good sleep now. Only," all at once a masterful ring came into that soft voice, "remember, Seventeen, there must never be any more bad language whilst you are in here. No manly man ever swears at a woman, or before a woman."

Tom gasped. His eyes fell before the grey eyes that watched him. He squirmed uneasily. A hand that seemed to him marvellously soft was laid upon his hand.

"I know I can trust you," she said, and her voice had lost the masterfulness, and was very gentle again. Her smile stirred a chord in Tom's heart that had never before vibrated. Something in his throat choked him. He shut his eyes—well, because they suddenly stung with an unaccustomed sensation. Perhaps Sister saw and understood. She moved quietly away.

Tom opened his eyes cautiously and watched her. She was so very small, that he could have knocked her down easily with one of his great hands. A hot flush flamed over his face; he looked thoughtfully at his big red fist on the white sheet, and then back at the small figure walking down the ward.

"Well, you might have knocked me down with a feather!" he articulated aloud. "Ain't she a fair treat?"

"You're right there, mate," the man in 18 bed said. "She's a rare 'un, she is. See 'er manage this 'ere great Ward o' men. It makes you fair sit up, don't it—and such a little 'un, as she is, too?"

"That's what takes me," Tom answered slowly. "She ain't got a commandin' presence, in a manner o' speakin'—she've only got something in 'er eye, ain't she?"

"She's a real lady, she is," Eighteen said warmly. "She've a feelin' 'eart, and a understandin' one as well. She ain't one as will stand any nonsense."

That fact soon became patent to Tom; yet it remained a mystery to him why he gave in to her, as he expressed it. The extraordinary thing was that he, who was accustomed to sprinkle every sentence he spoke with language of a lurid and sanguinary description, now pulled himself up instantly if the mildest oath came to his lips.

"Most funny thing, ain't it?" he confided to his neighbour. "Seems as if something rose up inside of yer and stopped yer sayin' things when she's about. Funny thing, too—fer she's only a little bit of a thing, as yer might say."

Yes, she was only a little bit of a thing—that was true enough; but she knew how to manage a ward of thirty-two men. Something in its peaceful atmosphere kept them good, she averred; but whether it was really that, or whether it was the presence of soft-voiced, gentle-handed women always about them, or whether it was Sister's own personality, is impossible to say. The fact remained. No bad language was ever heard in Accident Ward at St. Chad, and even that outrageous young person, Tom the Hooligan, was becoming subdued.

On his first Sunday in the hospital several members of his gang rollicked up to the gates, with a pleasurable expectation of "making a rare old shine" within the walls. Only three of them were admitted by the big porter, whose word of advice as to behaviour they passed by in scorn and with protruding tongues. They talked loudly as they crossed the courtyard, and they were heard to boast that they "warn't goin' out of the bally orspital without giving it a taste o' the rough side o' their fists."

Still talking loudly, they jostled other visitors through the door of the ward, and were proceeding between the rows of beds, with their hats on their heads and a general air of jauntiness, when their progress was suddenly stopped.

Sister, coming from the other end of the ward, met them and blocked their path, standing still and surveying them quietly from head to foot. Her gaze lingered longest on their hats. They grew restive under it, and their hands went instinctively to their heads.

"Thank you," she said, her eyes twinkling; "yes, that is what I meant. No man comes in here with his hat on."

The Hooligans' hats were off before she had finished speaking. Silent awe held them dumb.

"And I must ask you to go quietly to the patient you want to see, please," she went on. "I expect it is No. 17 bed you are looking for. Will you kindly talk and laugh with as little noise as possible. Some of these sick are very ill, you know."

The Hooligans were still speechless. They moved on, limply and on tiptoe. The impertinences they had planned outside the gates slipped away from them; their swagger was transferred into a nervous shuffle.

Tom greeted them with effusion, doing the honours of the ward like the oldest inhabitant; but when his friends, recovering from their speechlessness, began to swear softly, he frowned.

"Look 'ere," he said, "don't you let me 'ear none o' that in 'ere. Sister don't 'low it."

His boon companions gazed at him openmouthed.

"Sister? 'Oo's Sister? And 'oo is it 'lows you to do things, and not to do 'em?" They sniggered feebly.

"Sister's the boss o' this 'ere ward," Tom asserted firmly, "and them as comes 'ere does what she says; and if you're a-comin' to see me, you've got to do the same."

The faithful three gazed at Tom. They had a dim notion that he might be a bit dotty.

"Ain't yer made 'em all sit up—like you said yer would?" one of the party ventured to say feebly.

"It ain't no manner o' use your tryin' to talk o' things yer don't understand," Tom answered loftily. "There's some folks as you *can* get at, and some as you can't. Sister's one o' them as gets at *you* if you was to try it on—which you don't never do," he added reflectively.

"She ain't very big, neither," murmured one of the three.

"It ain't bigness as does it," Tom said. "It's something inside o' 'er, what comes out and 'its yer. It's through 'er being a real *lidy*, that's where it is. She've got a somethin' in 'er what yer can't 'elp obeyin'."

The three, remembering the awe that had stolen over them when she confronted them, did not dispute Tom's words.

They talked in whispers whilst still in the ward, and stole away like mice afterwards!

Sister's interest in Tom, roused at first by the very fact of his attempted defiance, grew each day that he was in the hospital. Being a woman of insight, she saw what fine possibilities lay beneath that gaunt and awkward exterior.

"Tom," she said to him one day, "do you know that, if you liked, you could be a very fine man?"

"*Me?* Now yer gettin' at me, Sister!" he ejaculated, grinning sheepishly, and flushing to the roots of his lank hair.

"No, I am not. I mean it. You never will be a fine man, of course, whilst you spend your time in loafing round and leading a gang of idle young vagabonds into mischief. But I don't believe you will really go on doing anything so silly."

Tom glared at her, but her cool glance made him wince.

"Well, if yer ain't got nothing to amuse yer, it don't seem silly to be the leader of a gang. We've been a fair terror down our way," pride showed in his voice.

"I daresay—though I don't see much to boast of in that. Now, I should have thought that anybody with your gift for leading," Tom flushed with pleasure, "would have wanted to lead something better than a party of stupid boys. Why don't you be a soldier, Tom?"

"Why don't you be a soldier, Tom?" The words swung to and fro in Tom's brain all through the days that followed, and Sister missed no opportunity of urging her advice upon him. She was a soldier's daughter herself, she told Tom, and it would make her feel very proud if she could persuade him to serve with the Colours.

When he talked it over with his gang on Sunday they told him frankly they thought he was "a bit balmy in the crumpet"—which, being interpreted, signified off his head. But Tom did not heed them. Sister's words had gone home.

Perhaps it was only want of occupation and love of excitement that had made Tom into a Hooligan; for, certain it is that even the wearisome process of being turned into a soldier did not dishearten him. And though his old gang still describe him as "a bit gone in the upper storey," for submitting to drills and other regulations, they have a sneaking admiration for his smart appearance and upright bearing.

And Sister prizes, as she prizes few things, a photograph on her mantelpiece that represents a young, tall soldier, with an alert face, and bears under it, in scrawling characters, the words "Tom the Hooligan."

L. G. Moberly.

THE COST OF CORPULENCY AND THE COST OF ITS CURE.

The mortality tables published from time to time demonstrate, amongst other alarming facts, that deaths from heart disease are as numerous as ever; but those dry official statistics do not show what an appalling proportion of these deaths from cardiac disease are due to more or less excessive corpulency. Nevertheless, it is an established fact that obesity is one of the most fatal causes of heart and liver affections. Listen to this significant pronouncement by an eminent authority: "An excess of fat not only becomes burdensome and unsightly, but a positive evil, and frequently an absolute danger. An accumulation of it may occur between the muscles upon the heart, causing embarrassed respiration, or around the kidneys, and persons in this condition are extremely liable to disease in the vital organs." Again, our authority says: "Those suffering from an accumulation of abdominal subcutaneous fat, sometimes several inches in depth, carry also an enormous weight of fat around the internal organs, and *are prone to the diseases known as fatty degeneration of the heart and liver.*"

This, then, is the cost of corpulency, not to speak of the extreme discomfort, and even suffering, which it causes in the oppressively hot weather—the weakness and exhaustion, the feverishness, the loss of appetite, the utter prostration and entire loss of energy, physical and mental.

As to the cost of its cure we cannot do better than refer our interested readers to the source of the remarks we have quoted above. We allude to the exhaustive treatise entitled "Corpulency and the Cure" (256 pages), by the eminent specialist, Mr. F. Cecil Russell, who has made this subject peculiarly his own, and has succeeded in effecting thousands of cures in cases where all other systems have proved abortive. Mr. Russell's lifelong researches have been directed to the discovery of a *permanent and radical cure* of obesity, and how far he has been successful may be gathered from the many hundreds of cases personally vouched for by the patients themselves, extracts from whose grateful letters are given in the book, together with copious excerpts from the press. In order to prove the absolutely harmless nature of the compound which forms the basis of his treatment, Mr. Russell also gives the recipe. This it will be seen, is of purely innocuous vegetable ingredients. Moreover, the treatment is pleasant and easy, does not interfere with the ordinary avocations, and entails no irrational limitations as to food and drink. Our readers, by sending two penny stamps to Mr. F. Cecil Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., may obtain a copy of this remarkable treatise under plain sealed envelope, when they will find out for themselves that the cost of the cure is as a drop in the ocean compared to what the cost of neglect may be.

SPECIAL OFFER.

TEST TRIAL CASES

For Stout People who have not tried the Russell Treatment.

By arrangement a limited number of specially prepared 6/- cases of the compound which forms the basis of the "Russell" treatment, have been reserved for distribution amongst interested readers of *Short Stories* at the nominal price of 2/6, including carriage throughout Great Britain, as a conclusive test of its wonderful efficacy.

Full directions for following the treatment will accompany each test case, also F. C. Russell's well-known book, "Corpulency and the Cure," 256 pp.

This offer remains open for 21 days from date of this publication or until such time as the number reserved is exhausted, in which case applicants will have their remittances returned forthwith.

Send remittance, under envelope, marked "reserved," to address given below, and mention this publication.

The packet is devoid of any mark denoting contents.

All communications will be considered private.

F. C. RUSSELL Woburn House, Store St., Bedford Sq., London, W.C.

Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, September 2nd. Postcards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Mr. C. F. Salmon, of 86 Claybrook Road, Hammersmith, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

If some men were half as big as they think they are, the world would have to be enlarged.

Prospective Litigant: "You give legal advice here, don't you?" Lawyer (absent-mindedly): "No, we sell it."

Anxious Mother: "I don't understand how it is, Bertie, that you are at the bottom of your class." Bertie: "I don't understand it myself; but I know it's dreadful easy."

Mother: "Johnny, I see your little brother has the smaller apple. Did you give him his choice, as I suggested?" Johnny: "Yes'm. I told him he could have his choice, the little one or none, and he took the little one."

Mistress: "Not going to marry that sweep after all, Jane? Why, I thought it was all settled." Jane: "So it was, mum; but the fact is, I saw him with a clean face for the first time last night, and I can't marry him! You've no idea how ugly he is when he's washed, mum."

A lawyer addressed the Court as "Gentlemen" instead of "Your honours." After he had concluded, a brother of the Bar reminded him of his error. He immediately rose to apologise thus: "May it please the Court, in the heat of the debate I called your honours gentlemen. I make a mistake, and beg pardon."

Notwithstanding this age of School Boards and Free Education it is surprising and ludicrous to read the excuses sent by parents for the absence of their children. Here is one: "Please excuse Johnnie for being absent, he had the tooth*ake* to oblige his mother who was whitewashing his father." Punctuation is of no account here.

*He was a naughty little brother; but little brothers are always naughty on such occasions. His sister's young man was sitting in the drawing-room patiently waiting when Tommy opened fire with: "Are you going to propose to my sister to-night?" "Why I—er—er—er—er—what do you mean?" stammered the young man. "Oh, nothing! Only if you are, you ain't going to surprise her. At dinner just now, she bribed me an' me brother to go to bed at half-past seven. She has hung four Cupid or stupid pictures on the parlour wall, moved the sofa into the darkest corner, got ma and pa to go calling next door, shut the dog in the cellar, and been practisin', 'Because I Love You' on the pianner all the afternoon. You'll get her all right, only if she tells you 'bout its being sudden, tell her it's all bunkum!"

The man who believes only half he hears generally gets along pretty well if he selects the right half.

"I would not recall the passed," sang the fellow who had successfully disposed of a counterfeit sovereign.

"At last I have reached the turning point of my life," remarked the convict when they put him on the treadmill.

Tag: "They say that old Growler is a man who will stop at nothing." Wag: "Old habits, I suppose. I hear he used to be a hansom-cab driver."

Busybody: "Hallo! old fellow, how came you so dreadfully hoarse?" Korfer: "Adswerigg the fools that asked me how I caught this cold. Good bordigg!"

Footelightes: "Gussie, of course, will insist upon being included in the theatricals. What part shall we assign to him?" Foster: "Well, eh—I should say he'd be available as—as—first walking-stick."

Budding Dramatist: "Have you been able to make use of my new play?" Callous Manager: "We have already used it. We found it available for the snow-storm scene in the second act of our great melodrama."

He: "What has become of that pretty Miss Barclay who was visiting you last summer?" She: "She's joined the great majority." He: "You don't mean to say she's dead?" She: "Oh, no! She married a man named Smith."

Clerk of the Court: "Remember, my good woman, you are on your oath, and must speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Mrs. M'Carthy: "Well, thin, out av politeness I'd have kept it to mesilf, but if I must spake the whole truth—sure, then, ye're the ugliest man I've ivvor sot eyes on."

Jack: "My darling, I want to tell you something. I have deceived you. I am not rich, but utterly penniless. Will it make any difference to you?" Ethel: "Not the slightest." Jack: "I am so glad, dearest. Are you quite sure it will make no difference to you?" Ethel: "Quite sure. I can marry old Moneybags."

Mrs. Smith (thoughtfully): "I'm afraid I shall have to stop giving Bobby that tonic the doctor left for him." Mr. Smith (anxiously): "Why, isn't he any better?" Mrs. Smith: "Oh, yes! But he has slid down the banisters six times this morning, broken the hall lamp, two vases, a pitcher, and a looking-glass, and I don't feel as if I could stand much more."

Traveller: "I've got some notices that I'm selling to shopkeepers everywhere. Everybody buys 'em. Here's one—'If You Don't See What You Want, Ask For It!'" Country Tradesman: "Think I want to be bothered with people asking for things I haven't got? Give me one reading—'If You Don't See What You Want, Ask for Something Else!'"

The gas was turned low. Scarcely a glimmer gleamed. Young Camera clasped in his arms the slender form of the beautiful heiress, and her roseate cheek pressed the waistcoat button nearest his heart. Her dulcet "Yes!" to the momentous question which concerned the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness of these two loving hearts still trembled upon the enraptured air. "And yet," exclaimed young Camera, exultantly, through the circumambient, impassioned darkness, "and yet they say negatives are developed in a dark room."

Hazel Harlow will be in Newcastle next week.

STRANGE MENTAL POWERS.

HOW PEOPLE ARE INFLUENCED.

◆ ◆ ◆

Startling Words from the Committee Appointed to Investigate Hypnotism for the Benefit of Journal Readers.

REV. PAUL WELLER,
Gorham, N.Y.

G. S. LINCOLN, M.D.,
101 Crutchfield Street,
Dallas, Tex.

F. H. STOUFER,
Sec. & Treas. of Railway
Conductors, Pueblo, Col.

JUDGE HENRY SCHAFER,
Flemington, N.J.

Hypnotism is no longer a myth, a fanciful creation of the mind, but a reality, a most potent power, capable of producing infinite good. For the purpose of ascertaining the exact value of this much-talked-of power, a committee, composed of a physician, a well-known jurist, a prominent minister, and a leading railroad man, was appointed to investigate Hypnotism.

The committee carried on a series of investigations in regard to the power of Hypnotism to influence the actions and deeds of people in the everyday walks of life.

The first step taken by the members of the committee was to master the science in every detail, so that they might state from personal experience the good or evil this strange power might produce. They wrote the New York Institute of science, of Rochester, N.Y., the greatest school of Hypnotism and Occult Sciences in the world, and received full and complete instructions in regard to how hypnotism may be used to influence people in business, how to use it in treating diseases, etc., etc. In a few days they mastered these instructions and were full-fledged hypnotists.

It was clearly demonstrated that hypnotism may be employed so that the person operated upon is entirely unconscious of the fact that he is being influenced; and, all things considered, the committee regard it as the most valuable discovery of modern times. A knowledge of it is essential to one's success in life and well being in society.

Dr. Lincoln says, after a thorough investigation, that he considers it the most marvellous therapeutic or curative agent of modern times.

Judge Schafer, although a legal light, turned his attention to healing the sick, and in a few treatments he completely cured John E. Myers, of Flemington, N.J., of a strange malady that had kept him bedfast for nine years, and which the doctors said must surely kill him. Judge Schafer's fame spread for miles around, and hundreds of people applied to him for treatment.

Mr. Stoufer performed the astonishing feat of hypnotising Mr. Cunningham, of Pueblo, Col., at a distance of several blocks. He also hypnotised an aged gentleman and had him run through the streets shouting "Redhot peanuts for sale." Mr. Stoufer says it is indispensable to one's business success.

Rev. Paul Weller says that every minister and every mother should understand hypnotism for the benefit they can be to those with whom they are brought in daily contact.

In speaking of this marvellous power, President Eliot, of Harvard College, said to the graduates: "Young gentlemen, there is a subtle power lying latent in each of you, which few of you have developed, but which, when developed, might make a man irresistible. It is called Personal Magnetism or Hypnotism. I advise you to master it."

The New York Institute of Science has just issued 10,000 copies of a book which fully explains all the secrets of this marvellous power, and gives explicit directions for becoming a practical hypnotist, so that you can employ the force without the knowledge of any one. Anybody can learn. Success is guaranteed.

The book also contains a full report of the members of the committee. It will be sent absolutely free to anyone who is interested. A penny postal card will bring it. Write to-day. Address:

NEW YORK INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE (Dept. VA21), **ROCHESTER, N.Y., U.S.A.**

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

THOSE who are reading "Adventures of an Actress" will see that Hazel Harlow is this week in Sheffield, *next* week she will be in Newcastle. These thrilling stories are attracting a great deal of attention, and their influence on the circulation of *Short Stories* is very marked. But although this is so I do not wish you to relax your efforts on behalf of the paper. This time of the year is an exceptionally good one for obtaining new readers, and a word of recommendation to an acquaintance in the train or on the beach is calculated to do an immense amount of good.

⁂

ADVICE ON LOVE AND OTHER MATTERS.

(*Replies to Correspondents.*)

"ALICE" writes to ask me how shall she break off her engagement with her lover. "When I first met him," she says, "I thought he was just the man for a suitable husband. He was a teetotaler, a non-smoker, and had recently become a member of the church; he was apparently kind and pleasant to everyone he met and most charming in his manner to me. But since then I have discovered that all this must be put on for the purpose of winning me. He treats his widowed mother in a way which no gentleman would do, he is always in debt, although I know he earns good money, he has taken to drinking and smoking and seldom goes to church now. I feel sure that we shall never be happy, but as I have given my promise to marry him, I don't know how to break off the engagement. And I feel certain that he will try to hold me to my promise."

I dare say he will try, "Alice," but you must act with decision and courage. Why should you tie yourself up to a man who will make you miserable for life? The only way to deal with him is to tell him plainly and firmly, but, of course, politely, that you feel the marriage would not be a happy one, and that you decline to continue the engagement. Never mind his bluster or his threats to tell everyone that you are fickle or anything of that kind. You have your future happiness to consider, and that is the great thing. A man who will ill-treat his widowed mother will certainly try to bully you into keeping your engagement, but you must not be frightened, and your friends will soon understand why you are acting thus. Don't forget to write to me again to tell me how you are getting on. I am only too pleased to help my readers.

"GOURMOND" has the best little wife in the world; but she is an awfully bad manager. She has £2 10s. a week, just for the current expenses, and never manages to make two ends meet. They live at Brighton in a nice little house, and keep a pony and trap, two servants, and "Gourmond" considers she ought to do better than she does.

It certainly depends, "Gourmond," upon what you mean by "current expenses." If your wife has to pay for coals, gas or oil, servants' wages, and food for the pony, I consider you are very unreasonable to expect her to make two ends meet. Write again, more definitely, and I will give you a rough sketch of what your household expenses ought to come to.

"UNKNOWN ONE" writes to know if there is any harm in a girl of seventeen allowing any man she has the least liking for to kiss and flirt with her. She does not think there are many girls now-a-days, who do not enjoy kissing and flirting. And for her part, she sees no harm in it.

I am afraid your knowledge of girls is very limited, "Unknown One," for very few nice girls could behave in so unladylike a manner. *There are* girls who find pleasure in flirting, but for the most part, it is the men who set girls a bad example in this respect.

"WORRIED DORIS" writes to ask me to give her advice on the following point. A man she does not know in the least, except by sight, and has never spoken to, has written to her, asking her to meet him secretly.

Take no notice whatever of his letter, "Worried Doris." Tell your parents all about it, and if you have any further annoyance from him, get your father to write and threaten him with the police if ever he troubles you again.

"RUNAWAY DICK" fell in love with a young man ten months ago. He left home and went into a situation and they had to part. She then heard that all his friends were against him going out with her, and it made her feel so miserable that she sat down and wrote him a heart-broken letter. Since then she has been very sorry, and three weeks before Easter she wrote and asked him to forgive her for writing such a letter to him, and told him she could never love another like she did him. He did not answer her, and she has only seen him once since, when he bowed and smiled; she lives in hopes they shall meet again, and asks if it will be wise if she goes out for a holiday, for her to call on him and ask him to meet her.

Yes, "Runaway Dick," I see no harm in your doing so. Hasty letters are always a mistake, but as you have written and explained that you did not mean what you wrote, I am sure you will find that he is willing to take no further notice of it.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I AM open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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Sold by all Druggists and Patent Medicine Dealers everywhere.

Mr. GEO. R. SIMS' HAIR RENEWER.

Called by him **"TATCHO."**

(Romany: "Genuine," "Good," "True.")

And why, pray, is the successful poet, playwright, and journalist an eminent authority on hair restorer? Eager for an explanation, a *Daily Mail* representative sought out Mr. Sims. . . .

Now Mr. G. R. Sims, as many people know, is one of the busiest men in the kingdom, but hastily affixing his signature to a letter, he looked up and extended a characteristically cordial welcome. Then he said: "I will explain. I found that I was rapidly going bald. Not seriously, you understand, but the thinning out was sufficiently marked to set me thinking out a remedy. I went to two specialists, both of whom cheerfully assured me that I should be absolutely bald in two years.

"Then I discovered the preparation which is now placed upon the market. **I found that I had hit upon a remedy capable of working wonders. Look at my hair now, isn't that convincing evidence of the value of my preparation.**

"Ladies confirm my good opinion of it as a dressing for daily use. Mrs. Brown Potter, whose beautiful hair is the admiration of the entire lady world, writes that she uses nothing but 'Tatcho.' There is nothing to prevent every woman from making her hair silken in texture and bountiful in volume, for she can obtain a bottle of 'Tatcho' now in every town or even village."

In order that the public may be able to test the superlative value of Mr. Geo. R. Sims' discovery, the Company is issuing large 4/6 size test bottles post free for **1/10**, under plain cover, one of which may be had on application. Please cut off the corner of this advertisement where marked, and send with name and address, legibly written, to the—

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Large **4/6** Bottle
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As sold in America for 50 cents.

Price **1/6** Post free 1/8.

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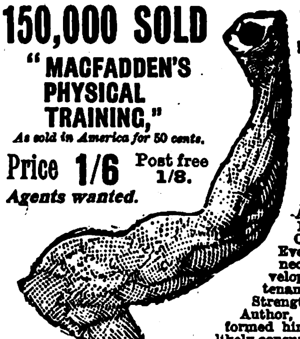

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A COUPON VALUE 1s. FREE with Book.

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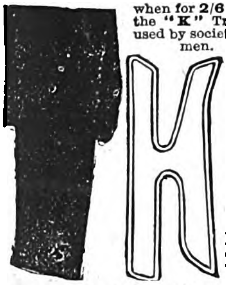

when for 2/6 you can have a pair of the "K" Trousers Stretchers, as used by society and military gentlemen. Makes Trousers *always fit, feel, and look like new.* Sent free from observation per return of post and post free for 2/6. Two Pairs, post free for 4/6. A Nickelled Cigar Cutter, with ring for attaching to watch chain, will be given *free* to all sending orders within seven days of date of this paper, which please mention.

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Strengthen your Grip. Strengthen your Wrist.
Develop Enormous Strength in Fingers.
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With a "Health and Strength"

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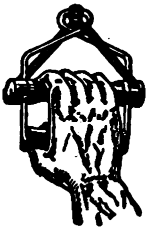

Physicians and Athletes have generally concurred that the wrist is the weakest portion of the human frame. It is the portion of the anatomy where strength is measured.

A person with weak wrists is a weak person constitutionally. When the wrists are strengthened the entire muscular system is made stronger.

There is no point in a man's anatomy where lack of strength is felt so much as in the wrist, nor where great strength is so useful, often seriously affecting his bread-winning power. With a systematic use of this machine only ten minutes twice a day you can double the strength of your hand in one month, and increase the size of your forearm very materially.

Purchasing and using a pair of Wrist Machines—one in each hand—saves half the time occupied in exercising both hands with one machine, and also ensures a more equal development of strength in the two hands.

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Prices—Pair, 2/6, post free.
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"HEALTH & STRENGTH" CO.,
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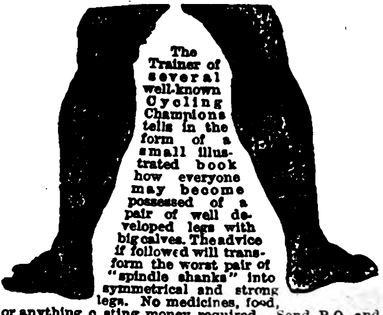
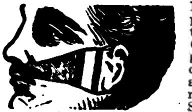


The Trainer of several well-known Cycling Champions tells in the form of a small illustrated book how everyone may become possessed of a pair of well developed legs with big calves. The advice if followed will transform the worst pair of "spindle shanks" into symmetrical and strong legs. No medicines, food, or anything costing money required. Send P.O. and stamps for 1/1 and book will be sent under cover and post free. *Money back if not satisfied after month's trial.*

Champion Cyclist Trainer, 1 Abbot Rd., East Ham, E.

"EMPEROR MOUSTACHE TRAINER."



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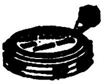

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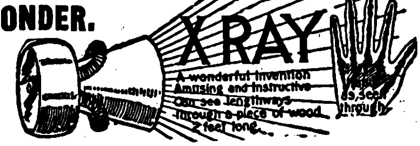

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PLAIN TALK by the most celebrated American Medical Author and Specialist, Dr. Foote. A wonderful book. Nearly 1,200 pages. 200 anatomical illustrations. 36 true-to-life coloured illustrations. Over a million copies sold. *Ours is the genuine unabridged American Edition with coloured plates.* Post free, 8/6.

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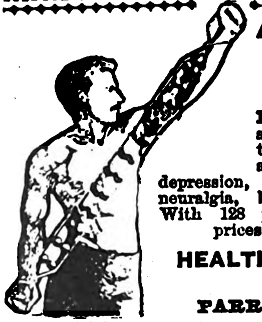

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5 Strengths in 1.

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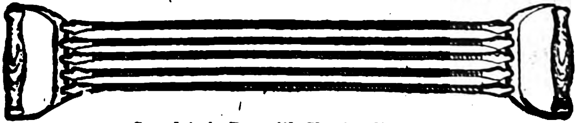

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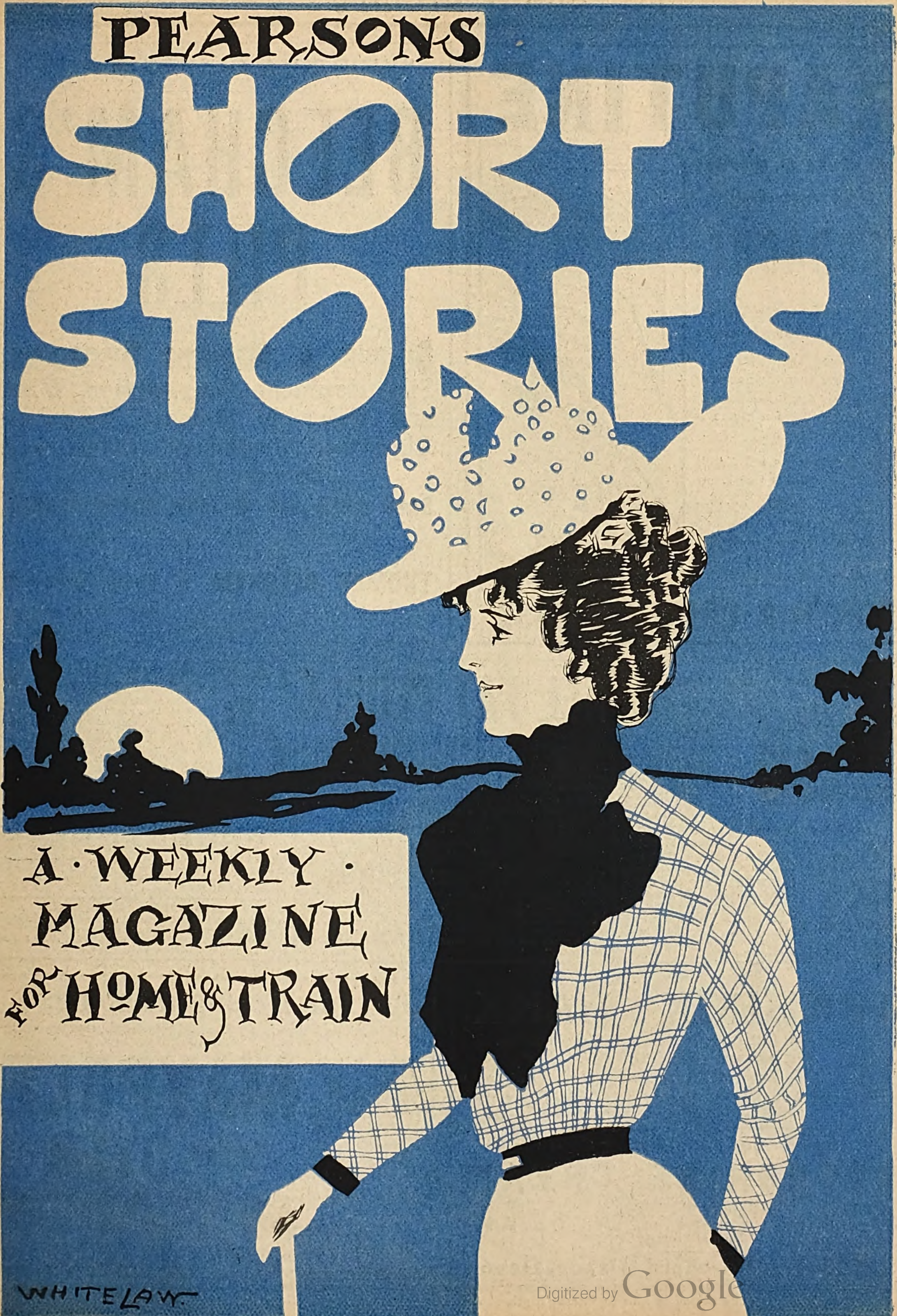
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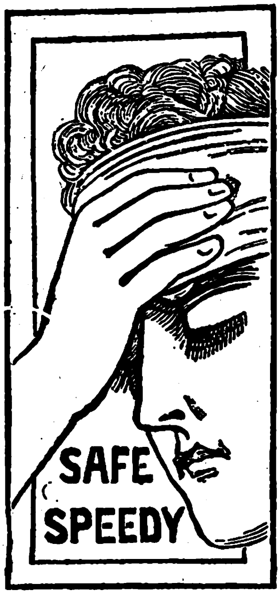

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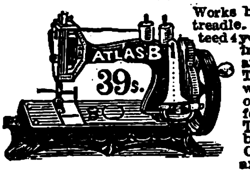

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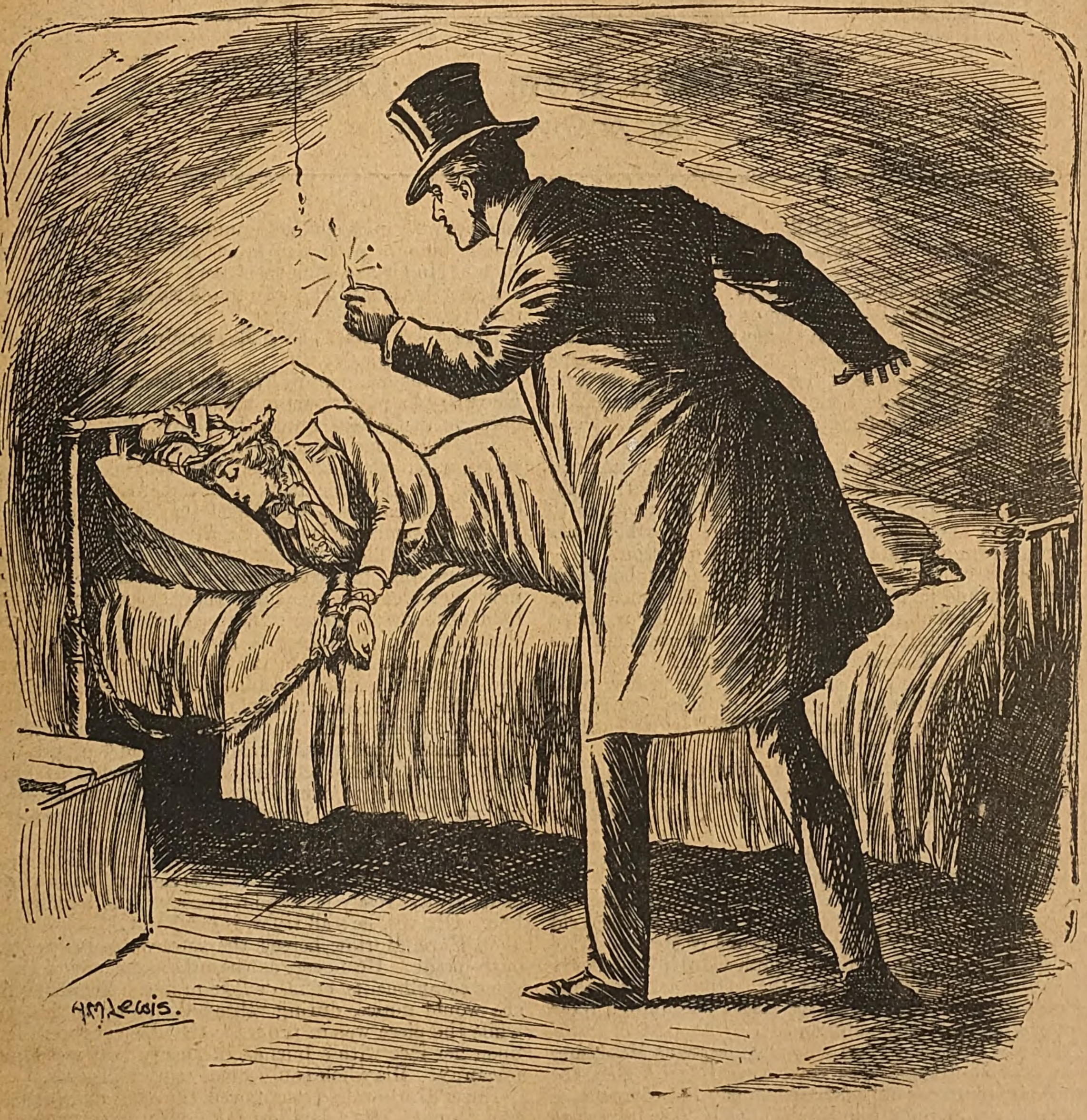

One glance at the deathly-white face told him that it was indeed the girl he loved better than all else in the world.

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STARTLING REVELATIONS OF THE STAGE.

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

V.—Back from the Grave.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

It was Sunday afternoon. The special train containing the members of *The Good Samaritan* company on tour, drew up in Newcastle station.

Politeness is usually at a discount on such occasions. It is too often the rule for the male members of a company, unless they happen to number wives or sweethearts amongst the ladies of the "show," to lose no time in hurrying off to secure good lodgings for themselves, leaving their female colleagues to shift as best they can for themselves.

On this hot September afternoon, however, the unusual sight could have been seen of the gentlemen of the company all crowding round one of their ladies, all eager to proffer help and assistance, the reason for which was apparent from one glance at the lady in question.

For she was beyond doubt one of the most beautiful women it would be possible to imagine. A woman, too, who looked all the more lovely by reason of her contrast with those standing around her, upon whose faces was plainly stamped the seal of "the profession."

"Isn't it sickening?" said one of the ladies, who rejoiced in the fine-sounding name of Miss Templeton Fane, "how the boys all fawn round Miss Harlow? She's a jolly sight too haughty to please me."

"Yes," answered the other, known to fame (!) as Miss Julia Montague, "and the worst of it is, Jenny Lovelace has chummed in with her. I should like to pay her a trick somehow."

"So should I," answered the other. "But come on, we must go and hunt for digs."

In the meanwhile, Hazel Harlow, the unconscious object of this venom, and her friend Jenny, had got rid of the, to Hazel, unwelcome attentions of Messrs. Clive Pendennis, Hayward Lindsay, Ralph Garden and Percy Carruthers, to say nothing of the manager, Raymond Venables, whose infatuation for Hazel was quite a topic of conversation in the company.

This was another reason why such ladies as Mesdames Fane and Montague were sore with Hazel. Had the handsome manager only deigned to pay his addresses to them, they would not, like Hazel, have been so backward in accepting them. Miss Harlow was so "straight." She even objected to supper-parties with "Johnnies!" She openly avowed her intention of keeping all men at arm's length until she had found the one man whom she would honour with her heart and hand! Was ever such a thing heard of on the stage?

Jenny Lovelace, who was an old stager "on the road," took Hazel under her wing.

"Tra-la-la, boys," she said merrily. "I'll take Miss Harlow with me."

There was one man in *The Good Samaritan* company, who played a minor part in the piece, who was somewhat different to the usual run of travelling actors.

This was Percy Carruthers, a man of good education and family, who had drifted into theatrical life, lured thither by the same bait that has proved so effective over and over again—the belief that it is in everyone's power to become an Irving or a Wyndham.

Now Carruthers, though originally good-hearted and clever enough, had contracted a habit that is, perhaps, more prevalent on the stage than anywhere else—the habit of secret drinking. Disappointment, coupled with the unending monotony of his existence—for nothing is more monotonous that the life of a strolling player—had introduced him to alcohol as a soother. And now the habit had become a fixed one.

To add to his trials, the actor had fallen madly in love with Hazel Harlow, the beautiful "lead" of the company. And alcohol and his passion, hopeless he knew, were combining to drive Percy Carruthers to the dreadful sea of insanity from which there is rarely a return.

Yet his fellow actors suspected nothing. "He's queer, Carruthers is," they would say carelessly, "but a decent chap, always ready to stand a drink or lend a fellow five bob. Oh, yes, he's all right, is old Percy."

To Hazel Harlow herself the actor was always studiously polite. He never, as the others did, paid her fulsome compliments, or made love to her. Yet sometimes she would notice, during rehearsals, or upon the stage while the piece was in progress, that his eyes were fixed upon her face with a burning intensity that was almost uncanny. His whole soul seemed to be in his eyes.

Hazel Harlow had renounced the *nom de plume* she had adopted, Hilda Hatherleigh, and was now upon the playbills under her own name.

"I won't sail under false colours," she said. "I've done nothing to be ashamed of. It was my father's

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unkindness that drove me from home. So let me be known as Hazel Harlow."

But to return to Carruthers. An old hand, such as he was "on the road," was never at a loss for rooms in the towns visited by the company. He accordingly departed at once to discover whether the apartments he usually occupied were vacant.

To his satisfaction they were. He lost no time in settling his few "traps" in their place for the ensuing week, and then, sitting down quietly in his apartment, he produced a brandy bottle, and, with the aid of a pipe, gave himself up to a lengthy "think."

His eyes were supernaturally bright. There was a far-away look in them. Suddenly he drew a photograph from his breast-pocket and began to study it attentively. It was a portrait of Hazel Harlow in her character of Ruth in *The Good Samaritan*, and fine presentment of the actress though it was, it failed to do justice to the radiant beauty of the original.

"How lovely you are, my little Hazel," murmured Carruthers, fervently pressing the portrait to his lips, "and I'll win you yet. If only I could possess you for my own! Can I think of no plan whereby I can call you mine?" He rose to his feet and began pacing up and down the narrow room like a tiger in a cage, his eyes shining with the light of a sudden access of delirium.

His lips moved quickly as he walked to and fro. "It can be done," he muttered, "we have a week here. Thank heaven, I know the theatre as well as I know my own hand. Hazel's dressing-room is cut off from the rest. The window opens out on to a broad roof. Danger! Of course there's danger! Yet a man can only die once. And if only I can call Hazel mine for a few short hours what matters it? Life has no more to give me. It can be done. There is much to be thought out. Yet I'll do it—I'll do it!"

He took another draught of the fiery potion, whose slave he was, and that had already set his fevered brain still more awhirl. If only his brother actors could have seen Percy Carruthers at that moment—Carruthers the quiet, the irreproachable! Perhaps they might then have realised the true state of affairs—might have averted the perpetration of a madman's scheme.

The diabolical cunning of the mentally diseased is proverbial. The scheme that Percy Carruthers had set afoot in his brain would have been impossible to a sane being. Even had it been conceived, it would have been dismissed with a shudder as too terrible for attempt even by the most hardened of criminals.

Yet Carruthers was no criminal. He was worse—a madman of the most terrible kind, so mad that he could hide his insanity beneath a cloak of reason, so mad that no scheme could seem too outrageous to serve the achievement of his own desires.

Till late into the night he sat solitarily planning and plotting, working out the details of the fiendish scheme he had conceived so suddenly, and that now seemed to possess every fibre of his brain.

CHAPTER II.

THE first few days in Newcastle went uneventfully enough for *The Good Samaritan* company. Hazel Harlow, already the victim of such thrilling experiences in her first venture as an actress, was now beginning to hope that her troubles were over. Horace Caldecott, the villain who had already made two dastardly attempts to abduct her from her career, had assuredly shot his last bolt the week before at Sheffield. Valerie Bellairs, the woman who had done her best to wreck Hazel's young life, had also apparently passed out of her life. Among her fellow actors and actresses Hazel felt that assuredly she was safe. And then there was Eric Monteith, her noble-minded young lover, who was willing to give up his life to guard her from wrong.

Eric had written to her from London to say that he hoped to be able to come to Newcastle to witness her triumph in that city before the expiration of the company's week there. He begged her to be on her guard against treachery, as he was convinced that Horace Caldecott would yet leave no stone unturned to trap her.

But little did Eric dream of the new danger that menaced Hazel. And it was the girl's own rare beauty and purity that constituted so terrible a menace to her safety in the profession she had chosen to adopt.

Newcastle went mad, as Sheffield had done, over the beautiful young actress, whose personality and charms were so far superior to the usual run of ladies of the stage.

And Raymond Venables, actor manager, rubbed his hands, metaphorically, as the boards "House full" went up outside the Theatre Royal every night.

"Well, if I can't marry Hazel Harlow," he said to himself, "I can at least make money out of her"—which somewhat sordid remark covered a genuine passion that the manager took scanty pains to conceal.

All the young "bloods" of Newcastle tried in vain to break down the barriers of Hazel's maiden modesty. They besieged her with invitations to supper-parties, aye, even with offers of marriage. A well-known sprig of the nobility would have made her a duchess and run the gauntlet of the abuse that would have fallen upon his somewhat shallow young head, only—Hazel declined the honour.

Naturally, such homage paid to an *ingénue* fluttered the feminine dovecots of the company, with the exception of Jenny Lovelace, who worshipped the very ground Hazel trod on, and who had, as we have seen already, proved her loyal-heartedness by saving her friend from a terrible danger in Sheffield.

"I do hope we shall get away from Newcastle without any mishap," said Hazel, almost jestingly, to her friend, as together they set out one morning to see the old castle, the Tyne bridge, the shipping on the river, and all the sights of busy old Newcastle.

"So do I," echoed Jenny fervently, glancing almost apprehensively at her friend's lovely face. "Do you know," she went on, "I'm glad I'm not beautiful. I don't say so because of sour grapes, but because if I were a man and in love with you, Hazel, I don't think I'd let anything come in the way of my winning you."

Hazel smiled rather sadly.

"I'm glad you're not a man, Jenny," she said. "If you were, I couldn't walk with you so peaceably and securely. What a nuisance it is that men can't be friendly with you without making love. At least, Mr. Monteith is friendly and gallant, and courteous, but——" a rosy flush overspread her face.

"He's in love with you, too," cried her companion. "There's an ideal husband for you, Hazel."

"Yes, but I don't want a husband yet. I want to be a great actress, to live in peace. Perhaps some day I'll fall in love."

This was a typical conversation, carried on by the two girls, showing how perfect was the accord that existed

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between them. The very dissimilarity in their several characters and appearance was only a greater bond between them.

And so four days passed away, and nothing happened to mar the uneventfulness of the visit to Newcastle. And every day saw fuller self-confidence for Hazel Harlow. Every day she began to feel more certain that she had in her the elements that go to make a great actress, a strong vein of romance, extreme beauty, health, youth, impersonality and a steadfast resolve to keep herself pure and unspotted from the world. If with these attributes she could not win her way upon the stage, then surely the theatrical profession was one that no woman should embark upon, for there could not be such a thing as justice.

And visions of herself in London, the Mecca of all true artists, acclaimed by press and public as the greatest actress since Bracegirdle or Siddons, would obtrude themselves upon Hazel's brain. The love of her art had taken possession of the young girl. She had no room in her heart for human passion.

Thus some men called her cold, adamant, passionless, women vain and self-opinionated. Yet Hazel's heart beat warm and true within her. There was, assuredly, never a more womanly woman than this country farmer's daughter, never one more ready to listen to the appeals of the needy or distressed. She only lacked one thing, the touch of that magician's wand called Love. And as yet love had passed her by unheeding.

It was four o'clock on Thursday afternoon. Hazel was alone in the little sitting-room of her apartments reading. Suddenly there came a knock at the door.

"Come in," cried Hazel.

A maid-servant entered with a note. Hazel looked carefully at the address on the envelope. The handwriting was familiar to her, though she could not for a moment recall the writer. It was evidently an educated hand. The note was as follows:

"Dear Miss Harlow,

"I am venturing to write and ask you a very great favour. I am in trouble and want your help. You are the only woman I know who is the embodiment of all that is good and tender, as a woman should be. Will you, therefore, meet me in the theatre at five o'clock this afternoon. And might I suggest that your dressing-room would be the best place for a private interview. It is secluded, and what I have to say to you I should not care for others to hear. If you could comply with my request you would be conferring an inestimable boon upon an unhappy man. Do not trouble to answer this. I shall go to the theatre and wait for you.

"Yours very sincerely,

"Percy Carruthers."

Now, as anyone will admit, there was nothing at all in this note to arouse any suspicions of danger in Hazel's breast. The missive was perfectly straightforward. Carruthers said he was in trouble, and wanted a confidante who would offer him advice. The matter, whatever it was, evidently touched him very deeply, so much that he desired above all things privacy in unburdening himself. So reasoned Hazel, and so would nine women out of ten reason, whose susceptibilities are inclined to all that is good and tender in life.

"Poor Mr. Carruthers," mused Hazel, letting the note fall idly from her hand. "So that accounts for his having been so quiet these last few days. He has something on his mind. I wonder what it can be. Ah, well, I suppose I must accede to his request. If it had been Mr. Pendennis or Mr. Hayward Lindsay I should never have consented to a *tete-à-tete*, because I know that they would have tried to make love to me. But Mr. Carruthers has always been polite and courteous. He's a gentleman, one can see that, although I've sometimes thought he takes rather too much to drink. Though that's a fault that a good many actors and actresses seem to have. How sad it is! Why can't we be on the stage and yet live in one's private life as other people do? Ah, well, it's no good my moralising. The question is, shall I go and see Mr. Carruthers? I'll go and ask Jenny. But no, I'd better not do that. Mr. Carruthers wouldn't like to think that I had betrayed his confidence. I'll just go and see what he wants without telling a soul. If only I can be of any assistance to him I shall be very happy."

Hazel looked at her watch. It was just four o'clock. She determined to have a cup of tea and then walk to the theatre, which was barely ten minutes away.

In the meantime Carruthers was already making his way to the theatre. At the stage-door was the doorkeeper, alone and looking particularly sleepy. He brightened up as Carruthers approached.

"Hullo, Bill," said the actor. "You look thirsty."

"I am that," answered Bill.

Carruthers drew a flask from his pocket. "Have a drink?" he said carelessly.

Bill's eyes glistened. He took the flask and had a long pull.

"Thank you, sir," he said, handing the silver "refresher" back to its owner.

Carruthers nodded. "Right O!" he said. "I'm just going up to my dressing-room for something," he continued.

Bill relapsed into his seat in the little box just inside the stage-door portals. The drink had made him sleepy. He felt an absolutely irresistible longing for sleep come over him. Curious, he had never felt like that before. Why—the next moment his head fell forward on his chest and he was sleeping like the dead.

Carruthers looked curiously at the recumbent doorkeeper. A smile played about his thin lips. An ominous glitter came into his dark eyes.

"When you awake, friend Bill," he muttered, "Hazel Harlow will be mine, and you—well, you will be wondering what has happened to you. Did you enjoy your drink? You didn't taste the sleeping draught, did you? Ah, well, good-bye, my friend, sleep on," and with a curious little laugh the madman, for such he undoubtedly was, passed inside the deserted theatre.

A flight of stairs led up to the dressing-rooms at the back of the stage. The staircase was gloomy. Carruthers hurried to his own dressing-room.

In a moment he issued forth from the room bearing something in his arms, that appeared rather weighty. Five times he made the journey to his dressing-room and out again, on each occasion bearing a mysterious parcel. These packages he deposited carefully in two doorways, one on either side of the staircase. Hazel's dressing-room lay at the top of the stairs, to reach which would necessitate her passing the doorways in question.

This done Carruthers looked at his watch. It was a quarter to five. He hurried back to his dressing-room. She must get to her room first, he muttered.

At five o'clock to the minute Hazel presented herself at the stage-door of the theatre. Bill was still sleeping

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soundly. The girl looked at him curiously. "It's a shame to wake him," she said to herself with a smile, "he's tired from doing nothing."

She entered the quiet theatre, and hurried up the stairs that led to her dressing-room. To her surprise Carruthers was not there, as he had said he would be. Ah, well, he would assuredly be there before long.

Hardly had the thought crossed her mind before there came a knock at the door.

"Come in," cried Hazel, and Carruthers at once entered.

He was very pale, and his eyes shone with intense brightness. So much Hazel noted at once.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Carruthers," she said sweetly, "you see I've come. I'm so sorry to hear you're in trouble. If I can help you, believe me I shall be only too pleased."

The actor fixed his burning eyes upon the beautiful face before him. For a moment or so he seemed to be struggling to find his voice.

"Miss Harlow," he blurted out at last, his voice sounding harsh and strained. "I have sent for you, because—because I love you with a passion that is consuming my very being. I cannot sleep, I cannot eat, for love of you. To look upon you is joy unspeakable, to hear your voice is heaven, to be with you is a torturing madness that I can hardly bear."

A cold wave of horror seemed to pass over Hazel's frame. She shuddered visibly, and shrank back before the madman's frenzied outburst.

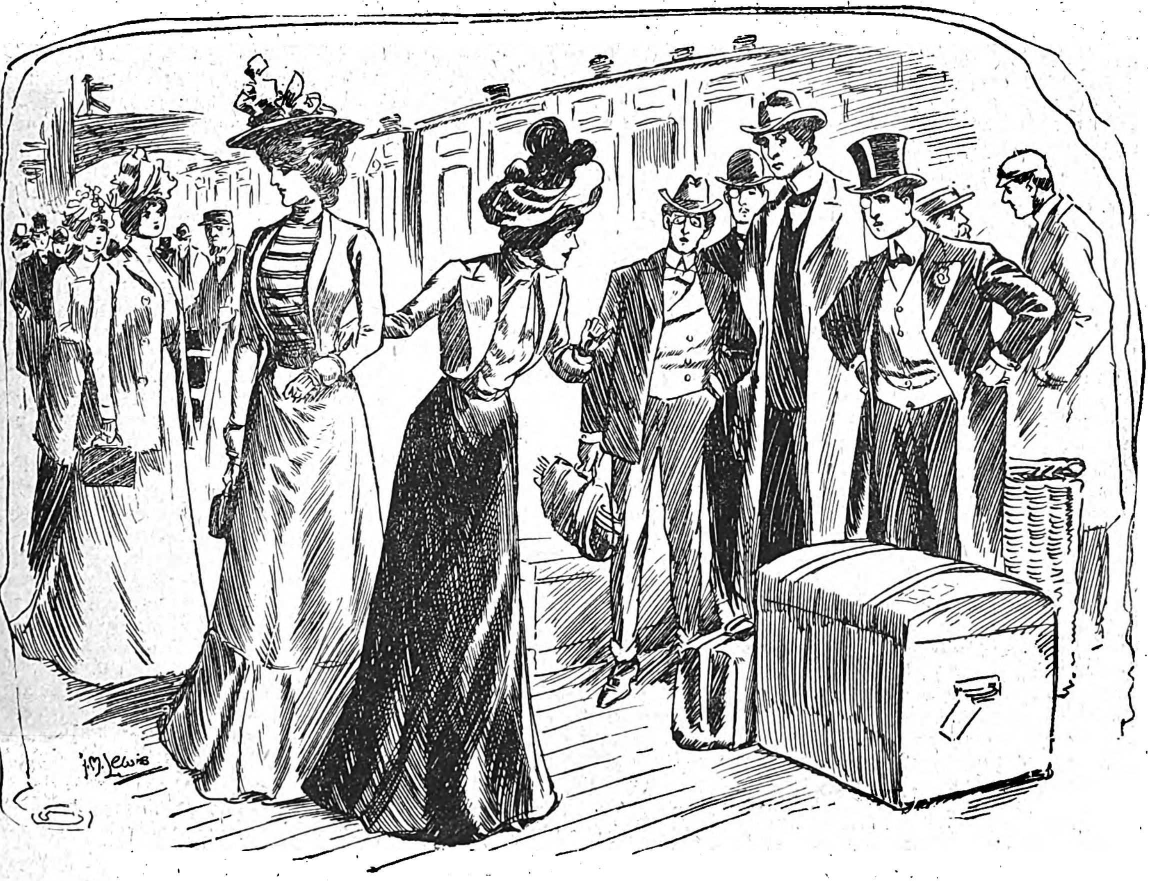
"Ah, you shudder," cried Carruthers, his eyes more wildly glaring than ever. "You shrink from me! No matter, you are mine, mine! you cannot escape me!"

He made a step forward. A wild scream broke from Hazel's lips. "Let me go!" she cried. "How could you bring me here by such a base trick!" A faint smell of burning assailed her nostrils.

A low laugh answered her, a laugh in which there was no vestige of sanity, that suddenly conveyed to her the terrible truth. The next instant Carruthers threw open the door. A cloud of pungent smoke, mingled with the crackling of burning wood drove inward. The theatre was on fire! The maniac laughed again.

"See, my Hazel, my queen," he cried. "You cannot escape me. A sea of fire stretches between you and the street. And I did it, I, Percy Carruthers, did it so that you should be mine, *mine*, MINE!"

His voice rose to a scream. Hazel's blood ran cold



"Tra-la-la, boys," she said merrily, "I'll take Miss Harlow with me."

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within her veins. A few moments before she had been so calm, so happy, so trustful in Providence. And now a horrible death stared her in the face, look where she would; like an animal at bay she looked around her. Was there no escape? The roaring sound of the fire as it encircled the theatre with its devouring arms rose higher every minute.

Carruthers leapt towards her with a cry. "I will save you, my queen," he said exultingly. "I will save you, that you may share my throne, may live with me, and learn all the wonderful ways of love! Come to me, Hazel, my darling!"

The poor, distraught girl, gave a loud cry. Then her senses reeled. A black darkness grew over her brain. She fell forward, senseless, into the arms of the maniac. In a moment he had swung her off her feet, and pressing a kiss upon her cold forehead, dandled her in his arms as though she had been a child, endowed as he was with all the new-born strength that madness had given him.

And outside the room the roar of the flames grew louder and louder.

CHAPTER III.

Hazel had scarcely left her lodgings, and proceeded to the theatre to keep the appointment with Carruthers, when Jenny Lovelace called to see her friend.

She was vexed to hear that Hazel had gone out. The landlady did not know where her lodger had gone, but she did not think that Miss Harlow would be long. Would Miss Lovelace step up stairs and wait a bit?

Miss Lovelace assented to this proposal and made her way to her friend's room. The first thing that caught her eye as she entered the apartment was a piece of notepaper lying upon the floor, Carruther's note in fact, that Hazel had left when it had dropped from her hand.

Jenny picked it up, and recognising the handwriting in a moment as Carruthers' read it without any hesitation, curiosity, to find out what reason the actor could be writing to Hazel for, overcoming her scruples as regards the honourableness of her action.

The note only mystified her. "What a funny thing," she mused, "Carruthers making Hazel a confidante. I wonder what on earth he wants to tell her. It's past five now. I think I'll stroll round to the theatre and fetch Hazel away."

She hurried downstairs and out of the house. When she got near the theatre she found a crowd of people hurrying in the same direction.

"What is it?" she asked a man who passed her.

"Theatre a-fire!" came the astounding answer.

Jenny's heart seemed suddenly to stop beating. The theatre was on fire! And Hazel had gone to the place only a few minutes before. Surely she must be out of the building, though, by now. Jenny hurried on, a prey to the most sickening doubts and fears.

Arrived outside the theatre itself she found that already a large concourse of people had assembled, and the first fire-engine had dashed upon the scene.

Jenny forced her way round to the stage-door. It was there that the fire seemed to rage the fiercest. Tongues of flame were already shooting out of the windows. The police and firemen were forcing the people back.

"Thank God it was in the daytime," said a man's voice. "There was no one in the place but the stage door-keeper, and he's out by this time."

"No one there," cried Jenny agonizedly. "There is someone there! Miss Hazel Harlow is there!"

In a moment Jenny found herself the centre of an excited crowd, from whose faces all the colour had faded.

"The doorkeeper was so fast asleep they could not wake him." A man's voice cried out hoarsely. "A doctor said he must have been drugged, so of course *he* couldn't tell whether any one was inside."

"Miss Harlow, the beautiful actress inside the theatre," the cry went round on every side.

A man forced his way through the crowd, a tall, handsome, well-dressed man.

"Who says Miss Harlow's inside?" he cried in a stentorian voice.

"Mr. Monteith!" cried Jenny, recognising the man at once. "Save Miss Harlow!" she cried, helplessly.

Eric Monteith ground his teeth together.

"Then it is true!" he said hoarsely.

The next moment he had cleft a way through the crowd like magic, and stood beside the firemen and guarding cordon of police.

"Stand back there!" cried a policeman roughly.

"There's a woman inside the blazing theatre!" cried Eric. "I'm willing to volunteer to enter the place."

"A woman!"

"Miss Harlow."

"*Miss Harlow!*" Twenty voices seemed to echo the name. As if by magic an escape was run up alongside the building, now blazing away with fearful intensity.

Eric sprang up the steps of the long red structure. In his agony of mind he did not feel the angry tongues of fire that leapt out at him, took no heed of the pungent, acrid smoke that filled eyes and mouth and nostrils, heard not the shouts of the firemen.

One of the latter swung up the escape and practically hauled Eric down.

Monteith, almost mad with rage at being thus thwarted turned upon the helmeted fire-fighter, with something akin to murder in his eyes.

"How dare you, fellow," he said.

"Do you want to go to certain death?" retorted the other quickly. Then in a softer tone he went on: "It would be absolute madness to go inside the building now, sir, aye, absolute death. The fire's got hold of the place now."

The man spoke nothing more than the truth. Even where they stood the heat was terrific. So much so that the captain of the fire-brigade hurried forward and commanded Eric and the firemen to retire back.

Half-a-dozen steamers were at work now flinging huge streams of water over the blazing pile. Yet the conflagration was only an insatiable demon, whose thirst could not be quenched by such pigmy efforts.

"If anyone is inside that building," murmured one of the firemen in a low voice, "they are cinders by now."

The man did not speak unfeelingly. Eric heard him, and a great groan left his lips.

"Can nothing be done?" he cried.

"Nothing, sir. We could all sacrifice our lives uselessly, of course, but what use would that be?"

Eric turned away. His heart seemed to have died within him. It could not be true. Heaven could never have allowed Hazel to die. And yet Jenny Lovelace had positively asserted that the beautiful young actress, the woman whom Eric had learnt to love with all his heart and soul, was within the theatre.

Where was Miss Lovelace? Eric shouldered his way

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back through the crowd, that sympathetically made place for him.

"Her sweetheart!" sobbed a woman.

"Her sweetheart!" echoed the men.

Yet the words fell unmeaningly, unheedingly on Eric's deadened faculties.

"Mr. Monteith!" It was Jenny's voice again. Eric looked up. Jenny was standing in the middle of a little knot of people, all members of the *Good Samaritan* company.

Raymond Venables was there, his face white as death, Pendennis, Lindsay, the other ladies of the company. Horror was on every countenance. "I can't believe it true," Venables was muttering.

Eric made straight for Jenny's side. "I must speak with you alone, Miss Lovelace," he said.

They drew apart. In a moment Jenny began hurriedly: "Oh, Mr. Monteith, I was in Hazel's room only a few minutes ago. I found a note upon the floor, that she must have dropped. It was from Carruthers, asking him to meet her in her dressing-room at five o'clock. At a quarter past five the theatre was well ablaze."

"Carruthers! The quiet young actor! what does it mean? Why did he ask her to meet him?"

For answer Jenny thrust the note in question into Monteith's hand. "I've shown it to no one else," she said. "I haven't dared."

Monteith read the missive carefully. Then an expression of horror left his lips.

"This Carruthers," he said quickly, "had he any grudge against Hazel?"

"No, no. I'm sure he had none. But—" Jenny looked round fearfully, though her apprehensions lest she should be overheard were groundless, as the fire held everyone's attention. "I know he used to give way a good deal to drink."

"Then you think——"

"Oh, I don't know what to think. But I'm a woman, Mr. Monteith, and women take strange fancies. The stage-door keeper was drugged. Why? Can it be that Carruthers has set fire to the theatre, to make believe that he and Hazel have been burnt while really—"

"He has spirited her away somewhere! By heaven there may be something in that."

Jenny's words had suddenly put new life into Eric's heart. The girl's quick perception had hit upon the only possible shred of hope that Hazel was still alive. The only question was, what motive could Carruthers have had? At once the name of Horace Caldecott flashed across Eric's brain. Could this be another scheme of that arch-villain? The young man's blood ran cold at the thought. If so, perhaps at that very moment Hazel was in her greatest enemy's power. Either that or her charred corpse lay among the ruins of the blazing theatre. Each alternative was horrible. And yet if only she were alive! Anything would be preferable to a horrible death. For while there's life there's hope. So Eric's thoughts flew like shuttlecocks across his mind.

CHAPTER IV.

In the meantime how had it fared with the hapless Hazel. It will be remembered that we left her senseless and helpless in the arms of the maniac Carruthers, with the horrid fire-fiend already beating with his flaming hands against the door of the dressing-room.

At one end of this room was a window opening on to some narrow leads, that formed a path, as it were, between the roofs of two rows of somewhat squalid houses.

In a moment Carruthers had swept the toilet things off the table that stood beneath the window. Then he leapt upon the table in question, and having deposited the still unconscious body of his victim upon the floor, battered out the glass and woodwork of the window with a poker, that he had found in the fireplace.

This done, he jumped lightly down upon the ground, smiling all the while, and again seized Hazel in his arms.

Without any apparent effort he surmounted the table once again, and clambered out on to the leads, a feat that would have been absolutely impossible to him, had he been in a normal condition, taking into consideration his own somewhat puny frame and the lifeless burden in his arms.

Yet his madness had endowed him for the time being with supernatural strength. Once out upon the leads, and the task before him was comparatively easy. The roofs on either side of him cut off the leads from view, save from the theatre itself, for at the extreme end the blank wall of a factory towered. It was an ideal spot for the successful consummation of the madman's scheme.

With the air of a man who thoroughly knew his ground, Carruthers staggered on with his burden. His false strength was failing him. The dead weight in his arms was telling upon his overtaxed muscles.

At last he came to a pause before a window set in the slates. He had already passed three such, each one grimier, if possible, than the other.

With great care he deposited Hazel upon the leads. Then he opened the window and peered cautiously inside the room with which it communicated.

The window was only a few feet above the floor of the attic, for such the chamber was. It was thus a comparatively easy matter to lower Hazel into the room. Carruthers swung lightly down after her and closed the window.

It was a narrow, bare apartment, the only furniture it could boast being a truckle bed in one corner, a pitcher of water, and two crazy chairs. Dust lay thick on every hand, from the corners hung great, matted cobwebs, the close smell that a long-uninhabited room always has permeated the miserable garret.

With almost grotesque tenderness Carruthers deposited his fair burden upon the bed. Then he sprinkled some water in her face. In a few minutes Hazel's eyes opened languidly.

"Where am I?" she murmured, as though waking from a dream.

"Safe, my darling," answered Carruthers ecstatically, "safe with your own Percy, who will never leave you again."

Hazel shuddered. The madman's words had brought everything back to her—the terrible scene in the dressing-room, the realisation that she was in the clutches of a lunatic, the fearful knowledge that she was alone in the burning theatre with such a being.

But the blank that followed all she knew for certain—what had happened since then? Where was she? How had she come there? How could she escape? Carruthers was bending over her, his eyes drinking in every detail of her face.

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Half-frenzied with terror though she was, Hazel managed to keep her presence of mind. She must humour the madman. She was absolutely in his power. Speculation as to her present position must for the time cease. She would want all her faculties for the ordeal that lay before her now, the keeping of the enamoured madman at arm's length.

"Oh, Mr. Carruthers," she murmured. "I'm so hungry and thirsty. Can you give me something to eat and drink? I should be so grateful to you if you would."

"Hungry and thirsty! My Hazel hungry and thirsty! Then of course I will go and get my queen food and drink," answered the maniac, in a voice that was as tender as a mother's. Then his expression changed. "But first we must secure our little Hazel," he said. The next instant he had slipped a pair of handcuffs over Hazel's wrists, securing the irons firmly to the bed by a slender piece of strong chain. "Now I'll go and get food and drink," he muttered.

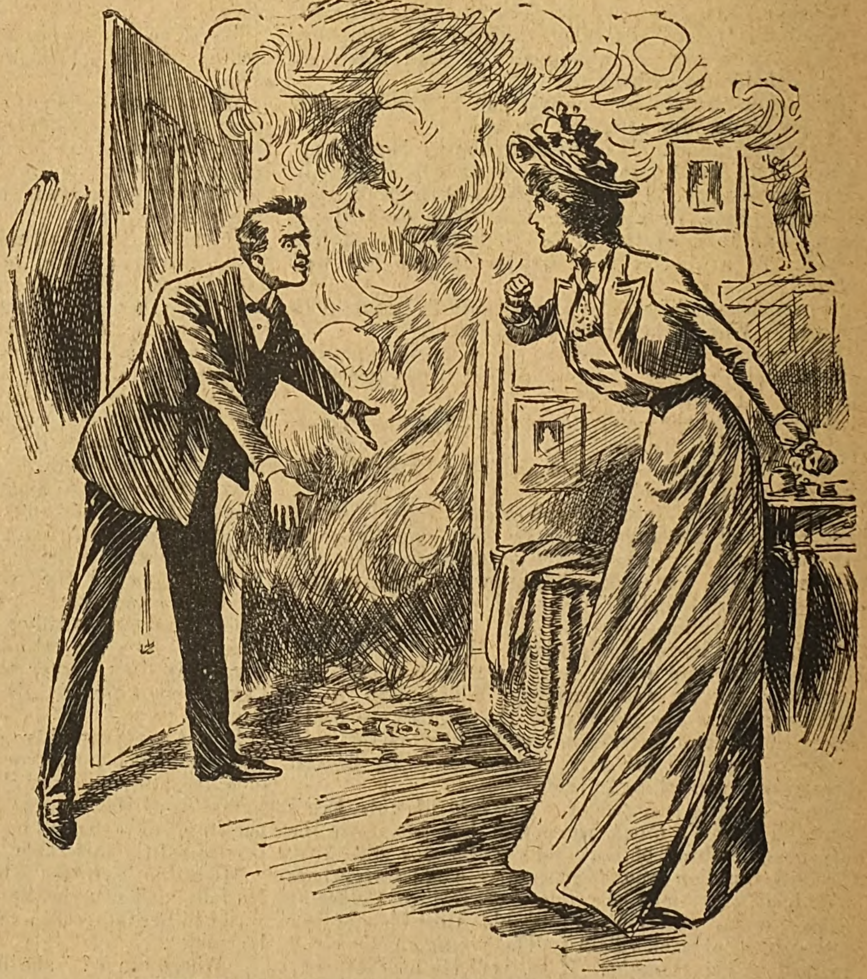
The next instant he had left the room. The sound of a bolt flying back into its socket told Hazel that she was indeed a prisoner.

She rose into a sitting posture, and endeavoured to break loose from her bonds. But Carruthers had done his work well. She was powerless to break free. A blank despair filled her heart. How could she hope to escape! She was in Carruthers' power—that is to say, in the grip of a madman who was capable of anything when once the last barrier of his reason was broken down.

His present attitude towards his captive seemed one of abject adoration, tempered, it is true, by his obvious determination to give her no opportunity to escape; yet no one could say how long such a state of mind might last. Once let passion break down the last remnants of his reason, and Hazel knew that she was doomed. Nothing but death could be her portion then.

The time dragged on with leaden limbs. Hazel had her watch. It was now past six o'clock. Why did not Carruthers return? Another hour passed away, and still there was no sign of the maniac.

Hazel had had plenty of time for reflection. What puzzled her most was where she was and how she had come there. Beyond the fact that she was in the attic of a deserted house, she had no clue to guide her as to how she had come there. But, she reflected, it would have been impossible for Carruthers to have carried her out by the street and away to this place. This train of thought once set in motion, she speedily came to the only feasible explanation, and as we know the correct one, that Carruthers had conveyed her over the roof.



"I did it, I, Percy Carruthers, did it so that you should be mine, mine, mine!"

Again she made a frantic effort to break loose from the handcuffs. But Carruthers had done his work well. She could not escape.

The shadows began to deepen in the gloomy garret as the September day drew to a close. A faint scratching in the wainscotting of the room betokened the presence of mice or rats. And still of Carruthers' return there was no sign. Hazel began to feel faint for want of food

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and drink. With the exception of a cup of tea she had had nothing in the way of refreshment since midday. A fervent prayer went up to Heaven for strength and guidance in her terrible trial.

The time stole remorselessly on. The darkness grew deeper. A silence, broken only by the scratching of the rats in the mouldering walls, as of the grave reigned on every hand. Gradually the idea grew on Hazel that Carruthers had deserted her wilfully. He had left her alone to die.

She determined to cry for help. A scream left her lips. Then another. Then another. And still no sound fell on her ears to tell her that her cries were heard.

CHAPTER V.

Percy Carruthers crept down the crazy stairs of the deserted house in which Hazel was incarcerated. His footsteps, stealthy though they were, awoke strange, eerie echoes. At the street door he paused and listened intently. All seemed still, and he crept out, failing in his haste to secure the door behind him again.

The street he found himself in was a deserted one. For the purpose the madman had in view, the incarceration of Hazel Harlow, he could have found no better place. The alley was condemned, and was indeed about to come into the hands of the housebreakers. Another reason that militated against the probability of anyone being about, was that all Newcastle had been attracted to the blazing theatre.

As he reached the street into which the alley debouched the sound of the commotion round the theatre—ay, and the roaring of the flames, became visible. A wild light came into Carruthers' eyes. The next moment he had darted forward, and was speeding away in the direction of his own terrible handiwork.

An enormous crowd surged in front of the burning building. Carruthers rubbed his hands together in devilish glee. He had suddenly quite forgotten about Hazel. It was plain that the firemen were slowly mastering the blaze. The theatre was already practically gutted. Yet they had prevented the fire from spreading beyond the theatre. For a time Carruthers stood on the outskirts of the crowd. The dusk of evening drew over the scene, and still he remained gloating over the scene.

"I did it!" he muttered at last. "It's all my work!"

At that instant a voice sounded in his ears that acted like a cold douche. For one brief moment it gave him back his reason.

"Mr. Carruthers," said the voice agonisedly, "*what have you done with Hazel Harlow?*"

Carruthers looked up, his face bloodless, to confront Jenny Lovelace, by whose side was a tall, handsome, well-dressed man.

"Hazel Harlow!" he echoed faintly.

"Yes," cried the man. "Speak, or I'll shake the life out of you."

With a snarl like that of a wild beast Carruthers sprang forward. A thousand wheels seemed turning in his brain. Letters of fire danced before his eyes! Kill! kill! kill! was what he read.

He hurled himself at Eric Monteith's—Jenny's companion—throat. The impetuosity of the madman's unexpected attack threw him backwards. Carruthers' fingers were at his throat—terrible, sinuous, wire-like fingers they seemed. He tried to beat his assailant off. He felt unconsciousness seizing hold of him. He was being throttled to death.

Suddenly the fingers relaxed. A terrible cry broke from the madman's lips. "Through the dressing-room window!" he muttered hoarsely, as though in answer to some unspoken question. The next moment he grew stiff and rigid. A few fierce convulsions shook his limbs And so Percy Carruthers died—smitten down suddenly by the hand of God.

For a few moments Eric could not believe that the man was dead. A policeman raised up the body, and placed his hand over his heart. The bystanders pressed round in horror.

"Do you know this—dead man?" he asked.

"No," answered Monteith truthfully.

"I did," put in Jenny hysterically, yet striving to keep calm. "His name was Carruthers. He was a member of *The Good Samaritan* company, to which I also belong." Then she looked piteously at Monteith. "I can't tell all I know here," she said.

"Come along to the station, Miss," said the constable sympathetically. "And you, too, sir," to Eric. He sent a boy for a cab.

When the vehicle came up the body of the hapless Carruthers was placed in it.

"You drive on," said Monteith to the constable. "This lady and I will follow you."

As they proceeded towards the station, Eric suddenly turned to his comrade.

"Miss Lovelace," he said, "can you describe to me what Miss Harlow's dressing-room at the theatre is like?"

Jenny looked at him with a puzzled expression. "Why, yes," she said. "It was a small room, with a window at one end opening on to some leads. Her make-up table was set beneath the window, and had a looking-glass on it. There was a fireplace in the room. That's all."

"But the window—could one get out by it?"

Jenny thought for a moment. "I should think so," she said finally. "But why do you ask?"

"Because poor Carruthers' dying words were: 'Through the dressing-room window.' I could only just catch them; but he seemed to be answering your question in some sort of way: 'What have you done with Hazel Harlow?' It is in the bounds of possibility that he escaped through the window. And if he escaped, then why not Miss Harlow?"

"But where can she be now?"

Eric shook his head. "I don't know," he said; "but I'm going round to the back of the theatre to see if I can find out any houses upon which the dressing-room window opened. Can you tell me which way the window faces."

Jenny thought for a minute. "It has a gleam of late afternoon sun," she said thoughtfully, "so it would face west."

"Good. Then will you go to the police-station and tell them there I'll report myself later?" And without more ado Eric hurried off, his heart beating high with hope renewed.

There was still a great crowd round the theatre, though the fire had been got under hand by now. Gaunt and grim the blackened ruin looked, with its bare smoke-grimed walls and gaping casements silhouetted darkly against the darker sky beyond.

For night had set in now. The hum of many voices rose up round the still smouldering structure.

"Poor Miss Harlow," Eric heard a voice mutter. "To think that that beautiful young lady has perished in the flames."

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"Ay, and there was another there, too," put in the voice of a man, evidently better posted than his neighbour. "The doorkeeper has recovered from his fit of sleep, or call it what you will. He says that a Mr. Carruthers, one of the actors, went in before Miss Harlow. This same Carruthers gave him a drink of doctored spirits. Looks like foul play, says I."

Eric drew a long breath. So the whole story was public property now. He hurried on, intent on tracing the mystery of Hazel's fate to its end.

He took his bearings as well as he could. If the dressing-room window faced west, he must trace his steps westwards. And thus a natural sequence of deduction led him into the narrow deserted alley, the street in which the very house was where Carruthers had deposited the hapless Hazel.

Here Eric found himself brought to a check. He had no data to guide him in a further search. Should he enter one of the houses and investigate the roofs? That seemed the best plan.

Suddenly a faint cry fell on his ears. The blood rushed from his face. His pulses began to drum madly. Again the cry rang out.

He dashed down the gloomy alley. Ah! Again that scream. Then silence, save for the roar of the city's traffic close at hand.

Half frenzied between hope and fear, Eric began to try the doors of the houses. The first two were bolted. Mechanically he pushed on.

The third door flew open before his touch. Good heavens! The coincidence brought him back to his senses. Why should that one door be unlatched?

Without pausing to consider possible dangers, he stumbled up the rickety stairs. The top of the house, he knew instinctively, must be his goal.

A door facing the stair-head brought him up. It was locked. The key was in the door.

The bolt swung back from rusty wards. Another instant and he was in a room, dark as the grave, and almost as silent.

Fearfully, apprehensively, he struck a match. A low groan escaped his lips as the tiny flame showed him a grimy apartment with a truckle-bed in the corner, upon which was stretched the inanimate form of a woman.

He leapt forward. One glance at the deathly-white face told him that it was indeed the girl he loved better than all else in the world, Hazel Harlow, snatched miraculously out of the jaws of a fiery tomb.

Out of the tomb! Was she alive? A hasty examination revealed the blessed fact that she had swooned.

"Thank God!" muttered Eric. "Thank God!" And tears of heartfelt gratitude to Heaven gathered in his eyes—tears that were no womanly confession of weakness. He had not dared hope for this.

CHAPTER VI.

The astounding story of Hazel's escape soon got into the papers, and there was probably no manager in London who would not have offered Hazel an important *rôle* on the strengh of the incident

As for Hazel herself, it was with the utmost reluctance that she could be got to speak of the terrible adventure at all.

Only to Eric and Jenny, her saviours, did she supply the missing links of the story. The reporter from the *Courier* had perforce to draw on his own journalistic imagination.

As for Eric, he could not refrain from again urging on Hazel what he had before made insistent—that she should give up a life that had already brought her such terrible experiences.

But Hazel, like many another woman, weak about certain things, was on this point adamant. "I have put my hand to the plough," she said gently, "and there can be no turning back. Heaven knows that the adventures that have befallen me were none of my seeking. No, kindest and best of friends, don't urge me any more. My mind is made up."

The fire at the theatre meant a serious loss to Raymond Venables. The insurance of his company's effects did not cover all that had been lost. And the tour list must be gone on with. To break his future contracts spelt ruin.

They were due the next week at Rugby, and somehow or other fresh properties must be obtained. Then, again, the loss of the unhappy man Carruthers, apart from its own peculiar sadness, meant the finding of another man to fill the dead man's shoes.

Venables convened a meeting of his company. "I take it, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "you are all agreed, that we cannot abandon our tour. I will go to London at once and secure fresh properties. On Monday I will be at Rugby. Your time till then must be your own."

The company were unanimous in continuing the tour. Venables departed, somewhat cheered. On his way to the station he encountered Monteith.

"Mr. Venables," said Eric, "will you give me the part vacated by the unfortunate man who lost his life yesterday? I don't want any salary, and I think I can undertake the small part. I have seen the piece more than once. What do you say?"

Venables looked curiously at the young man.

"Has Miss Harlow's presence in the company anything to do with this whim of yours?" he said slowly.

Eric flushed. "I will not deny that you are right," he answered. "But you need not think that I want to become an actor solely to make love to Miss Harlow. In the first place, she doesn't care for me any more than for any other man. Secondly, I hope I am a gentleman."

Raymond Venables' face cleared, and he held out his hand.

"It's a fair field and no favour, then," he said somewhat mysteriously. "And as to salary, I must beg you to accept thirty shillings a week—what the poor fellow Carruthers was getting. We shall have to have a couple of rehearsals at Rugby. Please be word perfect. The part *is* a small one, but even small parts want good acting."

"Thank you," said Eric, "I will not fail you."

And so he parted from his new manager. A more tranquil feeling had taken possession of him. At any rate, should there be danger in Hazel's path in the future, he would be at hand to guard her. As to his histrionic abilities, he had not much fear about them.

Thus did Eric Monteith bind himself to be knight-errant for the girl whom he loved, and whose life he had twice saved.

But for Hazel Harlow there was not as yet the dawn of love.

[The next place on the tour-list of *The Good Samaritan* company was Rugby. In the Warwickshire town Hazel Harlow was to be confronted with yet another adventure of absorbing interest. Readers of Short Stories cannot afford to miss this thrilling narrative.]

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My Strange Fellow Passenger.

By J. L. Hornibrook.

The man sitting opposite me in the corner of the smoking carriage was beginning to get on my nerves.

For the last hour or so he had been growing more restless and strange in his manner every minute. His long, thin, trowel-shaped face twitched at times in a curious spasmodic way that was rather calculated to make one jump; his eyes smouldered with sullen fire; and more than once he brought his clenched fist down upon his knee with a sounding thump. He took no more notice of me than if I was at the other end of the train; and as we were alone in the carriage, I confess that I did not feel altogether comfortable.

I consoled myself, however, with the reflection that Broxburn, where I had to alight in order to reach my uncle's place, was only two stations further on, when I would be rid of my strange fellow passenger once and for all.

At our next stoppage my attention was drawn away from him for the time being by catching sight of my old friend, Tom Richards, upon the platform. I sung out to him, and he came across towards the window at once.

"Hullo, Ashcroft!" he cried, in his breezy way. "Going down to the Grange, eh? They are expecting you, I know. I was over there yesterday, and—— Good Lord!" he exclaimed, under his breath, checking himself suddenly, and staring past me into the carriage as if he was quite flabbergasted.

I did not wonder at his astonishment. My unknown friend had moved away to the opposite window, and was staring out of it at the moment; but at the very mention of my name his head came round with a jerk, and his eyes fastened upon me in a curious devouring kind of way. The next second one of those strange facial contortions seized upon him, which was quite enough to startle anyone who happened to be unprepared for it.

Richards, with a very blank face, motioned me ot bring my head nearer.

"Who the dickens have you got in there?" he whispered.

"Haven't the least idea," I answered. "I've been treated to this sort of thing all the way down."

"Well, judging by that start he gave just now, he seems to know more about you than you do about him."

I thought it rather odd, for I had certainly never laid eyes upon the man before, and why my name should have aroused his interest was more than I could imagine.

"They are all well at the Grange, I suppose?" I said, changing the subject. "My uncle, and—and—"

"Miss Constance, eh?" chimed in Richards, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "Oh, yes; they are both tip-top. Take care of yourself, old boy," he called out, as the train began to move. "See you again in a day or two."

I settled back in my corner, trying to look unconscious of the fact that the stranger was still regarding me in the same fixed, searching manner. The tables were now turned with a vengeance! Instead of my staring at him, it was him who was staring at me, never once allowing his gaze to wander. I did not like it at all. The concentrated glare of his black glowing eyes gave me a most uncomfortable sensation, as if two burning rays were playing full upon me.

I took up a paper, held it in front of me, and made a pretence to read. But it was no use; I instinctively felt that the man's eyes were still upon me His gaze seemed to burn its way through the flimsy sheet, and transfix me as before. In despair, I tossed the paper aside, deliberately turned my back upon him, and fell to studying the view from the carriage window.

It was with a certain sense of relief that I stepped from the train at Broxburn, for I felt as if I were emerging from some oppressive atmosphere into the open air, and

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could breathe freely again. As I walked off down the platform, curiosity prompted me to glance back over my shoulder; and there, at the carriage window, I saw the stranger, staring after me in the most persistent manner. Whether he got out or not I cannot say, but he certainly made a movement as if to do so just as I turned away.

At the Grange I received a very cordial welcome from uncle Roger, whom I had not seen for six months, and—well, yes, from the Miss Constance whom Richards had alluded to.

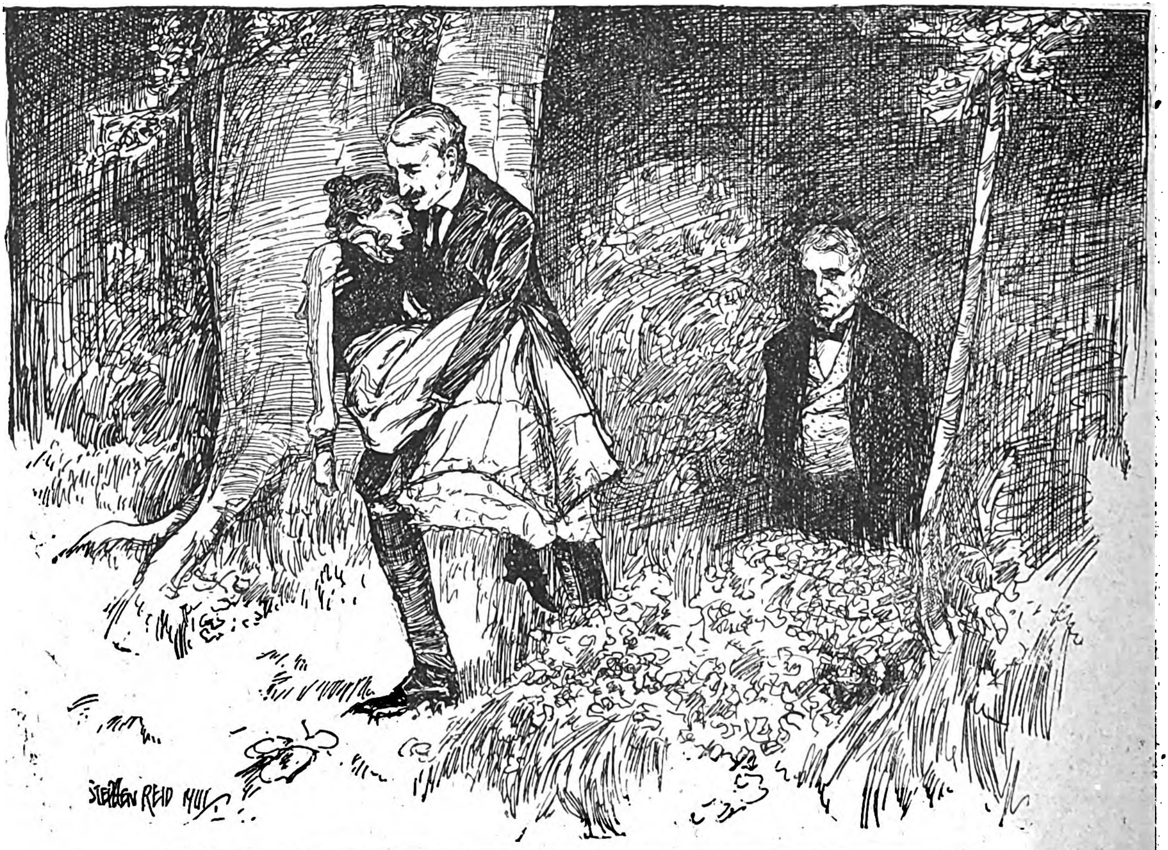
Let me just say here that there was a tinge of romance, if not of mystery, connected with Constance Heathcote and the manner in which she first became an inmate of the Grange. Several years before—according to Mrs. Warne, the housekeeper, who was my informant—my uncle received a letter one morning which seemed to upset him greatly. Within an hour he was off somewhere in hot haste, leaving word that he might not be back for a week. At the end of that time he returned, leading by the hand a child—a pretty, winsome little thing—the very sight of whom captivated Mrs. Warne's motherly heart on the spot. My uncle handed the little one over to her, said that her name was Constance, and that she was to be treated in every respect as if she were his own daughter—and said no more.

And a daughter Constance became to him as she grew up, twining herself round his heart in a manner peculiar to her. On his part, he thought there was no one in the world like her—an opinion which was cordially endorsed by one other member of the family at least.

For the remainder of the day I was much too occupied with Constance to give a thought to the man in the train. The whole thing slipped from my memory, indeed, and was only recalled by an incident which occurred that same evening.

My uncle, who was of a studious turn of mind, was much given to chemical research, and usually took himself off to his laboratory soon after dinner. For myself, as Constance had left us some little time before, I sauntered out into the grounds to enjoy a quiet cigar.

I was strolling up and down on the velvety sward at the side of the house, indulging in the pleasing occupation of day-dreaming, when a dark, gliding figure passed quickly between me and the skyline, and disappeared into the shrubs at the other side of the tennis lawn. Though I had only a momentary glimpse of it, it instantly brought back to my mind the strange-looking



Taking her up in my arms, I bore her back to the house.

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being I had encountered in the train that morning. I could have sworn it was the same man.

I hurried across to the spot where I had seen him disappear; but though I hunted through the bushes for some little time, I failed to discover a trace of anyone lurking there.

Considerably puzzled, I returned to the house, thinking that I ought to make known the circumstance to my uncle. With this object in view I sought him out in his laboratory, where I found him pottering about amongst his jars and phials, up to his eyes in scientific research.

"By the way, uncle," I said, perching myself on a corner of the table, and picking up a queer-looking fossil which I found at hand, "I had a rather curious experience coming down in the train to-day."

"What was that?" he mumbled, sniffing thoughtfully at a bottle, the stopper of which he had just withdrawn.

I started to tell him, glancing down at the fossil meanwhile, but before I had got very far my account was cut short by a sudden crash of glass at the other end of the room. Looking up, quickly I was astounded to find my uncle staring at me in a kind of horrified, open-eyed stupor, that had something almost uncanny in it. The bottle had fallen from his nerveless fingers, and the brownish liquid it contained was slowly spreading itself out on the floor.

I was off the table and across the room in an instant. "What is it?" I cried. "What's the matter?"

For all the notice he took, I might just as well have addressed the empty air. He seemed stunned—stupified. The look in his eyes shocked and alarmed me, and I laid my hand hastily upon his arm.

"Uncle," I said, "do try and pull yourself together. If Constance should happen to come in——"

That one word, "Constance," seemed to electrify him into life. With a sudden, sharp cry, he shook me off, sprang towards the door, and dashed headlong from the room.

I was after him in an instant, but in his frantic haste he easily outstripped me.

"Constance! Constance!" I heard him cry, as he rushed wildly from one room to another.

But Constance was nowhere to be found!

In less than a minute the whole house was in a turmoil. The servants, attracted by my uncle's cries, came crowding into the hall with startled, questioning faces, but they could give no account of the girl. At last one of them declared that she must have strolled out into the grounds, as she had been seen to put on her hat some time before.

This information appeared to dismay uncle Roger, and he was through the door almost before one of us could move. I waited a moment to give directions to the servants, and then hurried out after him. By that time, however, he had disappeared, in what direction I could not tell.

Without an instant's delay I made for the shrubs at the other side of the tennis lawn, a strange, sinking fear in my heart. Though I could not imagine what had happened, I felt that the presence of the man I had seen a while ago boded no good.

My second search among the bushes was as futile as the first. Hot, palpitating, breathless, I paused to look around me. Where could the girl have gone?

I then remembered that some distance further on, hidden away among the trees, there was an old ivied ruin, which was a favourite resort of Constance's in the daytime. Thinking that she might possibly have wandered towards this spot, I bolted off in that direction at once.

I was rushing madly through the trees, when, just as I got within sight of the ruin, I almost tumbled headlong over a prostrate figure, and found to my horror that it was Constance!

She was lying there in a dead faint, her white, inanimate face upturned to the sky. Not far from the spot was a heavy cloak and a man's hat, which seemed to indicate that an attempt had been made to carry her off, but was fortunately frustrated in some way.

Just as I was bending over her a sound came from a little hollow on the right that thrilled me with a vague horror and alarm. It was something that resembled a fierce, worrying snarl, followed almost immediately by a kind of choking gurgle.

I sprang towards the spot, and down there I saw my unfortunate uncle lying on the ground, a man kneeling upon his chest and gripping him by the throat with both hands. One glance was enough to show me that his assailant was the stranger I had met in the train.

I hurled myself upon the wretch, but it was only after a desperate struggle that I was able to tear him off. Then he suddenly collapsed, falling at my feet in a kind of fit.

I hastened to get my uncle on his feet, and assisted him to the spot where Constance was lying. Taking her up in my arms, I bore her back to the house, uncle Roger staggering along after us with feeble, uncertain steps.

When I had seen them both in good hands, I called to the groom and gardener, and we hurried off again towards the ruin. The cloak and hat were still lying on the same spot, but the man himself had disappeared.

* * * * *

It was not until the following day that my uncle was in a condition to afford any explanation of this singular affair, which had so very nearly ended fatally for him. When he summoned me to his room, I was shocked to see the livid finger-marks still on his throat.

"Who was that man, uncle?" was the first question I asked.

"His name is Robert Harding," he answered; "and he is——" he paused, and looked at me with a pained expression upon his kindly face.

"What?" I asked.

"Constance's father!"

"Her father!" I gasped; for the announcement quite staggered me.

"Alas! it is so," he replied. "Listen, my boy; I will tell you the whole sad story. If I have kept it from you hitherto, it was only because I dreaded lest any word of it should come to our dear girl's ears.

"You must know," he went on, "that there has been a little romance in my early life, the memory of which has remained with me ever since. Long years ago I was deeply attached to Constance's mother, Isabella Heathcote. I believe that my love was returned; but unfortunately her parents forced her into a marriage with this man Harding.

"It proved a most unhappy, a miserable union. From the first Harding treated his wife with harshness and neglect, squandered her money, and was often brutally

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violent in his temper. Even when their little daughter was born, it wrought no change in him. He was a man of the most vicious tendencies, and he gave free rein to his passions at all times.

"I need not go through the whole wretched story. It is enough to say that he went from bad to worse, until he finally deserted his wife and child altogether.

"They were left utterly penniless, poor things; and only that I was able, through an indirect channel, to keep them from want, I tremble to think how they would have fared.

"One night, several months after he had disappeared, Harding turned up again, looking wild and desperate. He told his wife that he had got into trouble, and that he must have two hundred pounds by the next day in order to settle the matter and prevent prosecution.

"Whether or not he had discovered the source from which their supplies had come during his absence I cannot say. At any rate, he ordered her to apply to me at once for the money. She refused point blank to do anything of the kind.

"He was a man of ungovernable temper at all times; and now, as nothing he could say would induce her to consent, he flew into a frenzy of passion. Seizing her by the throat, he flung her from him so forcibly that she never recovered the effects of the fall. Then he fled, but was captured soon afterwards and sentenced to penal servitude.

"I knew nothing of all this at the time; but on her death-bed his poor wife sent for me, told me the whole miserable story, and committed little Constance to my care. I brought the child home here, vowing that never again should she fall into the hands of her brutal father. I called her by her mother's name, which was always dear to me.

"I have lived in constant dread that when Harding regained his liberty he would seek to claim her from me, and you can understand my dismay last night when I heard from you that he was in this neighbourhood. Knowing that he would encounter opposition, it must have occurred to him to lay in wait and carry her off by force. Though that attempt failed, it is still open to him to set the law in motion, which no doubt is his intention. As her legal guardian, he can compel me to give her up in the end. And now, how are we to prevent it?"

I was silent for a long time, turning the whole thing over in my mind; and then I thought I saw a way out of the difficulty.

"No doubt he could claim her under present circumstances," I said. "But he could not do so if——"

"If what?" he asked.

"If she had a husband, for instance."

He brightened up at once.

"And the proposed husband?" he said, looking straight at me.

"Is not very far off," I answered.

"My dear boy!" he said, cordially wringing my hand, "it is what I have wished for all along. And if I know anything," he added, with conviction, "Constance herself will raise no great obstacles to this solution of the difficulty."

And she did not.

"Claribel, when we are wed, your pathway shall be eternally strewn with roses." "Pathway? Then you expect me to foot it everywhere, I suppose?"

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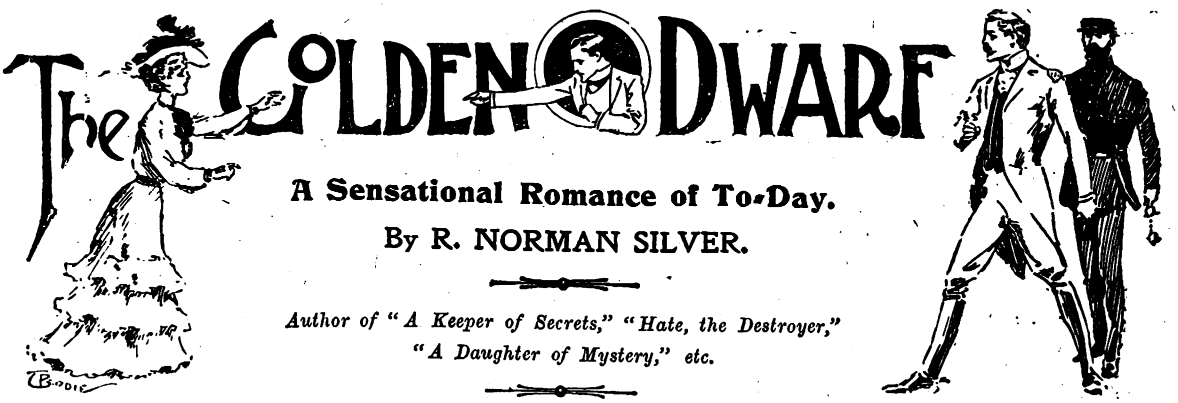

The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"It is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Felix in vain protests his innocence.

But the cloud of suspicion gathers around him. Meantime, the child Brian has been kidnapped, and Felix is suspected of this too. He discovers a riding whip with some peculiar marks upon it.

One day an old sailor named Foley is attacked by Otto Hare's dogs.

Kraft is summoned to dress the wound, and gives Foley a draught.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"She Worships Felix Dering."

"There, Miss Carew, that is as much as I can show you—not very exciting, I fear, but worth a glimpse, nevertheless."

Otto Hare abandoned the lens of the great telescope, and, descending from the species of moveable platform which served as a seat, left it to his young companion.

Esther roused—she had been absorbed in listening for a recurrence of the sound that, reaching her ears in so unlikely a quarter, had startled her into conjecture. She climbed to the position vacated by the Golden Dwarf and peeped through the large instrument.

A moment she gazed—then withdrew her eyes from the lens. "I can see little or nothing, Mr. Hare," she confessed; "only a huge pink ball and a blot or two in the middle of it."

She was answered by a tolerant smile. "The sun is of slight interest to any but experts," admitted Otto Hare, leaning on the observer's carriage; "it is at this end of the telescope, for instance, that I find my favourite star."

He glanced about him—the German, Zorn, had taken his lean figure and dull orbs away; the Golden Dwarf, save for Esther Carew, was alone in the singular building which apparently did duty for such a simple scientific purpose. Otto Hare pointed to a thin spiral staircase, running up the interior of the taper edifice.

"That leads to the dome," he said; "or rather to a gallery round the dome. It was the gallery made me call this my watch-tower. From it, by a rift in the foliage of the park, I was able to notice you as you came and went to the Rosery. Thus I knew you—or seemed to—before I learned your name by frightening you so terribly with my poor Cerberus."

Esther shuddered. "Cerberus was the big dog which—which discovered Sir Christopher's body?" she murmured, "it is horrible to think how close he was to us all the time and we never dreamed of it. What—what happened to it?" she added; "Cerberus, I mean."

Otto Hare glanced at his repeater. "Oh," he explained uneasily; "it met with an accident and died. But let us forget Cerberus and everything he stands for. He was part of my isolation, the hermit existence I have put behind me."

He laid a tiny hand on the padded end of the carriage in which she sat; Esther marked the size and splendour of the diamond he wore.

"Can you not guess," he queried, looking into her flushed and downcast face, "why I have flung myself out into the world as I have done, after fifteen years' solitude? Will you not comprehend that it is you who have drawn me forth and made me pant to live the life of my fellows. I am rich—you have rendered my wealth valueless but to give you pleasure: I am powerful—you have reduced my ambitions to this, the desire to execute your wishes."

"Please, Mr. Hare," begged Esther, trying to rise, "please do not speak to me like that—it is no use. Oh, I am very, very sorry for you, but, as I have told you, I love someone else."

The Golden Dwarf set his white teeth; his small, aristocratic features contracted savagely.

"You hate me because I am what I am," he snarled; "yes, you do, Miss Carew, and I will be revenged on you—on you and on Felix Dering, the man you love for his strength and his inches."

Esther shrank from the fierce gaze of the Golden Dwarf and the malignant attitude of his athletic, though diminutive frame. But his attack upon Felix stung her.

"I love Mr. Dering because he is noble and generous," she cried; "if he were poor, as—indeed, he is—and a cripple into the bargain, I would love him for himself."

Otto Hare's countenance relaxed into a ghastly smile. "There is a peculiar kind of crippling, Miss Carew," he

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retorted, "that your love would find it difficult to survive. It is the injury inflicted by the rope and the scaffold of the common executioner—a broken neck."

With this frightful jest, the Golden Dwarf caught her soft palms and grasped them as a vice might have done.

"Repulse me," he hissed, "and I will have Felix Dering hanged as high as Haaman—hanged for the murder of his uncle. I have a witness who could doom him to the gallows as surely as a judge in the black cap."

Otto Hare threw himself on his knees by the paralysed girl, and covered her fingers with burning kisses. She felt helpless before his diabolical threat; the contact of his lips scorched her like hot iron. Rallying her courage, she snatched her wrists out of his clutch.

"Mr. Dering is innocent," she declared; "I do not believe you could even make him seem guilty."

The Golden Dwarf struggled for self-control; his dark skin was purple and his brow knotted with swoollen veins.

"You challenge me?" he muttered; "I accept the challenge—I will satisfy you both of Dering's guilt and my power to prove it. In two days you may still loathe, but you *shall* fear me."

Half fainting, Esther tottered from the light carriage under the lens of the telescope, and gained the floor of the tower. As she did so the sound that she had heard already floated to her once more, far-off, indistinct, but unmistakably significant. This time it evidently reached the Golden Dwarf.

A look of embarrassment, almost of terror, crossed his face, and he touched, hastily, the button of a bell. The German responded to the imperative peal—a gaunt, pale form, the antithesis of his compatriot, Kraft.

"Zorn," said Otto Hare, and he spoke now in English, "the machines downstairs are running noisily—see to them." He added a rapid sentence in a foreign tongue.

The German bowed—the German fashion; feet together, arms in front, knees stiff. He was not over middle-age, and might have been much more youthful than he appeared. The bow finished, he turned about in a military manner and vanished through an opening that continued the spiral staircase into the basement of the tower.

The Golden Dwarf followed Esther's glance. "There is an electric installation on a lower level," he supplemented—"it feeds the house lamps, and some ventilators. But the vibrations interfere with the instruments; I am thinking of having it removed. You can hear at a considerable distance the throb of the gas-engine that turns the dynamos."

Esther listened—the muffled palpitations of machinery could indeed be perceived. Yet the sound was not that which had so forcibly attracted her attention.

Otto Hare watched her; he was nervous and agitated. "Pardon my little outburst of temper a moment ago, Miss Carew," he murmured. "But you distract me when you insist on espousing the cause of that rascal Dering; I will certainly fulfil my promise to convince you of his worthlessness. Permit me at present, however, to take you back to your mother."

He thrust wide the double exit of the tower, and escorted Esther towards the lawn, still melodious with the dance-music of the Hungarian band and bright with the gay costumes of his feminine guests.

Not a few curious glances were fixed on them as they joined the group about Mrs Carew—Esther, fragile and drooping as a lily, Otto Hare stern and upright. Most of those who scrutinised the couple hazarded a guess that the Golden Dwarf had been proposing to the girl at his side, and that she, doubtless well-schooled by her mother, had accepted him. "A strange bridegroom," thought all, yet there were few women among his visitors who would not have grasped, themselves, at the offer of Otto Hare's heart and fortune.

Mrs. Carew was not so satisfied as to the success of her darling scheme. Her penetration revealed to her the weariness in her daughter's bearing, the sullen discontent in the Golden Dwarf's demeanour. There was not even between them the polite if cold understanding of a mercenary betrothal. Mrs. Carew's victory was yet to win, and she was aware of it.

When she could steal a moment from the departing guests (Otto Hare's return had been seized upon as an opportunity for a score of effusive farewells) she glided to Esther.

"What has Mr. Hare been doing or saying that you look so doleful?" she inquired, affecting an indifference she did not feel. Her daughter looked away into the quiet blue of the August sky.

"He has threatened and insulted me," answered Esther, slowly; "here, in his own grounds. My hands tingle with the kisses he forced on me. He wishes me to marry him, though I do not love him, though he knows I love another man."

"Pshaw!" whispered her mother, "you exaggerate, Esther, absurdly; Mr. Hare is fond of you to distraction. If he has been a trifle ardent it is a compliment any girl would be proud of from so handsome and distinguished a suitor."

Esther shivered. "Mamma," she said; "you make me ashamed—ashamed of being your child."

Mrs. Carew pinched her cheek. "You are the least bit impertinent, dear," she retorted; "but I forgive you—you are unnerved. And now to get rid of the nobodies; the smart people have gone in a flock—our own sex to discuss you, my dear, the men to envy Mr. Hare."

She moved off, laughing, and began to distribute adieux to the nonentities of the garden-party. The Golden Dwarf waited till she was disengaged and the last wheel had rolled down the avenue. Then he paused by her, knitting his brows.

"I have no pretty news for you, Mrs. Carew," he said, sneeringly, "and yet I venture to believe I have produced a strong impression on your daughter's mind."

The widow sighed. "You are very kind and patient, Mr. Hare," she assured him; "Esther is so wilful. But I, too, have hopes. There, go, and let me have a brougham immediately. I want to whisk her home before she has a nervous breakdown."

Mrs. Carew tapped him maternally with her fan. "Your wooing, Mr. Hare," she said, "does not err in the matter of restraint. With Esther that is imprudent. Appeal to her head rather than to her emotions."

The Golden Dwarf muttered an indistinguishable apology, and went to order the vehicle desired by the widow. On its arrival at the white stone portico he handed them into it, scarcely speaking to Esther. Yet as he took leave of her he contrived to whisper, "In two days, remember." Esther did not raise her glance to his—she was numbed by anxiety for Felix Dering.

Their diminutive host surveyed the retreating brougham, almost lost in a cloud of dust, yet growing smaller and smaller in the vista of the avenue.

"She shall be mine," murmured Otto Hare; "if I die for it, she shall be mine."

He played with his jewelled repeater and watched the avenue—a familiar shape had emerged from the dust thrown up by the brougham; it was that of Joseph Kraft. The Golden Dwarf hastened to meet him.

"Where have you been?" the big German was asked; "have you struck Foley's trail?"

Kraft stroked his pink chin and smiled. "He will

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not trouble us again," vouchsafed his thin, humorous lips; "he is past cure, if he be not actually defunct."

The Golden Dwarf grew livid, then red. "So Cerberus is avenged," he rejoined.

"Cerberus be—anathematised," growled Kraft; "I have completed your bungling attempt, and delivered us out of the clutches of an obstinate and clumsy blackmailer."

"*You* have delivered us!" exclaimed Otto Hare; "he has not died from the bite Mahmud gave him?"

"Not he," said the other; "he died, if he be yet dead, of a rare South African poison—the sap of an obscure Brazilian herb. But enough of Foley—how have you progressed with Miss Carew?"

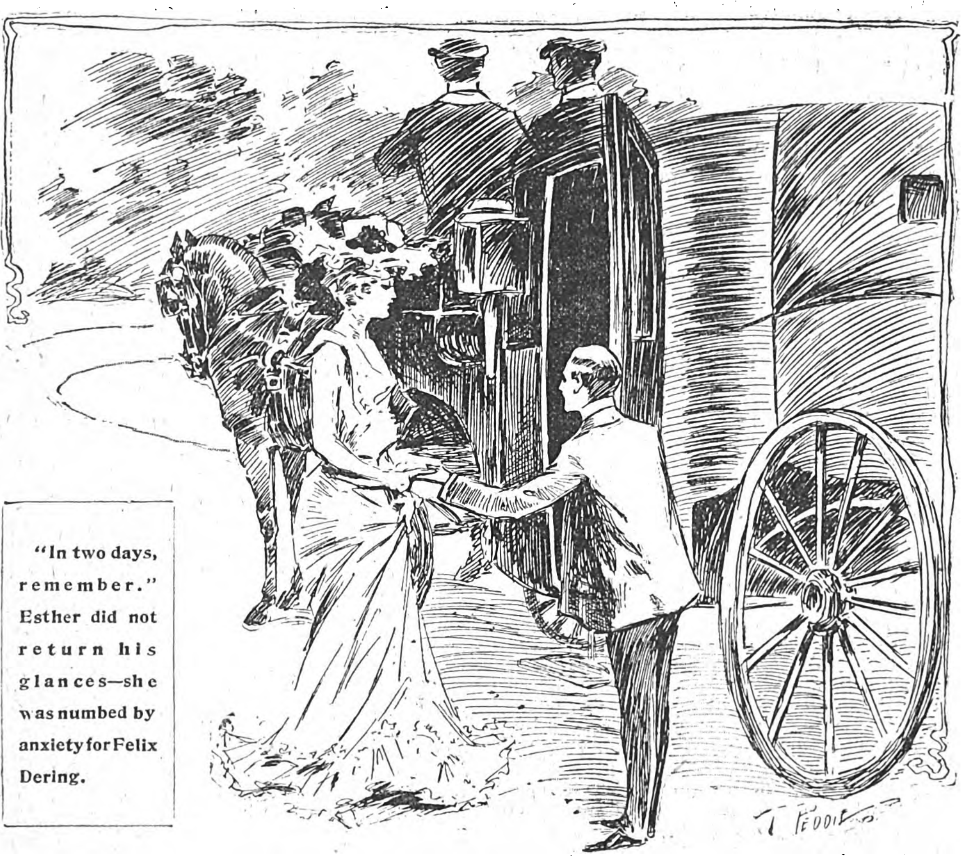
The Golden Dwarf spat out an awful oath. "She worships Felix Dering," was his vicious response; "we must terrify her into surrender. Bring down your honest Londoner, Kraft—your boasted Neal Garland: we shall have need of all his—honesty."

Joseph Kraft tossed away a half-smoked cigar. "So that is the plan," he said; "well, I suggested it myself, and I suppose we shall have to go through with it. But to be frank, Hare, I feel an instinct that it will prove unlucky."

"Rubbish!" ejaculated Otto Hare; "I see no alternative, and I will not relinquish her, Kraft, for fifty Felix Derings. Write to Garland to-night."

They turned back to the portico, the German pondering as he walked. In the hall, he snapped his fingers.

"A fig for instinct," he cried, with the air of one who arrives at a decision; "Mr. Garland shall revisit Wyresdale."



"In two days, remember." Esther did not return his glances—she was numbed by anxiety for Felix Dering.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"Give Me Back My Child."

"Lift him up gently, sir; oh, if we had only a drop of spirits! It's a piece of hard luck for me if he's gone."

Inspector Brasher was stooping over the prostrate form of Nicholas Foley. He took the sailor's head and shoulders into his own strong arms and raised them to the level of his knee.

Felix Dering obeyed the command, and together the two men deposited the third upon the unsteady hammock that hung in a corner of the bare room. Foley's neck was limp and a red stain on the bandages about the sailor's throat had spread.

"What's in yonder bottle?" queried Michael Brasher. His share of the movement just executed had brought him face to face with a low chimney-piece; on it was perched a fat flask bearing a suggestive label, and half full of a colourless fluid. By it stood a tin cup and a pannikin of the same metal.

Felix went and investigated these articles—the bottle contained whisky, the pannikin water; the cup had been emptied to the last drain.

Hastily he poured some of the spirit into the smaller receptacle, and diluting it to a nominal extent, poured it between the sailor's lips. The liquor overflowed the irresponsive mouth—Nicholas Foley could not swallow. Mr. Brasher tore open the breast of the blue bed-gown and laid a palm upon the tattooed skin—not a tremor disturbed the powerful muscles and lean flanks of the mariner; the sailor was dead.

With a profound sigh the Inspector set aside the tin

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cup and straightened his tall frame. "Slipped through my fingers, by Jupiter!" he exclaimed.

Felix Dering gazed thoughtfully at the police-officer, whose exact attitude towards himself he would have given so much to ascertain. Mr. Brasher was puzzled by the glance, it seemed fearless and intelligent. Felix had shaken off the despondence and melancholy that had hung about him since the murder of Sir Christopher Dering.

"You talk in riddles, Mr. Brasher," he observed, studying the swarthy corpse before them; "had you some reason to take a professional interest in Foley?"

Brasher stroked his trim black beard. "Of a sort, yes," Felix was told: "pardon me, Mr. Dering, if I ask you what you happened to know of the—the deceased?"

The Inspector bent, drew the flaps of the blue bed-gown to athwart the deep chest, and arranged an end of the sailor's blanket over the distorted visage. Felix hesitated to answer the question, so simply yet so directly put.

"I—I had grounds," he returned, after a moment's consideration, "for a belief that Foley was acquainted with some or all of the facts relating to my uncle's death. He—he had endeavoured to—to blackmail me on the strength of such an alleged knowledge. I treated him with contempt, and advised him to inform you of any secrets he had unearthed or was otherwise possessed of. But—on—reflection I decided to probe the matter—hence my visit. I may add, Mr. Brasher, that I share your chagrin at finding him as far from my demands as he is from your clutches."

Michael Brasher knitted his brows. "You speak frankly enough, Mr. Dering," he allowed, "but Foley is, as you see, dead, and I must accept your explanations, to a certain degree, on trust. However, if you will do the cause of law and order a service you might hurry to the police-station and ask the sergeant to send a constable and summon a doctor as quickly as possible: I dare not conclude too hastily that our friend here has shuffled off his mortal coil altogether. For the present, I will remain in charge myself."

Mr. Brasher's tone was stern and precise. Felix Dering regarded him for several seconds—a light in his eye which might almost have been that of suppressed amusement. But the Inspector's request was a practical command and he could serve no good purpose by demurring to it. Not that Felix had the slightest doubt of the sailor's decease—the clenched jaw, the glazed pupil, the awful inertia of the athletic figure, betrayed the unmistakable truth. With a cold assent, he passed out of the cottage, and, at a rapid pace, made for the small police depôt hard by. Arrived there, he gave the necessary instructions, saw one constable start for the nearest physician, another for the sailor's cottage, and turned his own footsteps in the direction of the High Street.

The afternoon was growing late as he went along the quiet thoroughfare, an elasticity in his stride to which it had been a stranger for weeks. At the establishment of Caleb Forester he paused and entered. The old chemist was behind the counter; he murmured a nervous good-evening.

"Is Mr. Geddes about?" inquired Felix, meeting Caleb's gaze with a species of embarrassment; their previous encounter had been the occasion of the chemist's singular warning against Inspector Brasher.

"He's indoors, sir," said Caleb Forester; "I will mention that you wish to see him. The chemist leaned over the counter and lowered his voice. "I'm glad to have this opportunity of speaking to you, sir," came in a whisper, to Felix's ear; "about what I recently took the liberty of mentioning, sir. You recollect I confessed I wouldn't guarantee myself if I got a trifle foolish any time. I must have been indiscreet, as I feared I might be, sir, for the other day Inspector Brasher tackled me on the very subject."

"And you replied——?" said Felix imperturbably.

"Put him on a wrong scent," chuckled Caleb; "I have evidently been bragging, in my drunken pride, sir—for drunk I was, sir, to be such a fool—about having done you a service of some kind. I meant, of course, my holding my tongue about your being in Wyresdale the night of the squire's murder. But I fobbed Brasher off by saying I had recommended you to see *The Colleen Bawn*, at the Duchester Theatre (you remember I did mention it to you, sir), and that if I hadn't sent you there you mightn't have been able to prove an alibi."

Felix assented; he was seeking, in memory, to analyse Michael Brasher's grave and non-committal demeanour towards him.

"That satisfied B.," proceeded Caleb, "more especially as he was on a new trail. He has suspicions of my brother-in-law, Nick Foley, a sailor, and a queer character at the best, who lives near your lodge-gates. Nick's lost an arm and couldn't have been the one to do away with the squire. But Brasher is as obstinate as a mule. Why won't you get off while he gives you the chance, sir?"

Felix was pondering. "Nicholas Foley your brother-in-law!" he said; "why, yes, I recollect the name as that of your wife's family. Mr. Forester, I called at Foley's place a quarter of an hour ago—and—and found him in a species of fit—or—or worse. Brasher was there, he was the first to discover Foley ill—or dying. Perhaps you had better go round."

Caleb Forester gasped. "Dear, dear," he murmured; "Nick dying! I never liked him, sir, he was a reckless, tricky sort, but poor Margaret was fond of him. I'll go immediately. And so Brasher was there; how odd, how very odd!" He began to put on his hat and coat—they hung in a cupboard by the stairs that led out of the shop.

Felix Dering produced a tissue-paper parcel. "At your leisure, Mr. Forester," he intimated, "you might deliver this to Mr. Geddes; it is a magnifying-glass I borrowed. Tell him it has been of the greatest value to me."

He laid a hand on the old chemist's withered palm. "As for your advice to fly, Mr. Forester," he added; "you mean well, but you do not understand. I am innocent, and I shall stay in Wyresdale. Let Geddes have his glass and my message. Good-evening." And Felix took a cheerful departure.

The chemist looked after him as he completed his preparations to set out for the sailor's cottage; his decision was expressed in a doleful shake of the head. Ignorant of his ominous gesture, Felix Dering returned, at the same quick and confident pace, to Dering House.

He sprang up the flight of oaken stairs to his rooms, more buoyant and eager than he had been for a month. Suddenly a thin and piercing wail penetrated to him—a wail that shaped itself into a familiar word, the name of his tiny cousin, the lost child baronet.

"Brian! Brian!" it repeated, in a woman's piteous tones. The call echoed through the ghostly twilight of Dering House, and chilled the warm blood in Felix Dering's veins. He halted, irresolute.

While he stood in the dusky corridor a rustle of skirts stole down it; he faced about, to behold Judith Garland. At sight of him she frowned and bit her red lips.

"Lady Dering is hysterical beyond her wont," said Judith, icily; "I am sending for Dr. Vavasour. He will hear something worth hearing," she supplemented menacingly, "when he comes to visit his patient."

She caught Felix by the shoulder. "Listen," she bade him; "listen!" They waited in the brooding

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shadows, Felix Dering and the woman whose love for him had turned to hate.

"Brian, Brian!" cried Lady Dering's mournful voice, penetrating the panels of an adjacent bedchamber; "what have you done with him, Felix? Give me back my husband, Felix, give me back my child."

The scream faded among the corridors of the rambling mansion. Judith laughed.

"Your time is short, Felix Dering," she remarked; "you made an enemy of me or I would have helped you to conceal even this. As it is I might yet relent—we women are so susceptible to the penitence of those we—we—love."

Felix freed himself from her grasp. "You humiliate yourself in vain, Miss Garland," he said, scornfully.

Judith snarled, as a cat does in its anger. "Your fate be on your own head," she hissed; "and when you mount the scaffold for your uncle's murder, remember it is I who have sent you there."

The man she had threatened smiled. "Neither you nor anyone else will send me there," he said; "not only am I innocent, but I know the guilty."

A cry broke from Judith Garland's heaving bosom. "You know the guilty!" she whispered.

Felix brushed by into the gloom of the narrow passage. But his words floated back to her.

"I know, and when the time comes I will prove it."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

In Which a Door Closes.

"Give me a pick-up of some kind—I've managed to run against a headache of the worst sort. Raised it coming down here on a rotten Parliamentary because the express didn't serve."

The person who made this explanation was a well-dressed fellow of about thirty, with bold dark eyes and a restless mouth. Under his carefully-groomed exterior it would have been difficult to recognise the former shabby respectability of Neal Garland. Neal had, to all appearance, had a stroke of luck.

He leaned on the counter of the Wyresdale Pharmacy and studied the keen, reserved features of Archibald Geddes. The chemist's assistant had acknowledged the querulous order, and reaching to a measuring-glass, began to get down bottle after bottle, as he compounded deliberately the required stimulant.

A certain uneasiness was evident in the restless motions of his customer's feet and hands; though Neal plainly sought to disguise the close attention with which he favoured the Scotchman. When the glass was delivered to him, it was three-parts full of a crimson fluid.

"I say," observed Archibald Geddes' patient; "you mightn't guess it, but I have been referred to you for a little information. Not but what my headache's genuine. As for my name, it's Neal Garland."

"I hope," answered Geddes, rubbing his chin, "you'll not be disappointed, but I don't fancy I'm acquainted with you at all, Mr.—Mr. Garland."

"No," admitted the other, coolly, "but you were with an old pal of mine—a sailor called Foley. At least, so I gather from local gossip. I'm staying at the Wheatsheaf Hotel, where I find your boss consumes a good deal of useless breath and a large quantity of inferior whiskey. I understand, thanks to him, that you were in, so to speak, at Foley's queer death. How did it happen—a dog-bite, I am told."

"Humph!" said the Scotchman; "he was bitten, and badly, while visiting Wyresdale Park, where Mr. Hare, the owner, had given him permission to set a few snares. Some big mastiffs run loose in the park at night—a whim of Mr. Hare's. The result was Foley came to me with a lacerated throat, which I bandaged, and advised him to call in a doctor. He asked me to get him a visit from Dr. Kraft, who lives at Wyresdale Park as a private friend of Mr. Hare's. Foley claimed a species of intimacy with him. He approved of my dressings, and prescribed a little anti-febrifuge."

"A little what!" exclaimed Neal, sharply.

"Something to reduce the risk of fever," said the chemist's assistant—"Foley had malaria in his blood. Dr. Kraft had met him years before and was aware of the fact."

Neal Garland snapped his fingers abruptly—Archibald Geddes made a mental note of the gesture.

"When Dr. Kraft and I saw Foley," pursued Geddes, "he was settling to sleep, fit enough, and in the best of tempers. An hour or two later, Inspector Brasher—of the county police—called at Foley's cottage and found him dead."

The listener frowned. "What had Foley been doing to get the police on his track?" he demanded.

"Brasher said," responded the Scotchman, drily, "he had struck up an acquaintance with Foley, and was just paying a friendly visit."

Neal relinquished the delicate glass, depositing it on the counter. He discharged the small fee out of a fist full of small change.

"I heard," he added, "a whisper about your professional accuracy being attacked—the bottle of medicine, the anti-febrifuge."

"It was analysed," said the chemist's assistant, "and found correct. Dr. Kraft swallowed publicly half the contents of the bottle at the coroner's inquest. Foley died, according to Dr. Kraft, from 'spasm of the glottis,' no doubt induced by the bite. The Doctor agreed that my dressing had been most suitable. And now I have answered your questions, Mr. Garland, may I inquire if you were intimate with Foley or had only met him haphazard."

The visitor abandoned his lounging position. "We were merely acquaintances," he returned; "I ran down to Wyresdale on other business and thought I should like to have a chat with the old shell-back. He was a bit of an oddity, you will allow. But it's of no importance, especially as he's gone under."

Lighting a cigarette, Neal Garland strolled out of the shop into the High Street. A fine rain was falling, and a stray leaf whirled down the pavement. August had yielded place to September—the early gloaming showed it.

Archibald Geddes put the coppers paid him into the till, and going behind the dispensing-screen, took from under the table a wooden box. Out of this he lifted a trap of wire; in it lay a mouse, stiff. The Scotchman contemplated the inert body, the wrinkles of deep thought chasing one another over his intelligent features.

A sound disturbed him and he peered round the polished mahogany. Michael Brasher stood at the counter. He caught sight of Geddes and went to the edge of the screen.

"Hullo," ejaculated the Inspector, taking in the probable significance of the article in Geddes' grasp; "troubled with mice?"

"Not over much," retorted the Scotchman; "I had a lot of bother to secure this—I wanted it for an experiment."

Brasher looked interestedly at the defunct rodent; Geddes stroked his full, strong jaw. Then he laid the mouse on a slab, opened it with a stroke of a scalpel, and examined the tiny viscera.

"That poor beast, Inspector," he said, "died from spasm of the glottis—have you ever heard the term before?"

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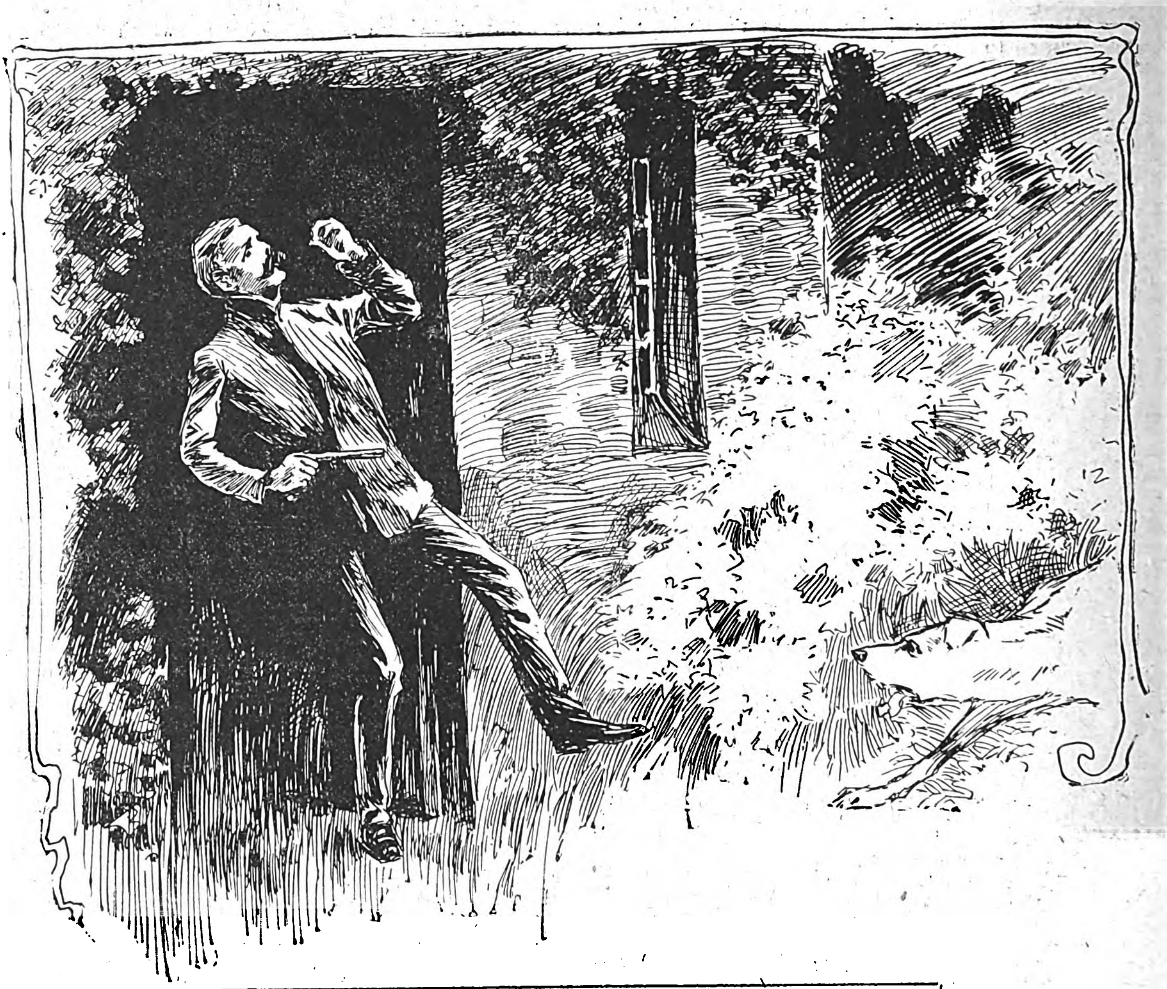

Unexpectedly the portal behind him swung open, and he staggered in. . . . The Scotsman was a prisoner—the captive of unknown gaolers.

Michael Brasher shot a glance at him. "The thing which killed Foley, wasn't it?" he responded.

"Quite so," assented Geddes; "you dropped in fortunately, Mr. Brasher; I have completed a difficult analysis. You recollect the medicine I put up for Foley. I diddled you a trifle over it—I represented that I touched it twice—once to compound it, once to give Foley a dose. Actually, I touched it a third time—the morning after he died—to abstract a sample."

The Inspector folded his arms and his face darkened.

"I had been to the cottage the night previous," pursued Geddes, investigating (in my amateur fashion), Mr Brasher, and decided to make sure of my stuff. Early the next morning, and while the body was being prepared to lie at the Wheatsheaf, I nipped a sample. Ten drops of it on a piece of bacon killed a large rat—it died from spasm of the glottis."

"And half the whole bottle failed to kill Dr. Kraft," sneered the Inspector, "besides which, the mixture was analysed."

"Pshaw," said Geddes, "what I could do could be done by others—the bottle had been refilled subsequently to my appropriating a dose or two, with a pure version of the original prescription. My sample was from the hocussed stuff. I cannot tell you what it was that killed Foley—not the name nor the nature of the drug, though I ascertained its presence. There was more than quinine and nux vomica in the portion I took; there was a minute quantity of what, concentrated, formed a white powder. That powder I administered to this mouse on a lump of cheese—as you see, it is dead."

"And by doing so," commented Mr. Brasher, "you have destroyed the single proof of your statement."

"Have I?" queried the chemist's assistant; "there was no proof in the pinch of white dust I gave the beast. Who could prove that I got my sample out of the original bottle, that I am not a malicious liar, that I have not invented the whole thing? My researches, though suggestive, are fruitless, Inspector—hence I permit you to become a sharer in them."

"But why," began Michael Brasher, "investigate at all—what did you suspect?"

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Archibald Geddes clapped him on the shoulder. "Think, my dear Brasher!" he cried; "think—it is a police-officer's first duty. But what can I do for you—have you called on business or pleasure?"

"Well," owned the Inspector, "I did wish to have a few words with Mr. Forester."

Geddes indulged in a grimace. "Good," he responded, "and I want to go out, so I'll retire and send Mr. F. through to you."

"Thanks," said Michael Brasher; "but see here, Mr. Geddes, are you joking about that medicine of Foley's?"

The Scotchman laughed as he tossed the eviscerated mouse into the waste-bucket. "Never was more serious in my life," he declared; "I have told you all there is to tell. Think, my dear Brasher, think."

And, chuckling, he disappeared into the back-parlour. He routed Caleb Forester from his doze over a belated tea, and sent him to interview Michael Brasher. After which, he himself set out by the side door through the windy fall of the day. The twilight grew as he strode on—evening was not far off.

Near the wicket in the brick circuit of Wyresdale Park he paused to survey his surroundings. The inquest upon Foley had drawn attention to the overhanging bough by which Inspector Brasher had observed the sailor scale the wall; it had been cut away and nothing but the iron transverses of the wicket offered the slightest purchase to a would-be climber. Yet to enter the prohibited demesne beyond the stout barrier was evidently the object of Archibald Geddes.

Strong in arms and chest, he mounted as Foley had done when he had tracked Professor Kraft from the High Street and the chemist's shop. Drawing himself to the top bar of the gate, Geddes thrust himself outward and upward by a lever-like action of his knee, gained the parapet of the wall, and alighted inside.

From his pocket he drew a short instrument, which glittered, save where it ended in a rubber bulb. It was an ammonia-gun, with a nickel barrel. Geddes was protected by a simple and noiseless weapon from the canine guardians of the place.

As the sailor had done, he stole across the turf between the trees to the base of the rounded hill, on whose slopes there stood the structure now accepted by Wyresdale as the luxurious observatory of the Golden Dwarf.

Soon Archibald Geddes became aware, as he scouted to and fro about the structure, of a monotonous throbbing sound, like the persistent coughing of some huge animal. He listened to it as he made a cautious tour of the observatory.

A deep bark broke the stillness of the autumn dusk, and a great dog leapt out of the increasing gloom. The chemist's assistant levelled his gun and a spurt of ammonia blinded the brute in its spring. It grovelled, howling piteously; another of Otto Hare's ferocious mongrels rushed to its cry. A third and fourth came, barking as if possessed.

Archibald Geddes was forced back against the low door. He kept the brutes at bay with his ammonia-projector, but the charges were giving out.

Unexpectedly, the portal behind swung wide, he staggered in, to darkness and the determined grasp of some invisible rescuers. There was a hollow clang and the bellowing of the dogs waxed fainter; the door had shut. The Scotchman was a prisoner—the captive of unknown gaolers.

(To be continued.)

* * *

Stage Manager Muggs (startled by "star's" unceremonious exit): "Hogan! What on earth's struck yer?" Actor Hogan (as Hamlet): "E-g-g-s!"

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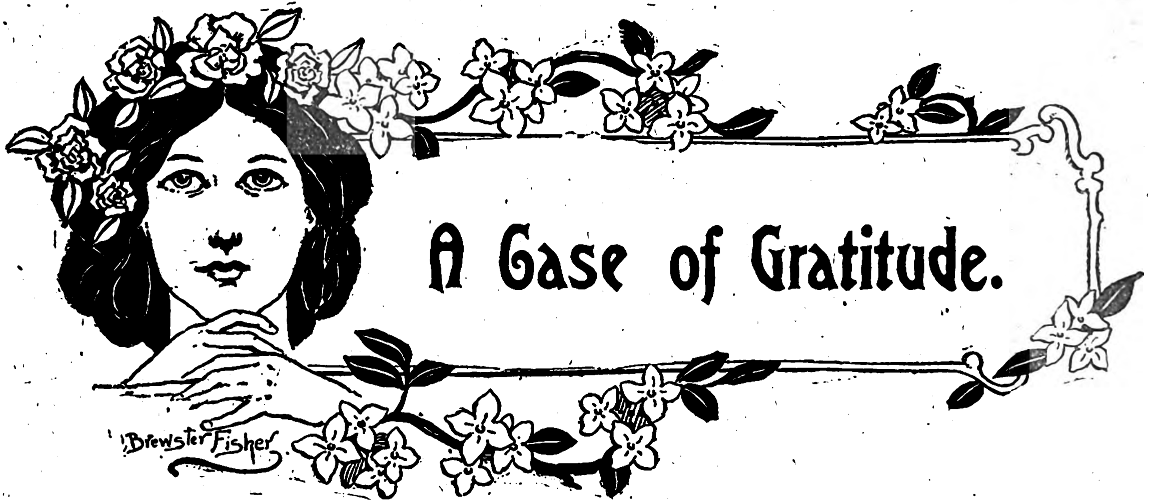

A Gase of Gratitude.

Jerrold Manning had reached the period in life when mankind in general granted him the privileges commonly accorded old age—a sufficient number of years having chased over his head to render it well nigh bald, while his teeth, the monuments of youth, had fallen out one by one, to be replaced by age's artist, the dentist! Yet withal he would have gasped with horror at the idea of his having entered his dotage, but when an old man is ever astride a new hobby, one name for childishness serves as well as another. He had within the past twelve months exhausted several such whimsical beasts—mounted and ridden them until he or the hobby had declared "Enough!"

First, he had money to humour his fancies; secondly, he was temperate and healthy, and lastly, not unattractive in face and figure, and was always elegantly dressed. He had now arrived at the mature, if not ripe, age of sixty, and had withstood the wiles, smiles and graces of scores of charming women with whom he had come in contact within the past forty years, and it had just dawned upon him that since there were no natural heirs to his estate he might derive considerable satisfaction from a free expenditure of a reasonable amount in philanthropy. The evening he had reached this conclusion he had dropped into a first-class theatre and was attracted by the singing of a mere slip of a girl. Her voice was untutored, but pathetically sweet and plaintive, yet without a suggestion of weariness. She sang from the heart, and each note seemed to touch a responsive chord in his nature as no song had ever done before, and long after the last note had ceased to vibrate, and the singer forgotten by the audience, Jerrold Manning sat dreaming.

Ah, here was the young nightingale with the clipped wings! Here was a voice that needed but slight cultivation to thrill the hypercritical world of music as it had thrilled him! Perhaps she was poor—folly, he knew she was poor—little brothers and sisters and a widowed mother clinging to her for support—these were the tones in her life that inspired the plaintive note in her voice! Was she pretty? He did not know, scarcely cared, but he resolved to give her a helping hand, an honest fatherly hand, toward higher ideals, greater perfection and truer art.

A resolution on his part was easily shaped into action, and but a few days elapsed until he had ascertained the private name of the young singer, located her abode, and arranged an interview through a mutual acquaintance. Accordingly one afternoon he presented himself at the home of Miss Nellie Bridges, as the young lady was known. "You need not wait, Stuart," he had told his driver. "I'll take a car back," and the worthy old coachman had chuckled and immediately fallen into a reflective mood as to what "de guv'nor" was up to now! He had been in Mr. Manning's service for years, had seen him take home ragged urchins out of the street who were supposed to be "full of promise" and "out of their element," etc., and had known his master to spend days following up a case of cruelty to children or animals, until he was always prepared for anything, or, to use his own language, "was 'spectin' the most un'spected things."

Mr. Manning was somewhat fastidious, and the mixed scent of onions, cabbage, garlic and coffee that greeted his nostrils as he entered the tenement was hardly calculated to stimulate his theory of establishing higher ideals among the people he might find there! Mrs. Bridges was engaged in the praiseworthy, if not intellectual, occupation of washing, and after wiping the soapsuds from her big fat hands, came forward cordially, meanwhile using her apron to dispel the beads of perspiration that bedewed her brow.

"And so ye wishes to see Nellie, does ye? Well, sir, she'll be in presently," setting forward a chair, and again bringing the handy apron into utility as a dust-cloth. "If yez can wait a bit, sorr, as she has just gone to the sthore on an errant, and sure seems to me she's gone plenty long!"

"I heard your daughter sing, Mrs. Bridges, and I feel deeply——"

"Sure, now, Nellie has a pretty voice, sir—ivery one does say the same, but she isn't me own daughter, you understand. Sure, Oi found her on the sthreet when

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she was but a baby, and nivir, sir, to this day, have Oi learned where she did come from."

"Then she's alone in the world, and is——"

"No, sir, don't you be a-thinkin' of that—my Pat and Oi we loves Nellie, and though she sings loike an angel, she loves us, too—at least, we think she do," she added reflectively, "though yez can see, sir, she's a lady, and we are not of the gintry, to be sure."

To feel that his prospective *protegee* was not of this blood and bone, honest though it might be, proved no small relief to him, and he found his interest strengthening, and his heart unfolding with kindliness and goodwill.

Presently a quick step was heard from adown the bare hallway, and a sweet young voice softly singing the second verse of DeKoven's masterpiece:

> "O promise me that you will take my hand—
> The most unworthy in this lonely land—
> And let me sit beside you——"

She had reached the door, and, ceasing her song, she stopped, slightly confused, but with a dignity that was inborn, for certainly it was not the result of cultivation; then stood awaiting some form of introduction.

"Sure, Nellie, yez been a long time comin', and this gentleman here has been as patient as a lamb, and——"

"My name is Manning, and you are Miss Bridges, I believe," and the old gentleman gallantly rose and ended the embarrassing situation. Nellie acquiesced gracefully, seating herself and waiting expectantly. He was struck with the incongruity of her surroundings—here was the proverbial pearl cast before swine, kindly though they were—nevertheless swine, and his heart gave a throb of pity that nearly suffocated him, and it was some moments before he could lay before her his scheme for her deliverance, as he now regarded her rescue from sordid surroundings.

"Miss Bridges, as you see, I am an old man. Perhaps I'm fanatical, perhaps I'm foolish, but I am honest, and having heard you sing I became deeply interested in you, not only in you, but particularly am I concerned about your future—your voice, which I consider possesses one rare quality—that of fine feeling—and when blended with exquisite pathos renders it unusual in the extreme."

"You are very kind, sir, but I fear you overrate——"

"Not at all, my dear young lady," he used the term not flippantly, but naturally and seriously. "I have heard some music in my day, and, as I said before, I'm plain spoken, and will admit 'tis more your voice than your personality in which I am concerned, although the latter I find charming," he added simply. Then, as she ventured no response:

"I have means, and feel that in the interest of musical art you could be of much service should you accept at my hands the cultivation of your voice."

The offer was an unusual one, and so delicately had he clothed his charity in the habiliments of a request, a favour—a kindness on her part—that Nellie herself was puzzled for a definite conclusion regarding his object. As the prospect of possible culture of her voice dawned upon her—this, the dream of her life—her head had seemingly danced a jig of expectancy to the tune played by her throbbing heart!

Tender years and her ignorance of conventionalities in general perhaps saved her from the mortification which fear of a baser object would have inspired to the mind of one better versed in worldliness, yet to Nellie but one fear presented itself—that of her inability to meet his requirements or attain the height of perfection he might assign to her. She was silent some moments, and Jerrold Manning studied her face thoughtfully. "A glorious opportunity for evolution, science, and art!" was his *resume* of her condition.

"I am grateful, sir, but I fear I would be a disappointment to you. I know so little of music I hardly see how I ever had the courage to sing for money; but some way people liked my voice, and so I have kept on because —well, we needed the money, Pat, Mammy, and I."

It was quite an hour before the old gentleman left the garlic-scented tenement; but when he did, a tear glistened in his usually merry eye, and his big heart was tenderly nursing the new offspring of human and philanthropic love!

* * * * *

Three years had passed—passed swiftly, happily, gloriously, for Nellie, in one of the fashionable finishing schools for young ladies—fashionable, hence well patronised and expensive, where she received special training in music, with a smattering of general information. She had been a bright, winsome, ambitious pupil, and her teachers, who occasionally had such cases with which to deal, asked no questions regarding her previous education, but endeavoured only to fit her as best they could, in so short a time, for a successful musical career. Nellie was keenly alive to this rare opportunity, and applied herself assiduously to every task, and at the end of three years had accomplished more than one of indifferent nature could have mastered in double that period.

Mr. Manning had called frequently, and on each occasion noted with a thrill of something akin to ecstacy the improvement in the voice of his *protegee*. Ah! here was a tone once lacking in power, now beautifully modulated, superbly full and mellow, yet retaining all its original sweetness, and again the dashing staccato movement, piquant and gay, with occasional little trills like the gurgle of a mountain stream, and so delicately executed that he marvelled at her simplicity and lack of self-consciousness, for here indeed was true genius.

She had ever greeted this more than friend without affectation, yet never disguising her almost tender regard for him. Once in trying, as she ever did, to thank him for his repeated kindness, she exclaimed:

"Ah, my dear friend, how can I ever repay you for all you have done? No father was ever kinder." And raising his hand to her lips, she imprinted a kiss, while tears of gratitude filled her eyes.

"Do not speak of repaying me, Nellie. All I ask is that your name be spotless, and your songs heard by the whole world, and that in listening it may know that your voice is no less true than your life. Then I'll be repaid!"

But the days of study were over now, and Jerrold Manning was preparing for her professional *debut*, sparing neither pains nor money. Dreading lest her association with poor old Mrs. Bridges and Pat might contaminate her, or at least lessen her opportunities for a successful opening into the musical world, he had found temporary lodging for her with a widowed friend, who supplied in refinement what she lacked in wealth.

Riches, discreetly exhibited and distributed, are the magic words that open the treasure caskets of the all-desirable patronage of good society and professional deference. Nellie's *debut* was a success. Jerrold Manning's *protegee* (others said ward), from no one knew where, was to come out professionally. She was beautiful

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and a romantic, not-to-be-unearthed side of her life was referred to quite cunningly by the press, until all the city—at least the most desirable element—were agog over the affair. The house was packed to suffocation, the boxes were full of faultlessly attired men and beautiful women—as much of the latter being apparent as the semi-operatic occasion would warrant! Artificial perfumes, intermingled with those of rare orchids, and roses were wafted across the house, to be fanned again by the sweep of glittering fans held by jewelled hands.

There was a polite hush, and Nellie, arrayed in virgin white, came forth confidently and reassuringly. Jerrold Manning, watching her from his box, caught his breath as he looked at her—surely, just to see her like that was worth all the paltry sum he had spent in her behalf! He caught his breath again—she had begun to sing. 'Twas the mad song from *Lucrezia Borgia*, and as she touched each note with precision and grace, on through the difficult passages where dramatic force imbued each word, his pride was boundless. She ceased, and a perfect shower of flowers lay at her feet, and gracefully raising a large bouquet of roses from the floor, she sang a dainty little *aria* as an *encore*, that again showed the beauty of her voice, though in a lighter vein.

The programme was done, but the audience, now her friends, so responsive is humanity when sent to meet the nature of a trusting, winsome, and talented woman—yet clamoured for one more number, and she, in the midst of her triumph, remembered an incident of long ago, passed a word to her leader, and began singing her old-time favourite, "Oh, Promise Me." Jerrold Manning listened as he had never listened before to earthly song, and as she reached the words, "Oh, promise me that you will take my hand," there was a beating as of unseen hands on his breast, he clutched the railing for a moment, rose, donned hat and top coat, and left the theatre.

Cupid's ways are mysterious; but at sixty he had met his fate—he was in love!

All night in smoking jacket and slippers he had paced his chamber, again and again, but this last and crowning emotion of his soul, which naught before had stirred, refused to be subdued. He thought of honour—was this honour to ask a young woman, overwhelmed with gratitude, as he knew she was, to give her young heart into an old man's keeping! Bah! He was dreaming! Then hope whispered of the advantages to her of foreign travel—ah yes!—she couldn't go alone—she needed his protection! So he had at last yielded to the sweet temptation, and in the morning, at scarcely a conventional hour, presented himself before her. He seemed to see her anew—but how could he hope? He plunged boldly into the subject—unbosomed his heart, pictured the years of study abroad, wealth—and all he asked in return was her esteem, comradeship, friendship! She listened; duty, gratitude and respect arranged themselves on one side, and on the other, a new found love, the love of one she had for years previous deemed too exalted in the social world for her to dare confess, even to herself, the love she bore him; and now, through her old friend's benevolence, when she had reached a higher plane in life, she had been sought and wooed by her idol. Oh! unspeakable joy!—but must she cast aside this bliss, as yet scarcely realised—all for duty's sake? Yet did she not owe Jerrold Manning everything—more than she could ever repay? Her formal acceptance of Horace Maddox had not yet been given—cruel fate that it had not! She struggled as with a mighty foe—fought the battle of stern duty *versus* love, hope, bliss—to her womanly nature it was life itself—still her answer to Jerrold Manning was bravely spoken.

"You are the best friend I ever had, and the esteem respect, and honour you ask is yours, and more; and if my hand in marriage will repay the debt I owe, 'tis yours!"

The old man gazed long and lovingly, even solemnly, into the pretty downcast face.

"I do not want your gratitude, Nellie only the opportunity to make you happy;" and with the old-time courtesy and deference, but with his heart aflame, he stooped and kissed her trembling hands.

* * * * *

'Tis said that joy seldom kills, but it may produce perfect oblivion; and this was true in the case of Jerrold Manning, as he briskly walked back to his apartments that eventful morning.

Someone thrust a friendly hand through his arm, and then he heard a cheery voice:

"How are you, Manning—seem awfully absorbed!"

"Why, hello, Maddox! Yes, was rather busy with my own thoughts. Have——"

"Dreaming over Miss Nellie's success last night, eh? Well, that's pardonable, I'm sure. Simply magnificent, wasn't she? Not a bobble in her work—perfect, in fact, But now that I have a chance, I'll just speak to you on a very important matter, which in honour I think you should know. You see—that is, Mr. Manning, I want to marry Nellie, and, as her father by adoption, I want your consent. I love her—have for years—and know she reciprocates. Truth is, I asked her last night, but, womanlike, she is weighing her decision."

"I—oh—call a hack, Maddox. Vertigo, you know," as he was assisted into the carriage. "See you again about that little matter!"

A few hours later a note was handed Nellie, addressed in his familiar chirography, which read:

> "My Dear Little Girl,—'Twas but an old man's folly—an old man's dream—from which I have awakened, and I cannot accept such a sacrifice. The greatest happiness you can bestow on me is your hand in marriage with Horace Maddox
>
> "Forget my idle, foolish words, and let me still and always be simply your father.
>
> "Jerrold Manning."

* * *

"Do you love me?" she asked fondly. "Dearly," replied he. "Would you die for me?" "No, my precious one. Mine is an undying love." She had to make the best of this.

Aunt Dorothy: "How many commandments are there, Johnny?" Johnny (glibly): "Ten." Aunt Dorothy: "And now suppose you were to break one of them?" Johnny (tentatively): "Then there'd be nine."

Mrs. Hingso awoke suddenly. "John!" "Whadoyouwant?" sleepily. "There's burglars in the house." "Let 'em burgle." "You're a coward. They'll steal all the silver." "Um-um." "They'll take my jewels." "All right." Silence for a moment. "John." "Can't you let me sleep?" "They aren't in the dining-room," in an awful voice; "they are in the cellar, stealing the wine——" "What!" leaping out of bed. "The scoundrels! Where's my revolver?"

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A BILL OF ACCEPTANCE.

Arthur Seymour sat down heavily in a chair and groaned. He had risen from his bed and begun to dress himself with the feeling that something was wrong; he had only half dressed when his efforts to discover the cause of this feeling were successful, and the memory of the events of the preceding night came back with a rush.

What demon had tempted him to play at cards with that fellow, Captain Vicars? He knew that the man had a reputation for always winning! But he had been fool enough to try his luck—goaded, probably, by the thought that he might in that way do something to retrieve his losses on the race yesterday afternoon—and he had lost £2,500.

Truly, his plight was a sorry one. It was useless to say hard things about his luck; he owed just £4,000 now to the bookmaker and Captain Vicars, and it must be paid by the morrow. How was it to be done?

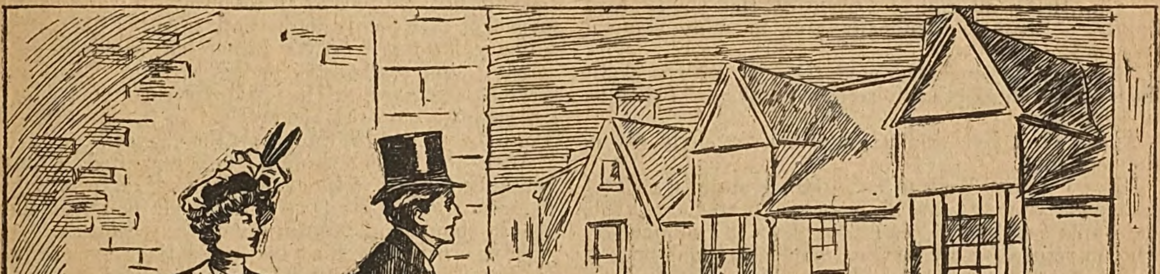
He could not apply to his sole relative and guardian, Sir Henry Seymour; the old gentleman was down upon extravagance, and would not advance a penny beyond the allowance which he had apportioned to his ward. Moreover, the sum was such a big one, that did the mere fact come to the old man's knowledge, Arthur would lose all chance of inheriting the fortune that lay snugly in the bank in the name of the old knight.

Well, sitting in the chair would not mend matters; he must be up and doing, or good-bye to future prosperity. He completed his toilet, and, after a scanty breakfast, went out to his club.

It was nearly twelve o'clock, he remembered, so that he was almost certain to find Jack Granger there. Jack was a man of expedients, and might be able to suggest some way out of the mess.

"He'll be very clever if he does," murmured Arthur despondently, "for the hole I've got myself into is a pretty big one; but I must try him."

He had been walking along without noticing where he was going. A cry for help near at hand aroused him, and he looked about him wonderingly. Where on earth had he strayed? He had turned a wrong corner,



He was soon lying groaning in the gutter.

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seemingly, for he could not recognise the locality. He was in some narrow bye-street. But had he not heard a cry for help? Of course, and it had seemed to come from the corner.

He ran to the corner—only a few yards—and looked down the next street; there was a drunken rough trying to embrace the slight figure of a girl.

Not a bad-looking girl, either, thought Arthur, as he rushed to the rescue. Her face was distinctly pretty, although rather distorted by indignation and fear.

The rough was a burly fellow, but in his condition he was no match for the trained young athlete, and he was soon lying groaning in the gutter. Then Arthur turned to the still panting girl and asked her if she were hurt.

"No, thank you," she jerked out, her face becoming still more highly coloured with shame. "I came this way to get my errand done more quickly, and he set upon me and tried to——"

"Well, he won't be able to steal a kiss from anyone else this morning," remarked Arthur, surveying the form of the brute.

"He didn't kiss me. I prevented him," cried the girl indignantly. "But," she added more gently, "I owe you many thanks for your timely assistance. I am afraid I cannot show my gratitude in any more useful manner."

"Oh, that's all right!" returned the young man lightly. "Shall I accompany you to more civilised regions?"

"No, thank you," answered the girl with a slight flush on the cheeks that were now cooling. "I shall be all right now."

And with a bow and a grateful look, shyly given, she was gone.

"Now," mused Arthur, as he strode down the street in an endeavour to locate his position, "if this were a tale she would turn out to be the daughter of a millionaire, who, in return for my services, would lend me—or give me—£5,000 to set me on my legs again. But she isn't, so I must find Granger."

He did find Granger, and that gentleman looked blank when he heard of his friend's predicament.

"I'd lend it to you myself like a shot, my boy, if I could; but it's too large an order. Besides, I'm hard up myself, for I've just had to meet a loan and pay over £500 to old Smiley. I wonder where he got that name? It fits him, for he always has a grin on his face, which is more than can be said for his clients."

An idea flashed across Arthur's brain. He was ready to grasp at any straw.

"A bill!" he cried eagerly. "Couldn't I get old Smiley to advance the money—for a time?"

"Not on your own hand only," observed Granger drily. "Smiley isn't so simple as that. He knows very well that Sir Henry is not bound to leave his money to you—that you may lose it if you kick over the traces. It's his business to know that sort of thing, you see. Besides, you couldn't borrow the money indefinitely, and you don't know for certain when the inevitable will happen."

"I didn't mean that, exactly," returned Arthur shamefacedly. "My idea was to get a loan for a time. I might be able to tide over this mess in a few months."

"You'll have to try someone else, then, for you won't be able to do business with that old gentleman unless you can get your bill backed by a substantial person."

A long pause ensued. It was broken by a question from Granger.

"Can't you think of anyone who would oblige you?" he asked. "It is rather a heavy responsibility, but something might turn up in six months, you know. But it would cost you an awful lot for interest."

"I don't care what it would cost for interest or anything else, so long as I can tide over this trouble. In six months I might be able to pay it off, and the old gentleman would never hear of it. At the worst, I believe he would pay the money to save the family name, but my allowance and prospects would go, and he would take care to let it be known that he was not to be held responsible for my doings."

"Then you had better try to find someone willing to chance it. It will give you a respite for half a year, and that's a consideration. I would go to old Smiley and arrange the best terms for you. He knows me."

Another pause; then Seymour spoke slowly.

"I once did a good turn for Guy Stanton. I hear that his father has made a pile of money over stocks and company promotion, and that Guy is pretty flush. I wonder if he would risk it and back a bill for me?"

"It's worth trying, anyhow," returned Granger. "You can't afford to let any opportunity slip. I'll tell you how to get the right side of him—flatter him about his cricket playing. The beggar isn't half bad with the bat, but he is no good at all with the ball; and he has a suspicion that people don't think much of his performances at bowling. So you flatter him generally on his playing, and particularly on his batting. That and a discreet reference to the good turn you did him at college ought to work the oracle. In the meantime I'll work the thing with Smiley on the chance."

With this understanding they separated, Granger betaking himself to the money lenders' office, and Seymour starting off for Lord's, where he thought it likely that he should find Stanton among the spectators.

After a little searching his expectations were realised. He found his former friend much disgusted at the poor show made by one of the elevens, and Arthur, though he felt hot at the part he was playing, ludicrously led the conversation into the right groove. They left the ground, and went to a refreshment room, where, after having talked Stanton into a suitable frame of mind, Arthur broached the subject of the loan.

Stanton was not a business man—his father was disappointed at his lack of commercial acumen—but he looked grave at the suggestion that he should become responsible for such a sum of money.

"But, I say," he objected, "suppose you couldn't meet it at maturity? How then? That would be rough on me, and the governor would rave—and he might refuse to pay. He's pretty 'cute."

"Oh, I don't think you need worry about that," replied Arthur, in agony at the idea that Stanton would decline. "It's certain to be all right." In his own mind he was not at all certain, and he hated himself for trying to deceive the young cricketer, but he was desperate. A respite for six months must be obtained at any cost.

After a little further demur, Stanton agreed, and it was arranged that they should meet at noon on the following day at the office of Mr. Smiley to complete the transaction. Seymour went off to find his friend Granger in order to settle preliminaries.

The next morning Seymour and Granger went to the moneylender's office just before twelve o'clock. The

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outer door was opened by a young woman, Mr. Smiley's general clerk and secretary, who ushered them into a small waiting-room, with the intimation that they would have a minute or so, as Mr. Smiley was engaged, and they were a little before their time. Mr. Stanton had not arrived, she said in answer to Granger's inquiry.

"That's one of Smiley's little dodges, having a girl in the office; she is cheaper than a man would be, and he thinks that she is more attractive. Did you notice her?"

"No," was Arthur's reply. He was too preoccupied to notice anything. Perhaps Stanton might not turn up, after all.

"You ought to have gone for him and brought him here," was Granger's comment when Seymour gave expression to his fears. "Your game is up if he doesn't come. Perhaps he remembered that the interest was not included in the 4,000. That makes 1,600 more. Forty per cent.; it's stiff, but Smiley wouldn't do any better, and you wouldn't get it anywhere else."

"If he doesn't turn up I must say good-bye to Sir Henry's money and my present allowance. As it is, I may lose it, for, honestly, I don't see where the money is to come from in six months. If that bill matures and I don't meet it——"

"Hush!" warned the other. "This door is open, and the girl may hear. I don't think she has caught any of our talk, and I think she's right. But I must go and tell her that I don't want Stanton to see me."

He went out and had a moment's talk with the clerk, whom he had seen before. Then he returned to the waiting-room, while she answered her employer's bell and showed the other client out.

A minute later Seymour was ushered into the money-lender's private room by the lady clerk, Granger remaining in the waiting-room. Had Seymour been less preoccupied, he would have perceived that the girl kept her face averted as much as possible.

Shortly afterwards the outer bell rang, and Miss Allen ushered Stanton into the private room.

Mr. Smiley was all smiles. He felt that, though there was some risk, the chances of a good stroke of business were preponderant. Having once got hold of young Stanton, although in an indirect manner, he might be able to get him into the clutches into which so many young men had been inveigled. Smiley was not the man to stop short of anything that would bring money into his coffers—that is, except crime of too flagrant a nature. He was very careful to keep out of reach of the long arm of the law, but he went dangerously near it at times.

At Granger's suggestion the bill had been drawn already. Smiley fussed about, handing each of the two men a pen and pointing out where they had to sign. He kept his hand partly over the bill, so that they could not see the amount properly, and each signed it without knowing that it was for £5,800. Smiley had put a little on the amount to cover possible expenses. Stanton had the figure of £4,000 in his mind, and did not dream that he was backing the bill for more than that sum.

Arthur stifled a sigh of relief as he took the bank-notes. The moneylender tried to begin a conversation with Stanton, whom he regarded as a probable pigeon to be plucked; but that young man was not in a humour for a conversation. He was angry with himself for having agreed to do this for Arthur; and—although not a keen observer—he took a dislike to the smiling individual who had placed that bill so carefully in his safe. He did not even wait for Seymour, but, bidding both him and the money-lender a hasty good-day, he went out abruptly.

Time went on. At first Arthur thought very little of the loan. Six months is a long time to look forward to, and youth is always hopeful. The immediate danger had been averted, and that was sufficient.

Four months passed, and Seymour began to think that he must be doing something. His Micawber-like policy of waiting for something to turn up was not a success. On the day when he arrived at this conclusion, he heard a disagreeable piece of news. The desire for money had blunted the business acuteness of the elder Stanton, and a slump on the market had ruined him, or practically so. This would make Smiley inexorable in the matter of the bill; there was no earthly chance of grace or renewal on payment of the interest.

But the more Seymour thought over the affair, the more hopeless it appeared. Day after day he racked his brain for some way out, but nothing feasible came to his mind. He became haggard and ill, and even Granger's gaiety could not dispel the clouds. He tried gambling again on a small scale, but he was careful not to go too far. At the end of six weeks, however, he had not advanced his position in the least. In ten days more the bill would become due.

Granger and he had a long talk, the upshot of which was that they decided to pay a visit to Mr. Smiley and endeavour to effect a compromise. It was "dealing in futures," but it was the only chance.

Mr. Smiley received them very affably, but as soon as they stated their request he politely, but very firmly, declined to accede to it. It might be a good stroke of business to agree to postpone the presentation of the bill until the death of Sir Henry, who was an old man and not in the best state of health, but there was an equal chance of the transaction resulting in a bad debt. Sir Henry might live a long time—he took good care of himself—and he was just a little eccentric; he might leave the bulk of his money to some exploration fund, for he was an antiquarian. If the bill were presented at maturity, there was no doubt that Sir Henry Seymour would pay it, and it did not matter in the least to Smiley what the consequences would be for Arthur. No, Smiley was not to be got at; he was in a bad temper, having made some serious bad debts during the past three months, and having been very much worsted in a lawsuit only the day before.

The moneylender went to his safe, unlocked it with a key which he always kept on a bunch that passed into no other hands, and drew forth a paper from one of a set of miniature pigeon-holes.

"It is due on the 21st of this month, and the amount is £5,800," he said, reading from the bill as though he did not know the facts by heart.

"Six hundred," corrected Seymour and Granger simultaneously.

"Eight hundred," repeated Smiley drily.

"But that's wrong," declared Granger stoutly. "The arrangement was forty per cent. and that——"

"I cannot spare time to argue the point," returned Smiley resolutely. "This is the bill, duly signed, and it is for the amount I have stated."

"You old thief!" cried Granger, rising angrily.

The moneylender had just deposited the bill in the pigeon-hole marked "S" when this remark was made. He slammed the door of the safe in an outburst of rage, and shouted to them to leave his office.

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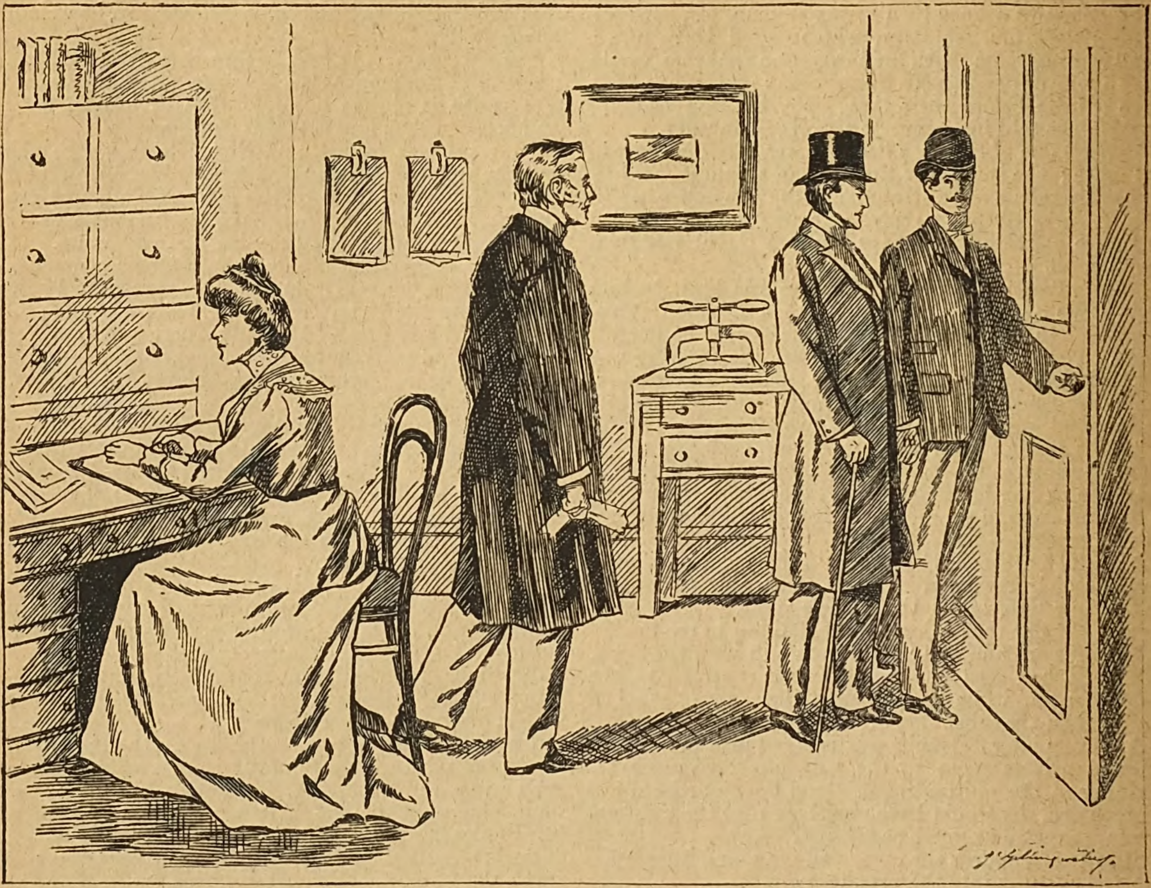

The money-lender had quite lost his temper. He followed them along the passage and half-way down the stairs.

“Oh, we'll go,” said Granger, more coolly. He opened the baize-covered door and walked into the general office, followed by Arthur, who was too dazed to utter a word.

“And if you are not here on the proper date to meet that bill,” screamed Smiley, quite beside himself, and forgetting the presence of Miss Allen and everything else, “I'll send a note to Sir Henry Seymour for payment.”

The moneylender had quite lost his temper. He followed them along the passage and halfway down the stairs (his office was on the first floor) muttering angrily. The slamming of the inner hall door informed him that his insulting visitor had departed, and he made his way slowly back to his own room.

Miss Allen was standing near the baize-covered door, which was shut. She looked frightened.

He pushed past her, entered the room, and flung himself into the chair at the table. Then he felt in his pocket for his keys, in order to open a drawer in the table, and, not finding them, turned mechanically to the safe at his back and took them from the lock where they were hanging. But he could not work; he was too much annoyed. He grasped his hat and coat savagely and strode out of the office, putting on his coat as he went.

That night Arthur Seymour fell ill of brain fever, and became powerless to do anything against the fate that was hanging over him.

Jack Granger was continually at his friend's bedside, listening to his ravings, of which the bill formed the most important part. Granger was inclined to heap maledictions on his own head for suggesting the loan from Smiley. It was not his fault that Arthur had got into the original trouble, and he had acted in Seymour's interests; but this reflection brought him little consolation. If he could only help Arthur!

Sir Henry Seymour was in India—he usually spent the winter in India—or Granger would have gone straight to him and pleaded for his friend, although the probability of being able to melt the old man's heart would have been small. His absence would entail a little waiting on Smiley's part, but the effect on Arthur's prospects would be exactly the same. Granger even thought of going to the moneylender and eating humble pie; but gave up the notion as futile.

He was seated by Arthur's bed two days later, when the patient's manservant entered softly, and said that a young lady was asking to see Mr. Seymour or Mr.

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Granger on very urgent business. Wondering who it could be, he went into an adjoining room and found Miss Allen waiting.

"I hope you will excuse me," she began nervously. "I hear that Mr. Seymour is very ill."

"He is," rejoined Granger gravely. "I am afraid that he cannot attend to the matter of that bill just now. I suppose that's what you have come about. But it isn't due yet."

"I have come about the bill," said Miss Allen hesitatingly; "but I have not come on Mr. Smiley's account."

"Sit down," requested the surprised Granger. "What is it all about?"

"I overheard some of your conversation nearly six months ago," continued the girl, taking the proffered seat, "and I have learnt enough since then to convince me that Mr. Seymour cannot meet his liability, and that he will be ruined if he does not meet it." She stopped abruptly.

Granger nodded. What was the meaning of it?

"Mr. Seymour rendered me timely assistance once, when I was attacked by a ruffian. I don't think he knew me again, but I recognised him."

"Ah, indeed!" That was all he could say.

"I owe him a debt of gratitude, and I have come to pay it. Smiley cannot demand payment unless he produces the bill. Here it is."

And she handed him the paper. He looked at it in utter bewilderment; then the full force of possession flashed upon him, and he emitted a joyful whistle.

"That's the ticket, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "We'll hold it, and the old rascal is done."

"Oh!" cried Miss Allen, in dismay. "Oh! I forgot! You must not keep it—that would be robbery. I only thought of keeping it out of the way till Mr. Seymour was better and able to pay. Oh, give it me back! I shall be a thief!"

"No, you won't. We shall not rob him—only keep it safe till my friend is able to pay. It will serve the old scoundrel right for defrauding Seymour out of £200. Here, you may hold it yourself, to make sure. But how did you get it?"

"When you both came to him and Mr. Smiley got out of temper, and spoke of telling Sir Henry Seymour, I knew what was meant. I was seized with a mad desire to help your friend in return for what he had done for me. I saw the keys hanging in the safe lock. A thought seized me. While he was following you I ran into the room, pulled open the door of the safe and took out the bill. I had just time to stuff it in my dress pocket and get into my own office when he came back. But, oh dear! what have I done? I can't go back to him. I feel like a traitor—and I hate the place. I had to take it, because I was in great straits, and couldn't get another situation." And the girl, quite unstrung, burst into tears.

Granger soothed her, and told her to go home and fear nothing, as he would get her a situation. But she must say nothing about the bill.

Granger sat down and gave himself up to thought. The game was in his hands now, and he must work out the best way to play it. That did not take him long, and he went back to Arthur's room in a happier frame of mind.

On the morning of the day on which the bill was due, Granger went to Smiley's office and said he had come to meet it. His friend was too ill to attend to the matter, and he had come with his own cheque to liquidate the liability. Smiley sneered, and said he should require proof that the cheque would be honoured before he parted with his security, to which Granger answered that they would walk round to the bank together and there make the exchange.

There could be no objection to this course, so Smiley went to the safe—and found the pigeon-hole empty! With an angry exclamation he said that he must have mixed it with some other papers. Granger agreed to wait while he searched for it, but the document was nowhere to be found.

The perspiration stood on the moneylender's brow. Where was it? No one but he ever had the key of the safe. He turned to Granger and said that as he was unable to find the paper just then, he would give him a receipt in full, and forward the bill when found. But to this Granger demurred.

"How do I know whether you have parted with it to someone else, and are not trying to swindle me?" he asked. "No; let me know when the paper is found, and you shall have the cash."

But the bill was not to be found. Smiley made one or two applications for payment, the response to which was that it would be better to wait a little longer. Seymour recovered, his recovery being accelerated by the information that Smiley had agreed to wait. The two friends went abroad, leaving Miss Allen in a good post in the City; and thus the matter rested for greater part of a year.

Then came the sudden death of Sir Henry Seymour. Arthur hated himself whenever he remembered that he had speculated on the old man's death. The whole business was a thing to be ashamed of, and it was a lesson that lasted him a lifetime.

It was then that he agreed to accept Smiley's receipt in full, as the security could not be found. When Granger showed this receipt to Miss Allen, she handed over the bill, which was destroyed.

Seymour rewarded Stanton—now in rather needy circumstances—for his timely assistance. There was another person who had helped him, and, according to the latest rumours, her reward will soon follow. But both of them take care to let the old matter slumber; it is not pleasant to recall it.

£1 a week for six months. See the great offer in this week's BIG BUDGET, 1d.

Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, September 9th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Mr. W. M. Barlow, Spring Bank, Cheadle, Staffs., whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

"HALLO, sir! How is it I catch you kissing my daughter?" "By sneaking in upon us, sir!"

"THIS is a hard world," murmured the young man. "Yes," replied she. "One doesn't realise how hard it is till one falls off a bicycle once or twice a week."

A SHORT time ago a publisher brought out a book entitled, "Advice to Plain Women." Only one copy has yet been disposed of, and that was taken by the office boy to his mother for curl-paper.

HEWITT: "I had a nightmare the last time I was at an hotel." Jewitt: "What of it?" Hewitt: "I foolishly mentioned it to the clerk the next morning and he charged me for the use of one horse."

"LOOK here," he said indignantly to the man with the hungry cow, "don't you see that 'keep off the grass' sign?" "Yes." "Well, yer cow's on the grass." "I know it, mister," was the placid answer, "I know jest as well as you do. You see, that cow can't read."

IT was evident the moment she entered the room that he was angry. "What do you mean by suing me for breach of promise?" he demanded. "I never proposed to you in my life." "Why, of course you didn't," she answered in a conciliatory tone. "And I wouldn't have accepted you if you had. But you know I am going on the stage, and I must make some preparation."

THERE are some people who cannot keep a servant for more than a month, and Mrs. Myldue is one of them. She is in constant communication with the registry office. One morning Mrs. Myldue found herself without assistance in the house, the new maid not having arrived. She answered a knock at the door and found the butcher's boy, with the meat. Imagine her feelings when the youth gave vent to a prolonged whistle, and ejaculated: "What! Another fresh un! You won't stay long here, I'll bet. She's a rum un, she is."

* A MOST amusing slip was made the other day by an attorney at the Stafford Court, who was retained to defend a farmer whom a late servant-man sued for wages alleged to be owing to him by defendant, who refused to pay on account of the said servant leaving his employ without proper notice. The attorney wound up a grandiloquent speech by informing his worship that the plaintiff had left his client in a fix by absenting himself from his duties when there were forty-one cows to milk, thus requiring "all hands to the pump." At this announcement the risibility of the spectators was infectious, the court itself being unable to repress a good laugh. As the attorney resumed his seat the fact dawned upon him that to all intents and purposes he had perpetrated an egregious blunder.

GLADYS: "So Charlie has at last popped the question, eh?" Gwendolin: "'Popped' is hardly the word. I had to draw it out."

"WHY don't you wear all-wool underwear?" "My dear sir, no man can afford to wear all-wool underwear unless he has five sons growing up."

YOUNG MOTHER: "Horrors! Here's an account in the paper of a woman who sold her baby for tenpence." Young Farmer (wearily): "Perhaps it was teething."

"THE most wonderful thing about a baby," says a cynic, "is his ability to refrain from blushing when his mother is in his presence, and describes his good points to his visitors."

NEIGHBOB: "It is very kind of you to take an interest in my daughter." Gotrox: "Such was not my purpose." Neighbob: "What was your purpose?" Gotrox: "To take her entirely."

"DEAR," said the poet's wife, noticing his abstracted look, "you are worried about something." "Yes," he ejaculated. "Tell me, what have you on your mind?" "Nothing. That's what worries me."

SHE: "I hope you won't stop coming to see us, Mr. Tendertop." He: "Oh, thank you, Miss Mabel!" She: "Because ma says your cigarettes are killing the insects on the plants. A call or two more and the job will be done!"

THE sufferer slowly raised his eyelids. "Where am I?" he asked. "You were run into by another cyclist," answered the nurse. Later, as he was about to breathe his last, he asked in a touching manner: "What make was his machine?"

VISITOR: "Is your father at home?" Little Daughter: "What is your name, please?" Visitor: "Just tell him it is his old friend, Bill Johnson." Little Daughter: "Then he isn't in. I heard him tell mamma if any bills came he wasn't at home."

MRS. SMITHERS: "What an elegant gown Mrs. Bilson has! I do believe I never saw anything lovelier. There she goes now; isn't it a perfect dream? I——" Mrs. Smashum: "Hush, that's a ready-made." "Dear me, but my eyes do trouble me so; of course it is; beastly, isn't it?"

"MAMMA," said small Willie, "when sister Mary had the toothache you took her to the dentist and had it filled, didn't you?" "Yes, Willie," she replied. "Well," continued the little diplomat, "I've got the stomach-ache; don't you think you had better take me to the sweet-shop and get it filled?"

"COME right in the kitchen, Tommy," said Mrs. Brown, "and get your supper. Don't make the least noise, and as soon as you are through you must go right upstairs to bed." "What's the matter, ma?" cried little Tommy, putting his finger in his eye. "Hush, dear," she replied. "Your father has been hanging pictures this afternoon."

A CERTAIN wild beast tamer has a tartar of a wife. The other day, as the result of a violent quarrel, she gave him a generous hiding, and the poor fellow, at his wits' end, took refuge in the lions' den. Judge of the amusement of the spectators to behold the exasperated wife standing in front of the cage, brandishing a huge umbrella, and shrieking through the bars at regular intervals, "Come out of that, you big coward!—come out of that!"

CATARRH OF THE EARS A CAUSE OF DEAFNESS.

It is a well recognised fact that catarrhal diseases of the middle ear are the cause of the majority of cases of deafness. This in itself is unfortunate, because so many people, even of the present day, have little more than a dim idea of what constitutes a catarrhal ailment, and so neglect treatment until the pathological changes have attacked the deeply-seated structures, and the disease becomes chronic and complicated.

Briefly stated, catarrh is an inflammation of a mucous membrane, and may therefore affect any cavity of the body lined by such membrane. When this inflammation attacks the middle ear it causes swelling of the membranes, with consequent pressure upon all of the delicate structures which it covers. The tympanum or ear drum becomes thickened; the swelling interferes with the movements of the minute chain of bones which convey the impressions of wave sounds from the tympanum to the auditory nerve, and the sense of hearing becomes less and less acute in proportion as the thickening of the membrane increases with the advance of the pathological catarrhal changes.

The history of the treatment of catarrhal deafness shows a great want of success, which at first glance seems remarkable in face of the advance in the knowledge of the anatomy, physiology, and pathology of the ear. But on further consideration it will be noted that almost the only resources of specialists were the ingenious instruments used in their attempts to treat deafness by forcing vapours and medicaments into the middle ear through the Eustachian tube, which can only be reached by way of the nose and throat. Decided success was not known until about twelve years ago, when Dr. Drouet began a series of experiments intended to demonstrate the possibility of conveying medicaments to the membrane of the middle ear by utilising the absorbent properties of the skin.

So great, indeed, has been the success of the Drouet specialised treatment that the entire August number of the *Journal for the Deaf* is devoted to a description of about two hundred cases cured by this process of medicating the middle ear. Those of our readers who are interested in the subject can obtain a free copy of this publication by addressing the Secretary, 72 Regent's Park Road, London, N.W.

We have permission to publish a few of the most recent cures. The case of Mrs. I. R. Maynard is an instance of catarrh of the middle ear uncomplicated by any suppurative conditions. Mrs. Maynard submitted her ailment for treatment by correspondence with the consulting physician of the Drouet Institute, reporting that deafness had affected both her ears for several years, and that of late it had grown much worse. In fact, the hearing was so bad that she could not hear a watch tick unless it was pressed close against the ear on each side. There were occasional noises in the ears like the ringing of bells. Mrs. Maynard previously had treatment by an aural specialist without benefit.

Appropriate treatment for catarrh of the middle ear and tinnitus, according to the Drouet Method, was prescribed and begun April 4th, 1901, with the result that in a few weeks' time Mrs. Maynard described herself as having recovered her hearing, and later, in response to an inquiry from the Institute as to whether the cure was complete, she wrote:

Melville House, Alfred Place,
Worthing, July 8th, 1901.

I have the greatest pleasure in writing to tell you of my complete recovery from deafness. About the middle of April I placed myself under your treatment, and after twenty days' treatment I was completely cured.

I was very deaf, could not hear the ticking of a watch, except when pressed close to my ear, but can now hear it from any part of the room in which I am sitting. I have not had any return of the deafness, but should I have any relapse (which I think unlikely) I shall certainly write to you again.

Thanking you very much for the great good you have done me.—Believe me, yours sincerely,

I. R. MAYNARD.

The case of Miss M. Gregson is an instance of chronic catarrh of the middle ear, complicated by discharges from the ears. In the latter part of May Miss Gregson obtained from the Drouet Institute a Patient's Report Form, which she filled up with particulars of her symptoms and returned for the consideration of the consulting physician. It was found that she had suffered for years from deafness in both ears, and there were most distressing noises in the head. The discharge from the ears was also very troublesome. As an additional complication, there was great irritation of the throat. The appropriate Drouet Treatment was begun at once, and faithfully carried out at home by Miss Gregson, under the supervision of the consulting physician by correspondence.

On June 15th the change for the better was very marked, and from that time the hearing improved so rapidly that early in July the following communication was received:

3 Radcliffe Street, Preston, July 8th, 1901.

I received your letter, and I am happy to inform you that my hearing is all right now. If I keep as I am now I shall be perfectly satisfied, as the discharges and noises have ceased entirely. Thanking you for your kind attention, and the interest you have taken in my ailment, I am, yours faithfully, M. GREGSON.

About a fortnight later Miss Gregson wrote again:

3 Radcliffe Street, Preston, July 17th.

I am only too pleased you should include my name among the reports of cures of deafness, for I am sure I am perfectly satisfied and happy to say that after so short a time I am entirely cured of my deafness and ear trouble. I want to add that I have not had so clear a throat as I have now for a long time. Before I began the Drouet Treatment the least bit of cold I got affected my throat. Thanking you again for your kind attention, I am, yours faithfully, MARY GREGSON.

The original letter, with all the others of which extracts have been given above, may be seen in the Autograph Room of the Drouet Institute, where hundreds of letters emanating from grateful patients are kept. The Autograph Room is open to the public every day, except Sunday, from ten a.m. to six p.m.

To prevent misunderstanding, it should be stated that the Drouet Institute does not profess to cure all cases submitted. It is unfortunately too true that in some cases the complaint is incurable, generally owing to anatomical changes that have taken place in the structure of the organs of hearing. But we must add the Drouet Institute never prescribes treatment in cases deemed incurable. Those who suffer from any affection of the hearing, or ailment of the throat or nose, need therefore have no hesitation in submitting their cases to the Institute. Whatever the serious nature of the case may be, or of whatever long-standing, and, though previous treatment has been unsuccesful, all hope is not lost, for the Drouet system of treatment is essentially different from all others, and in cases where other systems have failed, it has almost always been successful, thus repeatedly effecting the seeming miracle of radically curing patients who had been on several occasions pronounced hopelessly incurable.

Let us state again that the *Journal for the Deaf* is forwarded free of charge to all who apply for it to the SECRETARY of the DROUET INSTITUTE, 72 Regent's Park Road, N.W. Let us add that free consultations are given by correspondence, by means of a special report form, to those unable to leave home. The Consultation Room is open every day, except Sunday, from two till four. A charge is made for personal consultations given at the Institute. Special personal consultations may also be had at any time by previous arrangement.

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

More and more thrilling grow the "Adventures of an Actress." In this number we find beautiful Hazel Harlow in Newcastle. Next week we shall have a vivid story of her sojourn in Rugby. Residents in these towns could do me a great service if they chose. With the scene of these stories laid in their own neighbourhoods, they have only to mention the fact to their neighbours to ensure their immediate interest. Will Newcastle-ites and Rugby-ans kindly help me in this matter?

⁂

Don't despair, "Leonard." Remember you are young yet—only thirty, and if you haven't done anything to distinguish yourself, there is heaps of time. By way of cheering you, my most erudite assistant has compiled the following:

Sir Walter Scott was thirty-four when he made his first draft of "Waverley," and was forty-four when he re-wrote and published it.

Nearly every one of those tales which conferred immortality upon him was composed after he had reached the age of forty-six.

Carlyle was forty-two when he published the "French Revolution," the first work to which he formally put his name. His "Cromwell" was published when he was fifty.

Swift was fifty-nine when he published "Gulliver's Travels."

Tennyson was fifty when his idylls, "Elaine," "Vivien," and "Guinevere" were published, and was about sixty-two when he completed the series with "Gareth and Lynette."

Macaulay was forty-eight when he issued the first and second volumes of his "History of England," and the third and fourth did not appear until he was fifty-five. Good as are the essays of his early manhood, they pale when compared with the work of his maturer years.

John Stuart Mill was fifty-three when his essay of "Liberty" was published, and fifty-six when he gave us that on "Utilitarianism."

Milton was certainly more than fifty-four when he began to compose his "Paradise Lost"; he was fifty-nine when he sold it to Simmons, the bookseller.

George Eliot composed "Middlemarch" between the ages of forty-six and fifty-one, and, after that, "Daniel Deronda."

Bacon was fifty-nine before he published his great work, "The Novum Organum."

Cowper was over fifty when he published "John Gilpin" and "The Task."

Defoe was fifty-eight when he published "Robinson Crusoe."

Darwin published his "Origin of Species" when fifty, and his "Descent of Man" when sixty-two.

Grote wrote the larger part of the "History of Greece" between the ages of fifty-two and sixty-two, and Hallam occupied nearly the same period of life with his "Introduction to the Literature of Europe."

The two works by which Thomas Hood has survived the grave, "The Bridge of Sighs" and "The Song of the Shirt," were composed when he was forty-six, and from a sick bed, from which he never rose.

Longfellow gave us "Hiawatha" when forty-eight, "Tales of a Wayside Inn" when fifty-eight.

"The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table" was published when Holmes was forty-eight, and "Songs in Many Keys" when he was fifty-five.

⁂

A series of articles, entitled, "The Schools of My Childhood," has just commenced in *M. A. P.*, and will be continued for some weeks. These articles, in addition to good pictures of the Irish Schools of the "Fifties" and the "Sixties," will contain several chapters of the biography of Mr. T. P. O'Connor.

⁂

Advice on Love and other Matters.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

I am afraid, "Strawberry," that you are distressing yourself too much because your face becomes red after washing. I am sure it is nothing to be ashamed of, and a face with plenty of colour certainly looks a great deal nicer than one without any colour at all. I think, however, you might lessen the colour a little by washing in lukewarm water and wiping your face quite dry with a very soft towel. This redness is very often caused by indigestion, so you should be very careful to eat your meals slowly.

Well, "Flora," the young man you have kept company with for many years has been very cool in his behaviour to you for the last eight months, and as he is the only man you have ever loved, you want to know what you can do. What a pity to let a coolness arise that has lasted so long! The best thing for you to do is to ask him frankly if there is anything to account for his coolness, and if so, will he tell you what it is. Very likely you have only imagined it, and he loves you as much as ever he did.

"Cupid" has fallen in love with a girl who is very shy. She has no friends, and does not know that he loves her; and he wants to know how he can begin to woo her. Under the circumstances, "Cupid," I see no reason why you should not write and tell her how matters stand. You can judge by the way she receives your letter what her feelings towards you are.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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Bile—Beans for Biliousness.

AUSTRALIA'S GREATEST DISCOVERY.

AUSTRALIA, the land of gold, has given to the world a great number of marvellous things, but the discovery in that wonderful country made by a chemist and scientist, Mr. C. Charles Forde, perhaps will do more good to the world generally than all the gold Australia ever has, or ever will, produce. This discovery is of a natural vegetable substance that has the peculiar properties of acting in the process of digestion the same as Nature's own animal Bile. Mr. Forde, realising the great value of this discovery and the boon it would be to the millions of digestion sufferers who (according to the regular medical science to date) were martyrs to pepsin, bismuth, starving, and purging, decided to spare no expense to perfect this remedy to make it a cure for all digestion troubles and their attendant ailments. The result of this experimenting was the addition of some eight other ingredients, the whole being called Bile Beans, a title given to express exactly what the preparation is, "A Bean for the Bile." The expense and care in perfecting and compressing this preparation to the size of a small bean was very great, but the result is a small oval bean that the youngest child can take with ease, and a medicine the consumption of which last year reached some thirty million doses in Australia alone, the rich and poor alike being the friends of this marvellous specific. The consumption to date has nearly baffled the best efforts of the Proprietors, their laboratories working night and day to meet the demand.

Bile Beans have been found an undoubted cure for Headache, Biliousness, Costiveness, Piles, Liver Trouble, Bad Breath, Rheumatism, Indigestion, Dizziness, Anæmia, Buzzing in the Head, Fulness after Eating, Lack of Ambition, Debility, Influenza, Female Ailments, Pimples, and a host of other ailments that owe their origin to defective bile flow, assimilation, and digestion. They will also be of great service in Nervous Disorders, Loss of Appetite, Shortness of Breath, Blotches on the Skin, Insomnia, and Troubled Sleep. They act quickly in restoring females to health, and for a general aperient and tonic remedy they are unequalled. These Beans are placed on the market in a form that anyone can take them without medical supervision; and, as the price is so very low, there are few homes that cannot afford to always have a box on the shelf for emergency.

Depôts and Laboratories have been opened in England, and if you are unwell and a sufferer, and have doubts whether it is digestion or not, the manufacturers invite you to write in to their London Office, giving a full description of ailment, and free of charge you will be honestly answered whether Bile Beans will cure in your case or not. Address: The Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 London Wall, London, and mark your letter *Special.* You can also send to London if your dealer does not stock Bile Beans, and a box will be sent post paid and packed free on receipt of price 1/1½, and 2/9 for large box. Please mention this paper when writing.

IMPORTANT WARNING.

Bile Beans are *not* sold *loose*, being put up in sealed boxes only, bearing the name of the inventor, CHARLES FORDE. All others are fraudulent imitations, and you are warned not to accept any but the genuine.

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The proprietors have so much faith in the efficacy of Bile Beans that they will forward a SAMPLE FREE if you send your name and address, and a penny stamp (to cover return postage), along with accompanying coupon. Address: The Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 and 120 London Wall, London, E.C.

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SHORT STORIES.
September 7th.

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30/- Lady's Watch in the world. Fitted with a fine horizontal movement every part being interchangeable Patent winding work, &c., ornamental or plain dial (as preferred) Solid Silver engraved cases (*as illustration*)

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BUT should you prefer to buy one of these 30/- Watches for cash—send 27/- only—the nett cash price.

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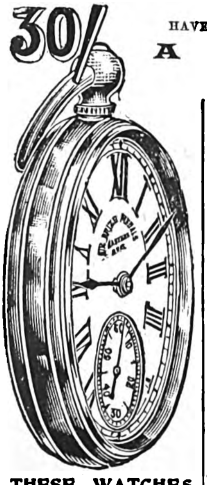
GENTLEMEN



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ONE THAT HAS BEEN AWARDED

SIX PRIZE MEDALS

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WHEN you receive the watch, if you approve of it, send them 2/6 more, and then pay them 5/- each month for 5 months, making 30/- in all.

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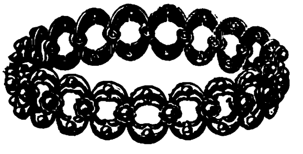

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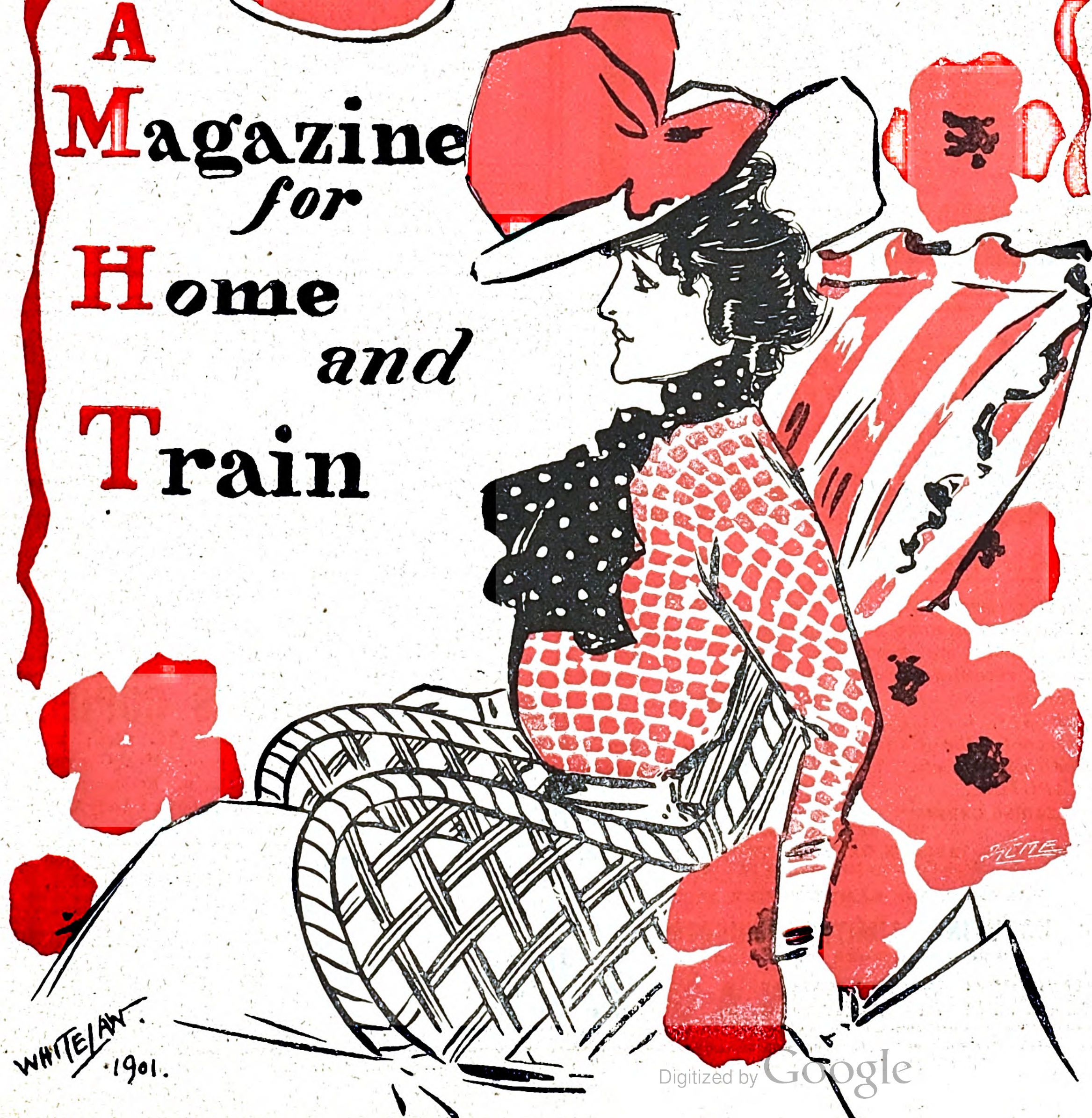
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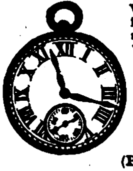

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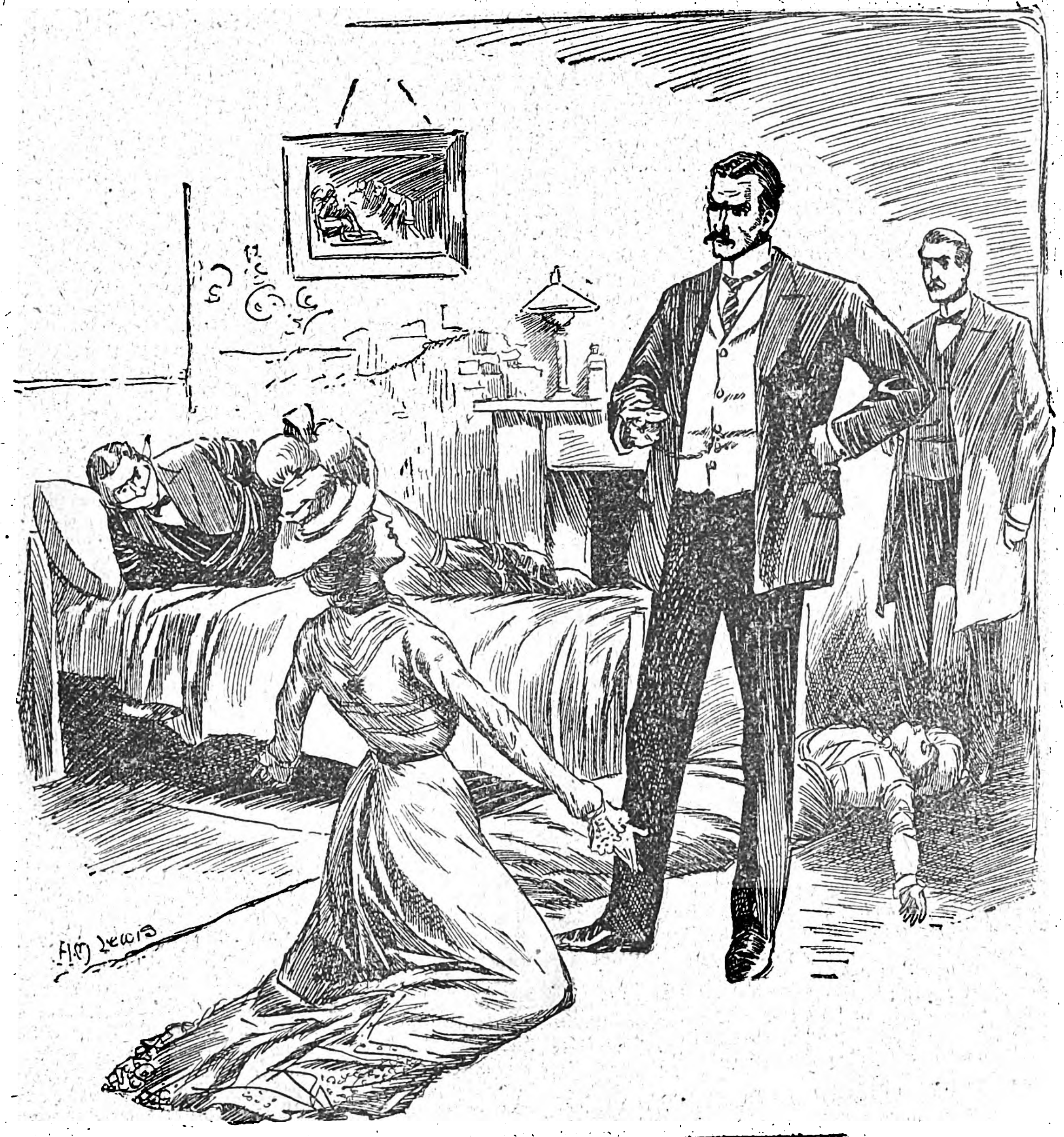
The Adventures of an Actress.



Hazel flung herself down on her knees before her tormenter.

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A THRILLING INSTALMENT.

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

VI.—Within an Ace.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

Fresh from the ter ible experience at Newcastle, the *Good Samaritan* Company arrived duly at Rugby in accordance with the programme that had already been worked out for their tour. It was Monday morning; the actors and actresses were already assembled on the stage of the Theatre Royal in the town. At the wings were standing Raymond Venables, the manager; Hazel Harlow, his leading lady; and Eric Monteith, the new recruit, who thus found himself preparing for his first rehearsal.

"I hope you are word-perfect, Monteith," said the manager. "Without any disparagement, it's a good thing for you that poor Carruthers had such a small part. One doesn't pick up the tricks of the trade all at once, unless you happen to be a genius like Miss Harlow here."

Hazel bowed with a laugh.

"Thank you for the compliment, Mr. Venables," she said. And so they proceeded to rehearse.

To Eric's relief the play proceeded comparatively smoothly. Nevertheless, he was somewhat nervous when the evening came and it was seen that the house was full. This was undoubtedly due to Hazel Harlow's beautiful personality, together with the desire evinced by the citizens of Rugby to see the heroine of the Newcastle Theatre fire.

The young actress received a tremendous ovation on her first appearance, and it was some minutes before she was able to utter her opening sentences.

Venables was jubilant. "It seems rather a heartless thing to say," he muttered to Monteith, who was standing in the wings waiting for his cue, "but that affair at Newcastle seems likely to prove a godsend to us."

Eric made no answer. He could not forget how the girl whom he loved with all his heart and soul, who was at that moment receiving the vociferous plaudits of the audience, had been within an ace of a fearful death, and he knew that of which Venables could have no inkling, how this same girl, who had never wronged a human being in her life, was beset by perils and difficulties that were all the more poignant by reason of their very subtlety.

"If only I could get her to give up the stage," ran Eric's thoughts, "to become my wife, to give me and me alone the privilege of guarding all evil from her head. If only I could awake in her an answering chord to my own love; perhaps in time she will come to care for me. I have one consolation, that she is at least heart-whole; and yet therein lies perhaps the greatest danger to my hopes. She may suddenly fall in love with somebody who is better looking and more attractive than I am, and then good-bye to all hope of happiness for Eric Monteith."

It was not long before Eric discovered that there was nothing more likely to jar all the finer susceptibilities of a man of refinement than life in a travelling company. His brother actors, chief among whom were men who hid their real identity under the names of Clive Pendennis, Ralph Garden, and Hayward Lindsay, were good-hearted Bohemians enough, but it was their very Bohemianism that seemed most offensive to Eric, steeped in the traditions of Eton and Oxford. They were continually pressing him to come and have a drink, always dilating on the charms of this or that maiden, chaffing him with being so "mashed" on Hazel Harlow, and when he showed resentment at such familiarity their surprise was unbounded, and in consequence he became a topic of contemptuous conversation among them.

The ladies of the company, with the exception of Jenny Lovelace, made love to him and tried to blacken Hazel's reputation in his eyes. Needless to say he would hear no word against her, neither did he reciprocate their amatory advances made to him. With Raymond Venables, the manager, he was on a somewhat different footing; he knew that Venables had power to dismiss him, he knew also that the manager, despite his cynical attitude, was madly in love with Hazel, and looked upon himself as a friendly rival. Thus he knew it was all-important for the furtherance of his object in keeping a protecting eye over Hazel to remain on good terms with Venables.

One morning he was sitting in his lodgings smoking somewhat gloomily and musing the while over his present life and the "might-have-been" could Hazel Harlow have been persuaded to abandon her career as an actress and become his wife. Suddenly there came a knock at the door. "Come in," cried Eric. His landlady entered with a card in her hand, which she laid down upon the table with the remark, "There's a young man downstairs what would like to see you; there's his name on the card."

Eric took up the little piece of pasteboard with languid curiosity: "Mr. Geoffrey Phelps," he read.

Hazel Harlow is in Rugby this week.

"Geoffrey Phelps," he repeated. "I don't know the name." Then to the landlady: "Ask him to come up, will you?"

The landlady retired, and going to the head of the stairs bawled in a voice loud enough to be heard all over the house, "You're to come up." It was evident that the woman didn't believe in showing undue civility to such a person as a travelling actor.

The sound of quick, lithe footsteps coming up the stairs showed that the invitation had been accepted.

The next moment a man stood inside the room—a brown-moustached, well set-up young fellow, with shrewd, rather deep-set dark eyes, evidently a gentleman.

Eric rose as his visitor entered. "To what must I owe the honour of this visit?" he said courteously.

The young man hesitated for a few seconds. "You are Mr. Eric Monteith, I believe?" he then said. Monteith nodded.

"And you are at present a member of Raymond Venables' theatrical company now performing in this town?" Again Monteith responded with a nod. "And you are a friend and well-wisher of Miss Hazel Harlow, who is playing the lead?"

In a moment all Eric's faculties leapt up to renewed alertness. The mention of Hazel's name acted like magic. The stranger's keen eyes were fixed upon him intently. "And if I am?" demanded Eric incisively, "what then?"

"It is rather a peculiar business," continued the other, picking his words with great deliberation. "We are both strangers to one another, and I am a stranger to Miss Harlow, except, of course, that I know what all the world knows, that she is a beautiful and accomplished young actress, and that but for you she might have lost her life at Newcastle last week. You must know, then, that I happened last night to stop at a little wayside public-house just outside Rugby. The landlord of the inn was a curious, nervous sort of man, who evidently had something on his mind that he wanted to get rid of. I was the only occupant of the bar at the time, and at last the fellow leant across his counter and said to me: 'Look here, sir, you seem a gentleman, I'm in a bit of a hole, and I want you to help me. An hour or so back an elderly man, a farmer by the look of him, came in here looking ghastly white. He asked for some brandy, which I gave him, and he then asked if I had a room where he could stay the night. I said yes, showed him to a bedroom, and left him. In an hour or so my servant came to me and said that the gentleman upstairs was making a great noise.'

"I went up and found the man lying on his bed fast asleep as it seemed, and talking quickly to himself. I listened to what he was saying, and after a bit I began to realise that he was ill, in a fever or something, and more than that, that I had hit upon a mystery that might have serious consequences to more people than one."

The young man paused. Eric had listened to him with growing interest. He was a good *raconteur*, and his story came so glibly and readily from his lips that it had a ring of verisimilitude that left no room but to believe that he spoke the truth.

"As far as I can remember," went on the young man, "the ravings from the delirious farmer as repeated to me by the inn-keeper were as follows: 'I have got within sight of her at last; I'll teach her to run away from home; I'll teach her to make the name of Harlow sound in everyone's mouth as a brazen actress woman; if she won't listen to me I'll kill her, aye, even though she be my own daughter; and if I can't settle her, well Squire Caldecott can!' This the fellow said, and a lot more beside. I saw him myself; he's a grizzle-haired, truculent looking old man, and he's at present lying low in that solitary inn concocting Heaven knows what plans.

"Well, I said to myself, it's no good my going and frightening Miss Hazel Harlow with this yarn. I'd better find out someone who she trusts and who can be trusted to do what's best for her. Of course I don't know the ins and outs of the story; perhaps you can supply the details."

As can be well imagined the effect of this story on Eric Monteith was electrifying. "It's perfectly true," he said eagerly, "Miss Harlow is the daughter of a reprobate old farmer. From what I know of him I think he would leave no stone unturned to do his daughter an injury. It's very good of you, sir, a stranger"—he went on impulsively—"to take so much trouble on her behalf. The question is, what's to be done now?"

The other made a deprecating gesture. "It's not a question of *trouble*," he answered. "Anyone else would have done the same in my place, and if I might make a suggestion it would be that you came back to the inn with me and interviewed the old fellow yourself. You could then take him unawares before he has time to make himself nasty. Personally, I think he was suffering from nothing more nor less than an overdose of alcohol. That would account for his feverish ravings."

There was truth in every word that the young man uttered. Eric felt this. No suspicion of anything wrong crossed his mind; the frankness with which Mr. Geoffrey Phelps had unburdened his mind of his story disarmed any initiatory suspicion that Monteith might have had.

He seized his hat, and said with alacrity: "Let us go at once; I am quite of your opinion that it would be as well to strike while the iron is hot."

"Then come along," said the other. "We shall walk there in half-an-hour. I think if you show the old reprobate that any attack on Miss Harlow will mean prompt action on the part of the police, he will have to lower his colours, and you can count on me to back you up in any way you like."

CHAPTER II.

The "Jolly Waggoners" is a small hostelry just outside Rugby. It is off the main road, and is usually only a house of call for the farm hands and pedestrians that happen to pass along that way. It is a pretty old-fashioned place, covered with climbing roses and clematis, and it looked particularly pretty on that bright September morning when Eric and his unknown companion came within sight of it.

"I wonder how Harlow came to find his way to such an out-of-the-world place?" queried Monteith. "I should have thought that he would have made his way to the 'Royal George,' or some place in the town itself."

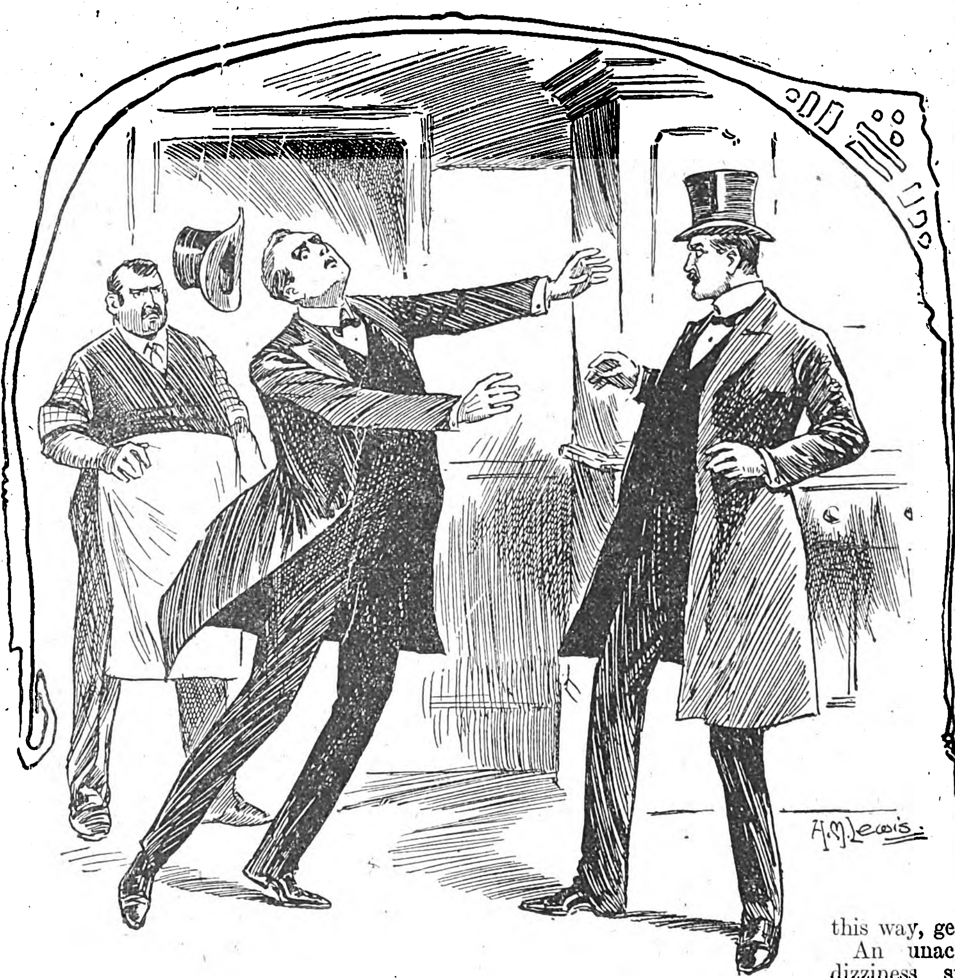
"It strikes me that's another proof of his artfulness," replied the other; "he knew that no one would be likely to look for him in such an out-of-the-way place as this."

"True," said Eric, "and as he has lived in the Midlands all his life, perhaps he knows this part of the world pretty well."

Further conversation between the pair was cut short by their arrival at the door of the inn. Phelps strolled inside the bar with the air of a man conversant with his surroundings. There were one or two labourers drinking home-brewed, but beyond them no one save the landlord, who was leaning bare-armed across the counter. To him Phelps nodded significantly.

"You'll have a glass of ale with me," he said to Monteith; and then, in a lower voice, "we'd better wait till these country louts have cleared out before coming to business."

There was nothing in this proposal which struck Eric as being in any way extraordinary. The landlord drew them two glasses of beer, and set them down on the counter.



"Drugged, by Heavens!" he gurgled despairingly.

Suddenly high words took place between the countrymen, and Eric, wheeling round, saw that there was every prospect of a free fight. As he turned he did not notice that Phelps had taken stealthily from his pocket a tiny phial containing a white powder, the contents of which he deftly emptied into his companion's liquor. The landlord in the meanwhile was so anxious to quell the disturbance that had started before it reached serious dimensions, that he ordered the originators of it to leave the inn. This, with much scuffling and many oaths they did, apparently to continue their quarrel outside.

Eric laughed and turned round. "A storm in a teacup," he said, "I suppose fighting's in the blood with these fellows."

Phelps smiled. "That's it," he said; "and now let's drink our beer and get to business. Is the old chap still upstairs?" he said to the landlord. He nodded. "Yes, and pretty quiet now," he said. Phelps raised his tankard. "I'll give you a toast," he said in a low voice, "let us drain our pewters to Miss Hazel Harlow, and a speedy confounding of all her enemies."

Eric raised his mug in silence, his eyes spoke for him; the next moment he had drunk the beer at a draught. He set the vessel down with a wry face. "I don't think much of your beer, landlord," he said.

"Don't you, sir?" came the answer. "It comes from Burton. It ought to be good."

Phelps tapped Eric lightly on the sleeve. "We'd better get upstairs," he said.

The landlord lifted the flap of the bar counter. "Come this way, gentlemen," he said.

An unaccountable feeling of dizziness suddenly made Eric put out his hand and grip the side of the bar with feverish energy. A parched, dry feeling was in his mouth, the tendons of his knee-joints seemed to become lax and flabby, a cold perspiration broke out upon his forehead.

"I—I—feel awfully queer," he mumbled. Then his eyes went almost despairingly to Phelps's face, and in the countenance of the latter saw a look that transformed his features entirely, a look of devilish malignity that suddenly gave Eric the knowledge, when it was too late, that he had been tricked.

He made a desperate clutch at Phelps's throat. "Drugged, by Heavens!" he gurgled despairingly, and then he fell forward senseless into the traitor's arms.

Tell your friends about Hazel Harlow.

When he came to himself it was to experience the utmost weakness and nausea, as though he had been through some terrible illness. His deadened senses refused for a few moments to give him cognisance of where he was or what had happened. A man's face gazing down into his own as he lay bound and helpless upon a bed, brought back realisation with almost soul-sickening directness. There was no mistaking the lineaments of the countenance before him; they were those of Horace Caldecott, the one man in all the world that Eric had reason to hate.

"Good morning, Mr. Monteith," said Caldecott sneeringly, "you didn't bargain to see me, but I think you will confess that it's my innings now. How do you like stage life? How proud Miss Hazel Harlow must be to think that you have given up the attractions of life in London to join a fifth-rate touring company!"

Eric made no answer. A wild fury was seething in his brain. He knew full well the character of the villain who had entrapped him to the inn with so plausible a story and so clever an *aide* as the man who had called himself Geoffrey Phelps. If looks could have killed, Horace Caldecott's last hour had indeed come. Caldecott was not slow to remark the loathing that flashed forth from his captive's eyes.

"Looks don't kill, my friend," he said, "so it's not a bit of good your glaring at me like that. You've got to face the music with myself as leader of the orchestra, and the sooner you realise that the better it will be. You've baulked me twice of Hazel Harlow"—a horrible expression came over his face—"but, by Heaven, you won't do it a third time."

"If you think," said Eric suddenly, "because you have got me into your power by means of such a coward's trick as the one that has just been perpetrated, that you can get me to be the means of bringing Miss Harlow into your clutches, you're mightily mistaken. You can add murder to all your numerous crimes if you will, but I don't see that you will gain much except a halter round your neck by such a course."

"Strange though it may seem," retorted the other carelessly, "I don't care to have all my eggs in one basket. Life is sweet, Mr. Eric Monteith, and I'll admit that I should have but little compunction in putting you out of the way if I thought you were fool enough to try the game of bravado. Now, I'll give you my first proposition. It is that you write a letter to Miss Hazel Harlow, which I shall dictate, asking her to come here. That is the price I put upon your life."

"You need not waste further words," cried Monteith, "I would sooner die a hundred times than be the means of putting Miss Harlow into your clutches. Is that plain enough for you?"

"That is what I expected," came the cool answer; "then I may play the rest of my trumps. Just come here, Geoffrey, will you?"—this to the man Phelps, who had been sitting quietly observant in a far corner of the room.

The other approached the bedside. "Just show Mr. Monteith what you have got," said Caldecott blandly.

Phelps held up a signet ring and a pocket-book, which Eric recognised at once as his own, and which must have been extracted from his person when he was unconscious. "You recognise those?" said Caldecott. "Now I'll tell you what we are going to do, as you won't write a letter. You have already had an opportunity of judging Mr. Phelps power as an actor, you must be moreover acquainted with the soft heart possessed by Miss Hazel Harlow. Well, by the simple process of putting two and two together, you may now be able to guess my plan of campaign. Mr. Phelps will go to Miss Harlow with your signet ring and your pocket-book to back him up, and will say that you have met with a most grievous accident, as token of which behold your personal effects. Now, according to her own view of the case, Miss Harlow owes you a good deal. Her soft heart will prompt her to at once fly to the aid of the man who has given up so much for her. Now, Mr. Monteith, will you write that letter or will you not?"

"No, a thousand times no," cried Eric, half beside himself with impotent rage. "It shall never be said that I moved a hand of my own accord to help you in the furtherance of your diabolical plans. Do your worst, blackhearted villain that you are!"

Caldecott made a step forward as though he would have struck the defenceless man before him; then his raised hand fell to his side.

"Words don't hurt," he said with a terrible laugh, "and you're not out of the wood yet, not by a long way. You shall have the satisfaction, I promise you, of seeing Miss Harlow here. You shall also have the satisfaction in spite of what you have just said, of knowing that you have been the instrument of giving me what should have been my own long ago. Well, Geoffrey"—turning to his accomplice—"I don't see any reason why we shouldn't go and carry out the rest of the programme."

Eric Monteith's heart seemed to turn to lead within him. He could do nothing—nothing, save look on, a silent and unwilling witness of a base conspiracy. He determined to make one last effort to save Hazel Harlow. Drawing in a long breath he suddenly emitted a piercing scream. In a moment Caldecott had flung himself upon his victim, a gag was thrust in Eric's mouth, and so his last attempt to gain help had been frustrated. Nothing remained now but to watch and wait, to pray that somehow, though in what way Monteith could in no wise speculate, Providence would interpose and prevent the consummation of Caldecott's foul plot.

CHAPTER III.

Hazel Harlow and Jenny Lovelace were sitting in their lodgings, which they had taken together, drinking tea.

"I do hope, Hazel," Jenny was saying, "that we shall get away from Rugby without anything terrible happening. Somehow there seems to be an evil destiny hanging round this company."

"Yes," said Hazel sadly, "and I can't help feeling that I am the Jonah who ought to have been thrown overboard; and yet it's through no fault of my own, that I can see." Tears gathered in her beautiful eyes.

Jenny put her arms round her companion's neck. "Of course it isn't your fault, dear Hazel," she said impulsively. "You can't help being sweet and good and beautiful, you can't help all the men fluttering round you like moths round a candle. I'm sure if I were a man I wouldn't rest a minute until you promised to marry me."

Hazel smiled through her tears. "I'm sure I wish you were a man," she said, "because I expect I'd marry you then; and yet I don't know. If you were a man I should never have had such a dear friend as Jenny Lovelace."

For "dear friends" the two actresses had indeed

Hazel Harlow will travel from town to town.

become; the contrast between them was sufficient to account for their friendship. Jenny impulsive, hare-brained, *petite*; Hazel of a quieter nature, gentle, almost statuesque; and, though she knew it not, Hazel had been the means of redeeming Jenny from becoming what is, alas, too common among members of the dramatic profession, lax as regards the finer feelings that are the safeguard of women whose paths do not lie amidst the glare and glitter of the footlights.

At that moment a visitor was announced. It was, in fact, Mr. Geoffrey Phelps, "desirous of seeing Miss Harlow alone, on very important business." The two girls exchanged glances at this message. "Do you know this Mr. Phelps, Hazel?" whispered Jenny eagerly.

"No," answered the other, "I never heard of him in my life."

"Then don't see him alone; let me stay here and hear what he has to say." And so when Mr. Phelps was ushered up into Hazel's apartment, it was to be confronted by two maidens instead of one.

"Have I the honour of addressing Miss Hazel Harlow?" he began blandly.

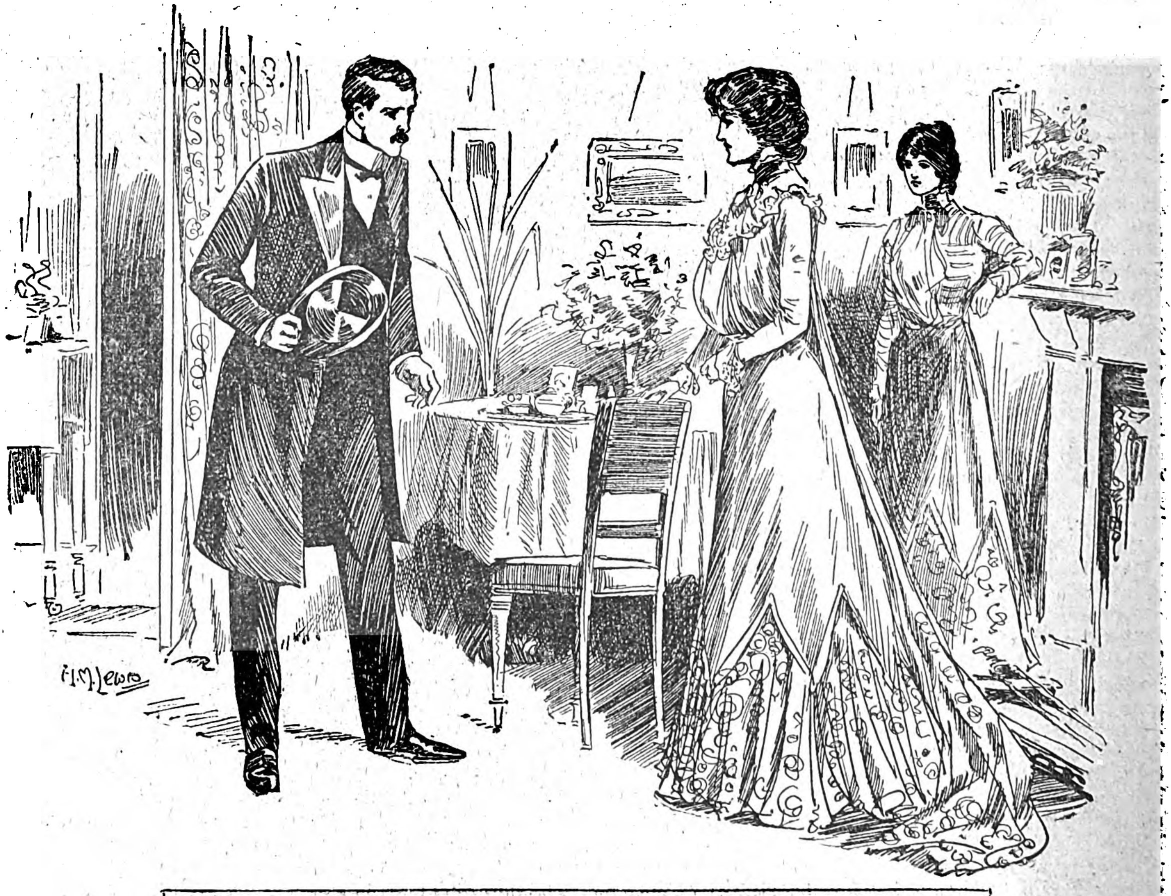
"I am Miss Harlow," answered Hazel coldly "May I ask what you want with me?"

Phelps hesitated. He had not bargained for the presence of a third party; and yet he felt that to withhold the bogus message he was bound to deliver, would create suspicion as to its *bonâ fides*, for if Eric Monteith were lying stricken and wounded there could be no possible reason for making a mystery of the occurrence. He began to wish that Caldecott had hit upon some other plan. All this passed through his mind at lightning speed; his hesitation was only momentary. There was no help for it, the third person must hear what he had to say. He looked inquiringly at Jenny to cover his hesitation.

"This is Miss Lovelace," said Hazel, "you need have no hesitation in saying what you have to say before her."

Phelps bowed. He determined to rush hot-foot into his tale.

"I come from a Mr. Eric Monteith," he said quickly, "a gentleman whose acquaintance I had not the pleasure of knowing until an hour or so ago. I happened to be passing a little wayside inn just outside Rugby when I became the witness of a most unfortunate accident; a gentleman was knocked down by a runaway horse and injured rather severely, particularly about the head and right hand. I helped to carry him into the inn. When



"Have I the honour of addressing Miss Hazel Harlow?" he began blandly.

Hazel Harlow is in Rugby this week.

he recovered consciousness he told me that his name was Mr. Monteith, and that he was a member of the *Good Samaritan* Company, at present playing in Rugby. He gave me your address, and asked me if I would come to you and ask you to go to him in his hour of need. As voucher for his identity—he could not write by reason of his hand being injured—he gave me this signet ring and pocket-book that he said he believed you would recognise as his property."

The two girls listened to the plausible villain's story with breathless interest. The signet ring and the pocket-book were beyond all doubt and question Monteith's. To clinch his story Phelps spoke again.

"Mr. Monteith informed me," he said in a low voice, "that you were some time ago the victim of a letter purporting to be written by himself, but in which he had no hand. He told me this to reassure you."

This put the finishing touch to Hazel's credence in the story. Even Jenny, more worldly-minded and sophisticated than her comrade, ready moreover to see danger in the most ordinary things where Hazel was concerned, had to confess to herself that she could find no flaw in the tissue of Phelps's narrative.

Hazel sprang to her feet. "Let us go at once," she cried impetuously. "Poor Mr. Monteith, he must be terribly hurt."

"I think it only wise," put in Phelps sympathetically, "to prepare you for the seriousness of Mr. Monteith's condition. He is undoubtedly in a bad way." This last remark was uncompromisingly true, though the two women could not see into Phelps's brain, and appreciate the subtle villainy that made him make this statement. It only added to Hazel's desire to go to the aid of the man to whom she indeed owed her life.

Phelps looked once more at Miss Lovelace. He seemed about to make a remark, but Jenny was too quick for him. She read the unspoken words that were on his lips. "Where Miss Harlow goes I go," she answered decisively. Phelps hid his deep-rooted chagrin with a polite little bow. After all, she was only a woman. What could she do to stem the torrent that was driving Hazel and Eric towards misery unspeakable?

The two girls put on their hats and prepared at once to follow the bringer of evil tidings.

"Let us go quickly," said Hazel, "every moment is precious." They hurried downstairs and out into the street. Here a conveyance was waiting. "I had the forethought to get a vehicle," said Phelps, "as it would take us three-quarters of an hour to walk there." He helped the two ladies inside the cab and got in himself.

He did not notice that against the kerb was lounging a somewhat seedy-looking individual, who looked fixedly at him; neither did he notice that when the carriage set off this same mysterious person followed after it, every now and then running so as to at least keep the vehicle in view.

But few words passed between the trio on their way to the inn. In due course the cab drew up outside the Jolly Waggoners and Phelps got out, assisting the two ladies to alight with conspicuous gallantry. At the door of the hostelry stood the rascally landlord, who had been well paid by Caldecott to back him up in his schemes, and who had no scruples in accepting a £50 note as the price of his acquiescence.

"How is the poor gentleman?" asked Phelps in a low voice, yet loud enough for his two fair companions to hear what he said.

The landlord shook his head ominously. "I am afraid it's a bad business," he muttered.

Everything dovetailed with such nice accuracy that neither Hazel nor her companion could find anything to allow their suspicions to be awakened; neither was this to be wondered at. They had to deal with scoundrels versed in all the arts of criminality, for Caldecott, although his position as a country gentleman and a man of wealth hid his real nature, was a *roué* of the worst order, a man moreover who consorted freely with criminals and blacklegs in the numerous by-paths where such birds of ill-omen are to be found. All was quiet in the little inn; the bar was empty; it was too early as yet for the returning labourers to drop in and have their glass at the conclusion of their day's labour. The inn was too much off the main road to command the patronage of its more favoured and pretentious rivals.

The landlord threw open a door that had access to a flight of wooden stairs. "The gentleman is in the room at the end of those stairs, lady," he said in a low voice.

Hazel went first, now all impatience to see the man whom she pictured as lying wounded, perhaps dying, in the lonely chamber at the top of the staircase. After her came Jenny. Phelps brought up the rear. The latter had realised that the presence of Miss Lovelace might prove a serious obstruction to the success of Caldecott's scheme. While they had been driving towards the inn his brain had been actively employed in devising a way whereby Miss Lovelace might be prevented from becoming a thorn in Caldecott's side when the real state of affairs became known. He determined accordingly upon a particularly daring act of villainy.

When the three found themselves upon the staircase Phelps hastily closed the communicating door behind him, with the result that the whole staircase became enveloped in darkness; then with wonderful deftness he whipped a handkerchief from his pocket, over which he emptied some chloroform already prepared for his purpose.

To fling the handkerchief over Jenny's head from the back was the work of a moment; a faint gurgling cry, and the girl fell back unconscious into his arms. Hazel stumbling on in the darkness ahead turned round at the sound. "What's the matter?" she said. "It's all right, Miss Harlow," answered Phelps, "I knocked my hand against the wall. Open the door at the top and we shall be all right."

Absolutely unprepared for what awaited her Hazel did as she was bidden; she threw open the door and hurriedly entered the chamber.

The sight that met her eyes froze the blood within her veins, for there, standing in the centre of the room, confronting her with a diabolical expression on his face, stood Horace Caldecott.

She had no eyes for anything else; no eyes for the pallet in the corner, upon which, bound, gagged, and absolutely helpless, with white face and staring eyeballs, lay Eric Monteith; no eyes for the man who had entered the room behind her, with the unconscious body of Jenny in his arms; her every faculty was centred upon the face and figure of the hated Caldecott.

"So you have come, sweetheart," said Caldecott mockingly, "your tender soul couldn't bear to think that your lover was lying helpless and wounded in a country inn. Lover, did I say? Look at him. There he lies, like a trussed fowl. How is he going to help you now, think

Hazel Harlow will be in Belfast next week.

you? You should never have run away frow Harlow Farm and the man who claims you now as a loving husband to be."

The tones of his low mocking voice fell on Hazel's ears like a whip. She quivered as though with physical pain. All her faculties seemed numbed and deadened. Her eyes, which seemed to have a vacant, almost meaningless look in them, went to where Eric lay straining with impotent fury at his bonds. Then they turned to the senseless body of Jenny Lovelace. It was like some horrid scene in an Adelphi drama—villain, hero and heroine had met in the culminating scene of the play.

"What do you want with me?" said Hazel. Her voice seemed far away. She could say nothing else, yet felt she must say something.

"That is soon told," said Caldecott. "I have been baulked of you long enough. I tried fair means, they failed; then I swore to myself that if that didn't answer I'd have you by foul ones, and I think you will admit that this time I have not played my cards badly. You ask me what I want with you. Listen. I want you for my wife; either you promise to marry me here, aye, this very day, or"—his voice dropped to a hoarse whisper, "*I'll torture Eric Monteith before your very eyes!* The price of your resistance shall be paid by your lover."

For a few seconds Hazel's brain refused to take in the real meaning of Caldecott's speech. It could not be true. She knew that the man before her was wicked and cruel, but he could not stoop to such villainy as that. The mediæval expedient to which he had alluded was surely impossible in the enlightened days of the twentieth century. In the small world in which Hazel had hitherto moved, such ideas had no real significance; they were only things to be read about, to be shuddered over, to be forgotten.

She looked helplessly at Caldecott. "Mr. Monteith is not my lover," she said in a low voice. "I have none, I want none. You must surely be jesting, you could not, nobody could be so terribly wicked as to torture an innocent man because a girl, who has no love for you, who wants only to live quietly and at peace with her fellows, has the misfortune to be unable to reciprocate the feeling that you call love."

Caldecott made a step forward. His dark eyes blazed with suppressed passion; he seemed for the moment to forget his position; to forget where he was, and that there were other persons in the room besides himself and Hazel. He remembered only that the woman for whom he was ready to sell his life, his soul, his honour, stood before him.

"What I call love," he muttered hoarsely. "This is no time for casuistries. I should have thought that by this time you would have realised that nothing in Heaven or Hell would keep me from possessing you." And then his voice grew almost tender. "Ah, Hazel," he said, "is it so much that I ask? I can give you wealth, a position, comfort for all your life. It is but one little word that you have to say. Think of all it means; on the one hand, wealth, happiness, Mr. Monteith's safety, your own immunity from any cares; on the other, you will still be mine at the cost of——" he broke off abruptly with a significant gesture towards the spot where Eric lay.

A thousand doubts and fears beset Hazel's brain. Was ever girl in a more awful position than she was at that moment? She looked wildly round her as though seeking for some means of escape from the horrible fate that hemmed her in so remorselessly. In her trouble she hardly seemed to realise that Jenny, her own dear friend, lay still and motionless in a corner of the room, beside her the man Phelps, who had been the ready tool in his employers hands.

"I cannot marry you," she moaned. "It would be a sin to give my hand to you without my heart, and how can I love you after all that has passed between us?" She broke off abruptly, and covered her face with her hands.

An exclamation of baffled rage fell from Caldecott's lips. "I will give you three minutes, Hazel," he said, "to make your choice. If at the end of that time you still refuse to accede to my request, I shall have to put into execution what I have already hinted at. A mediæval form of coercion perhaps, but one that even to-day is drastic and efficacious, and if you should entertain any idea of using your fair lungs let me remind you that we are in a lonely inn, the landlord of which is friendly to my interests."

He took out his watch with the air of a man who had fully made up his mind. "Three minutes, and then you know what awaits Mr. Monteith if you are still obdurate."

Hazel flung herself down on her knees before her tormentor. "If you have any spark of manhood left in you," she cried piteously, "if you have a heart, as other men have, you cannot be serious in proposing this awful crime. You must know that I cannot see an innocent and noble man suffer slow agonies before my eyes if I can do anything to save him. If there is no other alternative I will become your wife, but I tell you so surely as there is a Heaven above, I will take my own life rather than become the partner of a man who can stoop to such low depths."

And if the situation was terrible for Hazel it can be well imagined how frightful it was for the hapless Eric.

A witness of all that transpired, of the terrible fate that menaced the woman he loved with a pure and tender devotion, he lay straining at his bonds in impotent agony and rage, powerless to move hand or foot to save Hazel from her fate.

"Two and a half minutes," said Caldecott in a terrible voice as though he had not heard one word of Hazel's impassioned appeal, "you have half a minute in which to decide."

All the colour faded out of Hazel's face. She looked agonizingly around, her eyes fell on Eric's ghastly face, beaded with the sweat of agony. "For your sake," she murmured brokenly, her eyes upon Monteith. Then in a low, almost inaudible voice, she whispered, "I consent and may Heaven forgive you."

CHAPTER IV.

It will be remembered that when the self-styled "Mr. Geoffrey Phelps" piloted Hazel and Jenny Lovelace to the vehicle in readiness to bear them to the Jolly Waggoners, a seedy-looking individual had started off in pursuit of the cab. He kept the conveyance in sight through the streets of Rugby, but when it left the town he found that he was unable to do more than keep it in sight along the country road. At last, thoroughly blown, he came to a halt and stopped for a few moments to wipe the perspiration from his face and to recover somewhat his spent breath.

Tell your friends about Hazel Harlow.

"Phew," he ejaculated, "you're out of training, Kempton Bond, the pace has been too hot for you." He drew a photograph from his pocket, the portrait of a clean-shaven man with dark, crisp hair and well-cut features. "It's the same," he muttered, "in spite of a moustache and hair dyed. Now I wonder what on earth his game is, driving off in a cab with two young ladies, one of them Miss Hazel Harlow, the beautiful star of the *Good Samaritan* Company. I tracked him to Rugby all right, though I don't think he knew I was on his track. He's a smart man, but like a good many smart men, he's a bit foolhardy. If he'd laid low in London the chances are he wouldn't have run his head into the noose. But hold on, I haven't got him yet, and he's such a slippery customer, there's no knowing what may happen."

He put the photograph back into his pocket and set off at a brisk walk along the road. He had not gone more more than half a mile when he suddenly saw the carriage coming back. In a moment he was all alertness. When the vehicle came up with him he saw that it was empty. Taking a purse from his pocket he held it aloft and cried out to the driver: "Hi, there! what have you done with your fare? He dropped his purse on the pavement in Rugby, and I've been sprinting after that thoroughbred of yours to try and catch up with him."

The man on the box-seat grinned. "Let's go halves," he said.

Mr. Kempton Bond shook his head. "No," he answered, "but he's sure to give me five bob or so for taking it back, and I'll give you half a crown on spec."

"Right you are," said the other. "You'll probably find him and his lady friends at the Jolly Waggoners, about three-quarters of a mile on down the second turning to the left. I reckon they're actresses, those two. I expect there's another 'mash' of theirs waiting for them at the public. That'll make a nice little party of four, and one of the girls is a perfect stunner." This with a suggestive wink.

Bond laughed and threw up the half-crown as promised. The man bit it and then transferred it to his pocket. "Good luck, mate," he said, and drove on.

"That was a half crown well spent," said the mysterious Mr. Bond to himself as he struck out with renewed briskness along the lonely road. Then he felt in his pockets. "Shooting iron and darbies all handy. I shall have to spring a mine on him before he tumbles to what's up. It would be a feather in my cap if I could nab him. Wouldn't they look blue at the Yard?" And he chuckled softly to himself in anticipation of the coming triumph.

As he drew opposite the Jolly Waggoners he was at once struck by the remarkable absence of life there seemed round the inn. The house had the appearance of being shut up. It was a two-storied building and the blinds of the upper windows were drawn down. The front door, instead of yawning hospitably open as is usually the case with country inns on a fine summer evening, was closed. All this Kempton Bond's quick eyes took in in a moment. He went to the door and tried the handle. The door was locked. He determined on a bold course of action. He went round to the back of the house through the little garden to the back door. This, as he had half expected would be the case, was still open. From the room above came the suppressed sound of voices. He could hear it was a woman speaking, and from the low tones in which she spoke, he could tell that she was addressing someone as a suppliant, but could not hear what she said.

He boldly entered the house, and found himself in a low stone flagged passage, with doors right and left, and the bar visible straight ahead. With quiet tread he made direct for the latter place. The next instant he was on the landlord's side of the bar counter, and confronting a man placidly snoring in a chair behind the bar. It was the landlord of the Jolly Waggoners.

Bond smote him on the shoulder. "Hey, man," he said, "it isn't Sunday, wake up! I'm dying for a drink. What do you mean by locking your front door? Have you made so much money that you don't care whether customers come or not?"

The landlord had leapt to his feet; there was fear upon his face, that and something more. Bond's eagle eyes read this at a glance.

"Who are you?" muttered the fellow hoarsely. "How do you come here? What do you want?"

Bond laughed in his face. "Upon my sam," he said, "you're the rummiest sort of drink-purveyor I've come across for a long time! Is it the custom for inn-keepers in this part of the world to shut up shop before it begins to get dark, and then when a man comes in to have a drink to ask him what he wants?" Then his voice changed. "Look here," he said sternly, "It strikes me you've got some ugly game ahead. There's something jolly suspicious about all this. I'm not a man to be fooled with. What's your game?"

The landlord went white to his lips. If ever terror was painted upon a man's countenance it was upon his. Bond's eyes never left his face.

"I'll give you drink," muttered the fellow, "anything you like, and you needn't trouble about settling for it. The fact is I was feeling a bit queer to-day. I'm alone in the house, the missus has gone to Rugby, and really I have such a small business that I thought I'd shut up shop and have forty winks."

The man was lying, and Bond knew it.

"Oh, that's it," he said in a low voice, "then perhaps you will kindly explain to me what you have done with your two gentlemen and their lady actress friends."

The man was struck speechless. He tried to find words to falter out some pitiable excuse, but, like many other rascals, he was an abject coward at heart. He dimly realised that this strange, shabbily dressed individual was not what he represented himself to be. Suddenly Kempton Bond's hand went to his breast-pocket; the next moment the inn-keeper found himself gazing down the ugly looking barrel of a handy little Smith and Weeson. In a moment he dropped on his knees.

"Now see here," said Bond, "you tell me the truth or I'll blow your brains out. Who have you got in the house? What villainy's afoot? If you can serve desperate men serve me now—the truth, mind you, for you're nearer eternity at this moment than you ever have been or ever will be in all your miserable existence."

Bond threw all the intensity of scorn into his voice of which he was capable. He knew the man before him, knew exactly how to deal with such as he. His words produced the desired effect. The inn-keeper was clay in his hands, clay to be moulded into whatsoever shape Bond might desire.

"I'll tell you," muttered the miserable man, "if only you will spare my life. There are five of them upstairs, three men and two women. One of the men is bound;

the other two have got some game on which I don't know."

The fellow was not lying now, Bond could see that. Into what hornets' nest had he dropped? What villainy was being enacted in the room above him? Then the sound of the pleading voice came back to him.

"Where are they?" he said to the landlord. With a trembling finger the miserable wretch pointed to the door behind where he was sitting, that led to the upper chamber. "They're up there," he muttered hoarsely.

Bond stole across and opened the door noiselessly. The sound of a woman's voice came down the dark staircase.

"I consent, and may Heaven forgive you," were the words he heard, but never in all his life had he heard a voice in which was bound up such a world of concentrated agony.

He looked swiftly round; it was well he did so; behind him with a long butcher's knife in his hand the villainous landlord was creeping stealthily towards him. Like lightning Kempton Bond seized a pewter mug that stood on the zinc counter at his side and dashed it full into the cowardly scoundrel's face.

With a low cry the man fell over senseless, a thin line of red on his forehead marking where the unusual weapon had found its billet.

"That's settled him for the time," muttered Bond. The next instant he had bounded up the dark staircase and flung open the door of the room above. The sight that met his gaze transcended everything that he had expected.

In one corner was Eric helpless, in the centre of the room stood Caldecott with Hazel fainting at his feet, at the other side stood Geoffrey Phelps beside the motionless form of Jenny Lovelace.

Kempton Bond's six-shooter was levelled straight at Phelps' head. "Henry Lester," he thundered, "I arrest you in the King's name. Throw up your hands!"

With a low snarl like that of a wild beast, Phelps flung himself forward.

Kempton Bond's revolver rang out. Phelps fell heavily, but it was not the bullet that had caused his fall. Jenny Lovelace, who had been lying apparently unconscious, had in reality for some considerable time partially shaken off the effects of the anæsthetic administered to her. As Kempton Bond entered the room, and as the man Phelps or Lester, or whatever his name might be, flung himself forward, her right hand shot out and grasped his ankle.

The tug at his foot threw him to the ground, his head caught the boards with a dull thud. Like lightning Kempton Bond fell upon him and had slipped a pair of shining handcuffs over his wrists.

In the meanwhile Caldecott, realising dimly that even now at the very moment of victory defeat stared him in the face, stooped down and swung Hazel off her feet. Bond had left the door open. If he could once get out upon the stairs with his burden he felt that he could lock the door and perhaps make good his escape. But Bond was too quick for him.

"No, you don't," he muttered, and turning from the unconscious Phelps, who had been stunned by his heavy contact with the floor, he gripped Caldecott by the waist.

Caldecott loosened his hold on Hazel with a fierce oath. There was a revolver in his pocket, but he had no time to use it. His right hand swung out and he caught Bond full on the point of the chin. He was a powerful man, and the blow was a telling one. Bond staggered back and fell to the floor. In the midst of all this indescribable confusion Jenny had managed to get to her feet.

Like a bird she skimmed across the room to where Eric lay, and with a pocket-knife had begun hacking at the bonds that confined him to the bed. Another instant and he was free, just as Caldecott lusting for vengeance, had turned to wreak his baffled rage against his defenceless enemy.

Seeing, however, that Monteith was free, and noticing a look upon Eric's face so terrible in its expression of righteous anger, he shrank back. He was no coward, despite his villain's heart, and yet he dared not face the awful resentment that blazed from Eric's eyes. He cast one look round the apartment. Bond was slowly struggling to his feet, his confederate lay helpless, the next moment Eric would have been at his throat.

He leapt for the door and dashed down the wooden staircase with indescribable speed. Slamming the door at the bottom of the stairs, he shot back the bolt on the other side.

Without pausing to notice the landlord who lay unconscious beneath his bar, he sped out of the back door and away.

CHAPTER V.

How they got through their performance at the theatre that night Hazel, Jenny, and Eric never knew. Indeed, in the middle of the second act Hazel, absolutely overwrought by the terrible events of a few hours ago, broke down completely. For a moment a vast hush fell on the whole audience, absolutely at a loss to understand the meaning of such a *contretemps*. At once Raymond Venables ordered the curtain to be rung down. The manager had always a great eye for effect. He went round to the front of the curtain and in a grave, impressive voice, said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am sure you will all sympathise with Miss Harlow when I tell you that she is acting to-night notwithstanding the fact that she has recently passed through a great domestic sorrow. In a few minutes I hope with your kind indulgence, Miss Harlow will be fit again to resume her part. Miss Harlow begs me to ask for your indulgence."

In a moment a mighty cheer rent the auditorium, and when the curtain went up again it was some few minutes before the storm of cheering subsided. The rest of the play was gone through without a perceptible hitch.

After the performance Kempton Bond, at Eric's invitation, came round to the latter's rooms to supper. Bond had promised to relate to Eric the history of how he had happened to come to the rescue so opportunely.

"I am a detective," began Kempton Bond. "You will perhaps remember that a year ago a daring bank robbery was perpetrated in London which resulted in the thieves or thief getting clear away without leaving any definite clue behind them. Scotland Yard was baffled, and I took up the job. A great many times the scent grew hot, but I was never able to put my finger exactly on the right spot. At last, however, by a long series of circumstances that it would be needless to relate, I managed to bring the crime home to one man, the man Lester, *alias* Phelps, *alias* a hundred names, one of the most daring and successful criminals that the annals of crime have disclosed. What his connection exactly with this man Caldecott was I cannot tell you. My own theory is that Squire Horace Caldecott, landowner and wealthy man as he is, has a knowledge of the seamy side of life that even

Charles Peace would have envied. But he's a deep customer, you won't find any records against him at Scotland Yard, and besides, he has money that was left him by a wealthy father, so that he has no need to break into banks or commit such felonies. But I should be greatly honoured if you would tell me, Mr. Monteith, the history of Miss Harlow as connected with this man Caldecott. Who knows, I may be able to do you a good turn some day? I've got Lester, but the other's given us the slip."

Eric readily complied with the detective's desire. He told him all; how that Caldecott had set his soul upon becoming possessed of Hazel Harlow; how he had sworn that he would let nothing stand in his path that might keep him from the consummation of his purpose.

Kempton Bond heard him out in silence. When he had finished the detective looked somewhat grave.

"There's always a woman in the case," he said sententiously, "and I'm afraid there's still trouble ahead for Miss Harlow. Her purity and beauty are the two great factors that must always militate against her, especially as she has entered the thorny path of stage life. Can you not persuade her to leave a profession that has so many snares and dangers for such as she?"

Eric sighed. "That is just what I cannot do," he said moodily. "I will not disguise from you the fact that I would make Miss Harlow my wife to-morrow if she would let me, but——" he stopped abruptly, as though his his heart was too full for words.

The detective looked at him shrewdly. "You have my sympathy, Mr. Monteith," he said feelingly. "My advice to you is what may perhaps seem trite and commonplace, but I think it is nevertheless sound, 'Faint heart never won fair lady.'"

* * * * *

As can be well imagined, the terrible experience they had gone through had left its traces upon both Hazel and Jenny. At breakfast the next morning they could talk about nothing but the adventure of the day before. They were half way through breakfast when the landlady entered with a letter that bore the Rugby postmark, and had evidently been posted the night before. One glance at the writing and Hazel uttered a low cry.

"Oh, Jenny," she said, "it's from *him*. I daren't see what is inside; there must be no secrets between us now; open it and tell me what's there."

Jenny opened the letter with a feeling almost of fear. She read it through carefully.

"Shall I read it to you, Hazel?" she asked.

Hazel nodded.

There was no date, no heading.

"If you think," the letter began, "that I am the sort of man who can bear without any pangs seeing that which I have sworn to possess continually being snatched from my grasp, you little know the sort of man you have to deal with. I have sworn that, even if I have to sacrifice every penny that I possess, if I must sell my soul for the attainment of my object, I will do so rather than lose you. As for the man who has constituted himself your protector—though other folks might give him another name—this letter will serve for him as well as for you. Tell him that I will be even with him yet, and there are more ways than one of procuring that revenge which shall assuredly be mine. I have money. I have power, and I have cause for vengeance. Tell him this, that he shall never know when the blow shall fall; he shall never be safe sleeping or waking, by day or by night. He shall feel what it is to have thwarted the desires of a desperate man."

Here the letter ended without a signature. The two girls stared mutely in one another's faces.

"What will you do, Hazel?" asked Jenny.

"Do?" cried Hazel, her face aglow with new resolve, "do, I shall give the letter to Mr. Monteith, and take no more notice of it. What can Horace Caldecott do? We are not in the Dark Ages. Can he employ hired assassins to dog Mr. Monteith's footsteps? That letter is the letter of a bully and a coward."

Yet although she spoke bravely, Hazel knew full well that in Caldecott both she and Eric had a terrible and implacable foe. The man was delirious with passion, he had become a monomaniac where Hazel was concerned. They could only keep watch and be ever on their guard against this snake in the grass, who always struck at them with poisoned fangs when least they expected it.

Synopsis No. 7.

The next place on the tour list of the "Good Samaritan" Company was Belfast, the inauguration of a fortnight's stay in the Emerald Isle. The adventure that was to befal Hazel Harlow there was one to which was added the terrors of the sea. It was one that nearly cost the beautiful actress her life. Readers of "Short Stories" should certainly not fail to follow Miss Harlow on her journey.

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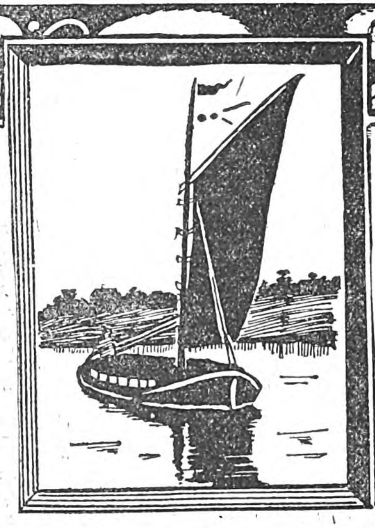


His Fair Unknown.

THE STORY OF A SEASIDE ADVENTURE AND ITS ROMANTIC SEQUEL.

CHAPTER I.

One Day at Dirriecomb.

"If you get out as far as Gull Island, sir, you'll mind that a pretty strong current sets to the nor'ard of it. We've had more than two or three accidents with folks getting carried away."

Allan Curtis laughed as he stepped into the broad, shallow pair-oar, so different from the smart, slender craft to be seen on inland waters.

"Thanks for the tip," he said, sitting down on the central thwart and picking up the gaily-painted sculls; "but I have known Dirriecomb Bay from boyhood. Push her bow well round for me, will you, there's quite a swell on this morning."

The grizzled, elderly boatman at the hiring-station obeyed and thrust the prow of the dinghy off the massive concrete stair that descended to the beach from the fine esplanade which occupied the greater part of the Dirriecomb sea-front. The full, strong waves of the high tide were dashing against it with considerable force.

For the rest, Dirriecomb Bay was bright and peaceful. The scorching rays of a summer sun beat upon its expanse of blue, flecked with gusts of snowy foam, upon the staring stucco hotels and the long promenade of the new town, upon the red brick and mossy tiles of the old town—nestling in a hollow of the uneven coast—upon the grey shingle, the merry children, the lounging holiday-makers, the rank of bathing machines, the little harbour with its plantation of masts, and the half-submerged islet in the middle of the bay.

Allan Curtis, rowing lazily towards this last, drew breath after breath of air as stimulating as champagne, and contemplated, with a regretful pleasure, the animated picture before him.

A few more hours and he would be in a very different place. London, whose smoke, whose dust and roar, whose sweltering pavements, he dreaded to think of, would claim him—he would go back to the huge hospital, to its grim, bare wards, its operating-room, its arduous duties, its tragedies of life and death. The young house surgeon, broken down by overwork in a torrid June, had rapidly regained his health beside the invigorating sea, and now, his vacation ended, he must return to relieve his substitute, to take up once again the practice of his profession.

Truth to tell, that profession—for all Allan Curtis loved it ardently—proved sometimes just a trifle unsatisfactory to the youthful medico's romantic heart. Good looking, athletic, a general favourite, of growing reputation, he was as fancy free as a girl in her teens. Yet even a heart that is fancy-free may occasionally remind its owner of its existence, and, at the present moment, something—whether it was his approaching departure, the beauty of the scene about him, or the intoxicating freshness of the sea-breeze, gave the brilliant young house surgeon of St. Luke's an unmistakable twinge of melancholy. He felt—though he would have been puzzled to say why—both lonely and sentimental.

As his active muscles propelled the small craft nearer and nearer to the low reef in the centre of the bay—where the gulls hovered shriekingly over the banks of weed—he noticed, between him and the islet, a blot of bright yellow upon the surface of the water, rising and falling with the waves.

A keener scrutiny proved it to be a smart bathing-cap frilled and tucked like a dainty Tam o' Shanter; beneath it was a pretty flushed countenance. He could perceive that the swimmer, no mean one, as was testified by her distance from the beach—was striking out desperately in the direction of the coast. Yet her progress was rather sea than shorewards.

Hastily Allan Curtis took his bearings, to discover that he had shot across the powerful current which set past the island. It lay astern of him, and the swimmer was in it, finding it too strong for her, and drifting momentarily further from the beach.

Slewing the pair-oar with a vicious manipulation of the sculls, the young surgeon rowed in pursuit. The yellow cap was slipping out to sea by slow instalments which told how bravely its wearer was fighting.

Curtis snatched the dinghy over the low rollers as if it had been a racing skiff; another moment and it ran in on the swimmer's lee, shielding her from the shimmering ocean which had seemed to be her goal. The oarsman marked admiringly the determined courage of the resolute features and the graceful swing of the white arms beneath the lapping water.

Allan Curtis put the handle of a scull under his knee and raised his straw hat. “You are in an awkward current,” he said cheerfully, “hadn't I better tow you free of it? Or would you prefer a lift home?”

The closely-compressed lips of the swimmer parted and her dark eyes smiled pathetically. “Thank you,” she gasped, laying a soft palm on the gunwale of the boat, “I—I fancy I was beginning to get a bit frightened. But I could swim back all right if only I could get out of the current.”

Her rescuer looked over his shoulder—there was an ample length of cord fastened to the painter-ring in the bow. He reached for it, and tossed an end overboard. The girl caught at it and he began to pull steadily athwart the bay, his attendant water-nymph swimming on her side with slow, yet expert strokes that carried her along at a considerable speed, and left her but little dependent on the assistance of Curtis's sculls, as soon as the dinghy cleared the rapid seaward current.

While he rowed Allan Curtis had time to study the piquant person that was so gallantly breasting the waves of Dirriecomb Bay. Her face, dipped with the salt spray of the chopping sea, there were patches of throbbing colour on either cheek and a mischievous light in the brown orbs. Not for five years had the young surgeon made so exhaustive an inspection of a woman's face. His sculls beat mechanically, and he stared at the fair features of the swimmer in an entire forgetfulness of himself and his whereabouts.

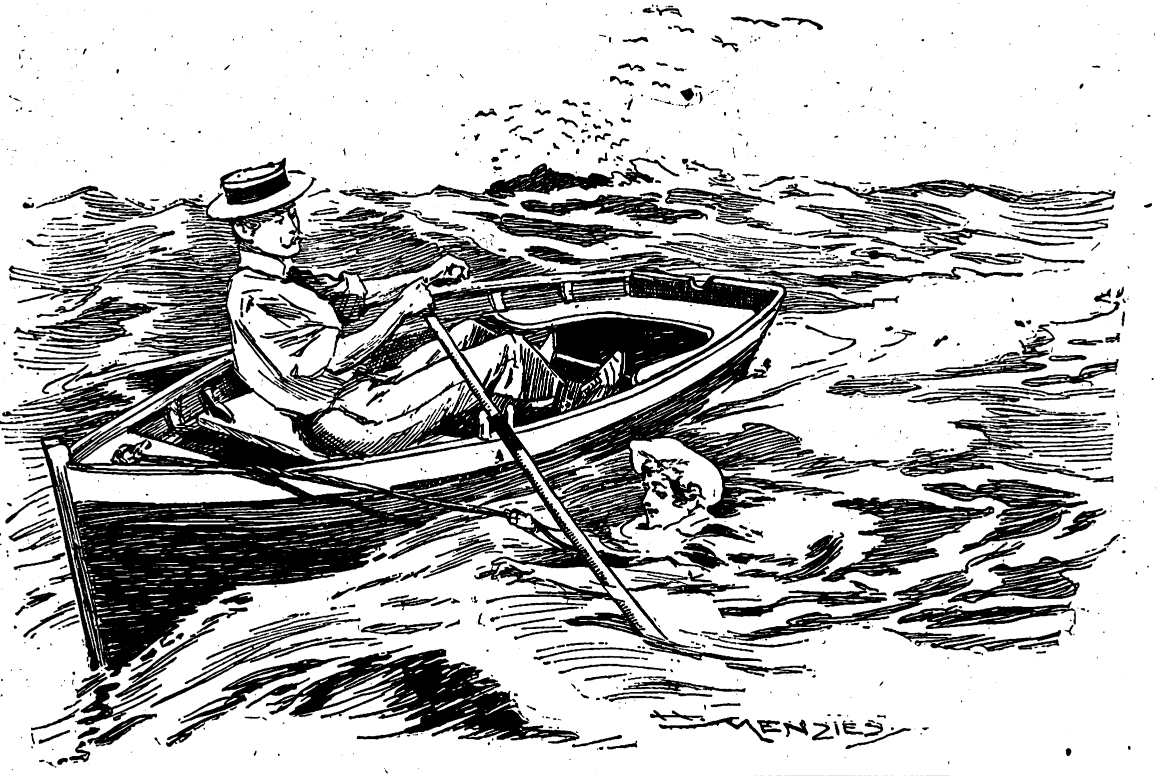
The girl herself aroused him from his ecstatic contemplation by flinging the rope in once more. “Thank you very much,” she said, “I feel as if I had awakened from some horrible nightmare. And yet I'm positive I should have been too proud to cry out if you hadn't offered to help me. I'll swim back to my machine now. Good-morning, and please believe that I am very grateful.”

“I—I trust we shall meet again,” stammered Curtis, “under more—more conventional circumstances.”

“I'm afraid,” retorted the unknown, “that it isn't very likely. Thank you all the same.” And while her preserver hesitated for an answer, she darted shorewards.

Allan Curtis watched the yellow cap thoughtfully as it approached the beach. It disappeared abruptly—the wearer had dived. Scan the shallows as he might, after that he could not see the distinctive head-dress. She must have whipped it off before coming up, so that he should not track her. Curtis heaved a profound sigh and muttered certain syllables that sounded suspiciously like strong language.

Ultimately he sculled to the landing stairs, paid for his boat, lit a cigar, and walked down the esplanade to the beach, where he devoted himself to observing feminine faces, as many an elegant figure, fresh from her morning dip, passed him, unconscious of his scrutiny. But the memorable countenance of his ocean-nymph did not



He stared at the fair features of the swimmer in an entire forgetfulness of himself and his whereabouts.

Hazel Harlow will travel from town to town.

dawn upon his vision. Allan Curtis fumed in an irritable discontent.

Having thus whiled away an hour, he strolled over to his hotel, which happened to command the shore-end of the esplanade, and ordered lunch on the terrace. He consumed the meal absent-mindedly, keeping his eyes fixed on the moving throng beneath. But no glimpse of the fair unknown rewarded him for his pertinacity.

He was sipping his coffee, with moody deliberation, when he saw that the loungers about the sunlit promenade had gathered into a circular crowd near the inland extremity of the pier. At the centre of the circle, upon portable folding-stools, sat three personages draped mysteriously in lengthy red garments, resembling a domino, and masked with short vizards of red satin.

Two of these were men, the third a woman, the latter tall and of singularly elegant carriage. One of the men was a harpist, the other bore a violin; the woman poised by its long bright ribbon a mandoline, decorated with the parti-coloured streamers inseparable from that instrument. Something about the mandolinist, cloaked and masked as she was, struck Allan Curtis as familiar.

He listened to a portion of their concert, popular fragments of melody, vocal and instrumental, floating up to his terrace lunch-table, and then, inexplicably interested by his review of the mandoline player, rose to pay his bill and descend.

"What's the meaning of that masquerade?" he asked the waiter, indicating the crowd at the pier-foot with a gesture of his wrist and cigar.

The waited shrugged his shoulders as he counted out the change of a half-sovereign. "The 'Red Musicians,' sir," he said, "they're all the rage in Dirriecomb. But if you do go in the ring, sir, have a care of your watch and purse. There's been any number of complaints about pocket-picking on the beach and esplanade while the Red Musicians are playing."

Allan Curtis left a shilling on the salver, put a match to another "Henry Clay"—he had choice tastes in tobacco—stalked down to the shingle, and, having buttoned his coat over his pockets, elbowed his way into the front rank of the circle.

The mandolinist had commenced to sing, accompanied by the harp and the violin. Her voice was a sweet contralto, not too penetrating but well-managed. She was singing a favourite air out of a recent light opera, most of her audience—Curtis among them—knew the words.

A hush had seized on the crowd—a hush in which the tremor of the tide on the shingle could be distinctly heard, as a sort of background to the sad poetry of the song.

> Love is a butterfly in the sun, hearts are the flowers that, one by one,
> Yield him their honey and whisper "Stay!"
> But he flies away, he flies away,
>
> Love is a star that falls to the earth, love is a sob that began in mirth—
> A golden glow in a sky of grey
> That fades away, that fades away.
>
> Love is a little wind from the west, hearts are the leaves by his breath caressed,
> But he sighs farewell at the end of the day
> And steals away, and steals away.

Curtis started. The curves of the singer's mouth and chin below the crimson silk vizard, the movement of the delicate lips as they shaped the words, marked the face as that of the woman he had rescued that morning in the bay. He told himself that he could see too small a portion of the masked countenance, that the effect of the picturesque bathing-cap and the nun-like hood were so different that a comparison between the wearers was impossible. Yet, in spite of his caution, he was sure of the singer's identity.

Slipping round the ring, he contrived to get nearer. She had finished her song and returned to her mandoline to play a duet with the harpist. The violinist laid his instrument upon his camp-stool, produced a green cloth bag, and went to collect the donations of the audience.

In due course he came to Allan Curtis. The young surgeon, as a result of his interest in the masked lady regarded her colleague critically. The features behind the violinist's vizard were obviously not those of a gentleman: they were vulgar, impudent, and bloated as if by drinking.

Curtis dropped a sixpence into the receptacle, noting, as he did so, a broad white scar on the back of the fellow's right hand. Then his eyes strayed back again to the masked and hooded head that he would have given so much to see without its provoking guards. It was bent over the chords of the mandoline, her fingers drawing a passionate waltz tune from the vibrating strings. But once he thought it was lifted and that a glance was shot in his direction. Yet he could not be certain that her gaze had actually rested upon him.

Suddenly there was a scuffle not far from where he stood, and the crowd, swaying violently, almost swept him off his feet. When he regained his balance it was to behold the violinist struggling in the grasp of a burly policeman. Astonished, he looked for the mandoline player. She was nowhere to be seen, but the harpist was surrendering, to a second constable, both himself and his instrument.

Allan Curtis, amazed by this novel development, was pushing towards the actual point of the commotion, when he felt a touch on his arm and spun about, to discover before him, in a neat black gown and flat toque the heroine of his adventure in the bay. She was flushed and excited and obviously striving to render her disturbed breathing even and regular.

"Forgive me," she murmured, "but you have done me one great service to-day, may I make that my excuse for asking another. If—if I am accosted by—by any body during the next few minutes will you—will you say you know me, and that my name is Watson, Miss Hilda Watson, of 15 Frobisher Place, Kensington, London? That is my real name and address; it is, indeed."

The dark orbs that peeped into his own were so pitiful the face in which they were framed so lovely, that Curtis, despite the promptings of his practical common-sense, could only bow. Miss Watson's request and his assent had been only just in time, a police-sergeant, who was moving about among the excited crowd, singled out the young surgeon and his companion. Curtis saw that the officer carried in his hand a mandoline and, slung over his wrist, a red domino that trailed upon the shingle as he walked.

"Beg pardon, sir," he remarked, halting by them, "but is this lady with you?"

Curtis was driven to action; he had made an imprudent promise and he must perform it. "Yes," he said coldly, "what is the trouble?"

The sergeant was taking a quiet survey of Miss Hilda Watson. "A gang of thieves," was his reply, "has been working in with that troupe of players there. The one

Hazel Harlow is in Rugby this week.

as had the violin was Charlie Weldon, known as Clever Charlie, and he's marked on the hand with a scar that he received from his own knife in a fight with a 'tec.' he was trying to skewer; his speciality is musical fraud. We've got him and the other man, as well as their pickpocket accomplices in the mob. But we're after the girl that played the mandoline—she dropped her instrument and toggery and got off. But we have her description, and we'll nab her yet."

"Perhaps," rejoined Curtis, "as Miss Watson and I appear to have excited your suspicions, you will take my name and address. I am Allan Curtis, house-surgeon at St. Luke's Hospital, London. This lady resides at No. 15 Frobisher Place, Kensington, also London."

The police officer weakened under this show of dignity.

"Oh, not at all, sir," he faltered, "sorry to have inconvenienced you. But we are wanting a good-looking female with dark hair and brown eyes, and I noticed this lady standing, as I thought, alone. I apologise to you, sir, and to Miss—Miss Watson, for my error."

He saluted nervously, and went back to his subordinates, still solemnly carrying the mandoline and the domino. The girl at Allan Curtis' side glanced after him, with an irrepressible smile upon her lips.

The young surgeon stepped away from the crowd and directed his course to the open beach, Miss Watson's hand laid demurely on his arm. Further along the shore he felt that his companion had relinquished her hold.

"How can I thank you, Mr. Curtis?" she said, and her voice lingered upon her first utterance of his name.

"Do not try," advised Allan Curtis, with forced calmness, for he was fretting under the shock of the discovery that his fair unknown of the bay was the associate of criminals, possibly a criminal herself. "I had no option but to protect you, since you threw yourself on my mercy. I hoped, as I told you this morning, to meet you once more. But I did not, I confess, expect to have to deliver you from the clutches of the Law, as I did from those of the Gull Island current."

The other tossed her handsome head, though her black eyes were suspiciously moist.

"You are not complimentary, Mr. Curtis," she responded; "it would have been chivalrous to ask me for an explanation before condemning me unheard. But now, I shall admit nothing and explain nothing."

Curtis stared moodily at the expanse of dancing water. He was humiliated by the thought that he had been dreaming dreams over his solitary lunch, dreams in which the fascinating creature before him had played the most romantic of parts.

"Probably it is as well," he said drily; "however, do you feel sure that you will be safe from—from the further attentions of the—police. You should leave Dirriecomb as soon as you can contrive. Otherwise inquiries may be made into my right to vouch for your respectability."

He trifled nervously with his watch-chain. "I'm a bad hand at preaching," he murmured; "but I wouldn't go on as you've started, I wouldn't, honestly—it's a road that leads to misery and despair. I pulled you out of the current, don't make me wish—for your own sake—I'd left you there."

The girl moved away, smothering a sob. "You mean well," she glanced back to say, brokenly, "but you don't understand. Good-bye, and thank you again."

Curtis stepped after her, taking his sovereign-purse from his vest-pocket. "You can't communicate with—with your associates," he said; "they are in custody—have you the means to get free of Dirriecomb?"

Miss Hilda Watson flushed to her ears, and shrank from him. "Don't, don't!" she cried; "you're mismistaken, truly. Oh, I must go—I can't endure it any longer."

And turning her back upon him, she hurried up the shingle, crossed the promenade, and vanished among the strolling holiday-makers. Allan Curtis had recourse to a fresh cigar, and a saunter by the edge of the tide.

An hour later he flung the stump of his third "Henry Clay" into the wavelets, went to his hotel, packed his bag, and caught the next train to town. Dirriecomb had suddenly become unbearable.

When he unpacked the said bag in his room at the hospital that night his brain was still running on Miss Hilda Watson.

"Poor little woman!" he muttered, "I wonder what will happen to her in the end. She was as pretty as a picture and swam like a mermaid. Ugh, fancy a mermaid wanted by the police!"

With which grim reflection he dismissed the lady in question from his mind.

CHAPTER II.

A Walk Down Bond Street.

"A cup of coffee, please, and a biscuit."

Allan Curtis sat down rather wearily in a corner of the smart West-end tea-rooms. He had hurried from St. Luke's to Bond Street for a talk with a famous surgical instrument maker about a new thing in metal splints that the latter was perfecting for him, and this, with a couple of accidents earlier in the day, had effectively deprived him of his lunch. A glance at his watch had decided the young surgeon that he had time to snatch a little refreshment before hastening back to the hospital.

It was late in a dull September afternoon, two months since he had returned from Dirriecomb and his vacation. But it was not of Dirriecomb that Curtis was thinking as he sipped his coffee, his mind was absorbed by the problem of reducing in weight his otherwise satisfactory splint.

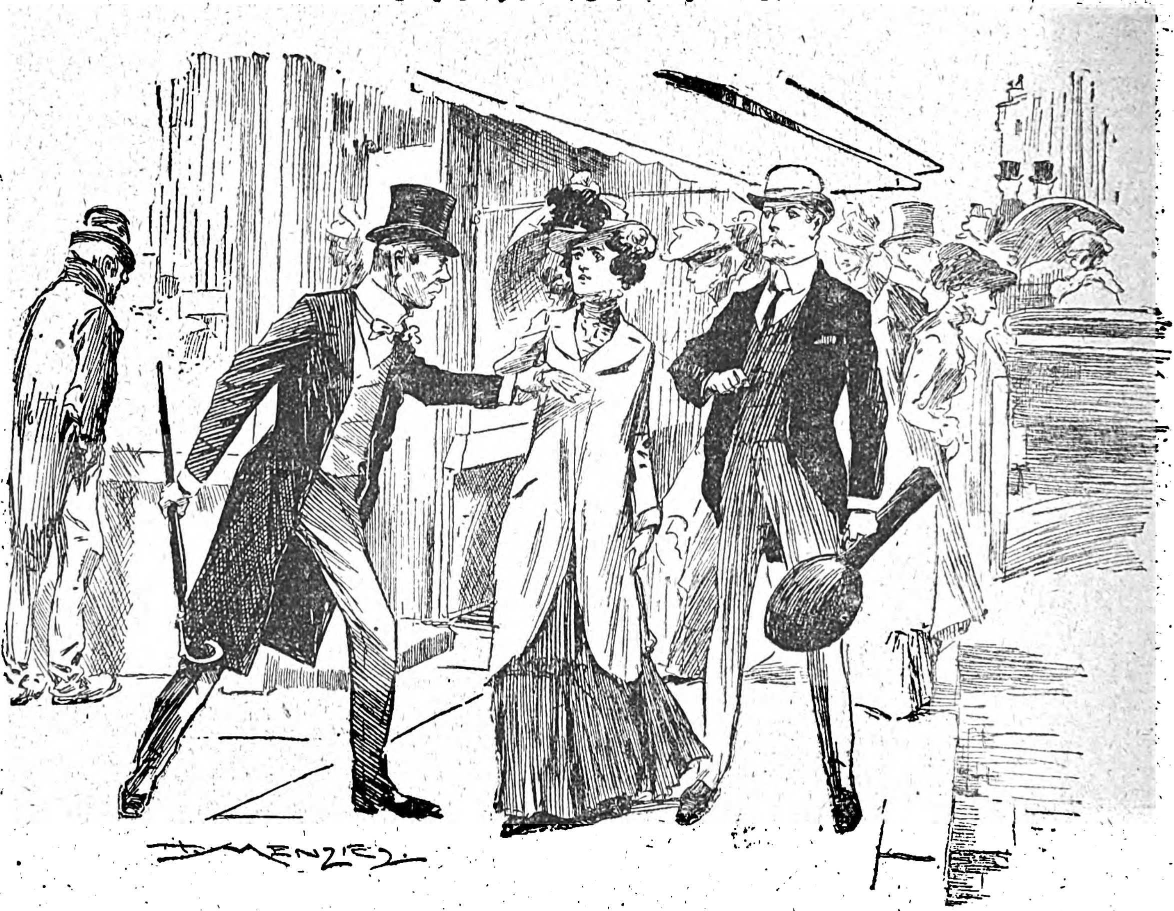
Suddenly there fell upon his ears the vibrating notes of a mandoline, playing to a piano and violoncello obligato, a lingering air. The melody seemed to speak the familiar words:

> Love is a little wind from the west, hearts are the leaves by
> his breath caressed,
> But he sighs farewell at the end of the day
> And he steals away, he steals away.

Curtis spun round mechanically, at the extremity of the long room, but not ten feet from him was a trio of picturesque persons, clad in loose tea-gowns of amber "Liberty" silk and with artificial chrysanthemums of the same hue in their hair. Bent over the beribboned instrument, whose sound had arrested his reflections, he beheld a lovely face—the face of his singular acquaintance of Dirriecomb Bay.

His eyes rested upon her inquiringly; she was absorbed in her playing, and did not notice him. Her expression, he fancied, was graver, her features thinner, but still strikingly beautiful. As he contemplated them, Allan Curtis realised that he had never really forgotten her, that his last few hours at Dirriecomb had provided the most enduring of his life. Every motion of her graceful figure, every inflection of her clear, characteristic voice,

Hazel Harlow will be in Belfast next week.



Hilda Watson threw off the hand he had laid on her wrist

had come back to him, in many a momentary reverie, in many a haunting dream.

Yet he had imagined her swept away by the currents of folly and crime, and here she was engaged in the pursuit of an honest calling. He recollected the confused sentences of appeal that had burst from him that day on Dirriecomb beach—was it possible that she had heeded them? that she had struggled back to an honourable existence? The idea moved him deeply.

He was gazing so earnestly at her that the musician wakened to the fact. She glanced up and saw him. A flood of burning colour mounted to the wandering curls on her forehead, and, stooping over the mandoline again, she devoted herself to her music.

Soon there came the crashing chords of the finale and the piece ended. As it did so there was a peal from an ornamental clock on the wall and the hour struck—it was six. The players rose and disappeared into the rear of the establishment.

Curtis looked after them thoughtfully, then he perceived that a programme stood on the table, and inspected it. "Music three to six," it intimated. The young surgeon picked up his check and strolled down the room, to pay it at the desk cash. Another customer was settling a similar account—a short man, with a vulgar and dissolute, yet obviously shrewd visage.

Allan Curtis studied him, hardly conscious that the other had so riveted his attention. Just then his neighbour gathered some silver off the rubber pad before him, and Curtis saw his hand. It was disfigured by a grey wheal or scar. In a flash the identity of the man broke upon him—he was the violinist who, masked and cloaked, had been arrested on Dirriecomb beach the preceding July.

While Curtis's brain grappled with the riddle of his presence there the fellow passed out. The young surgeon discharged his own trifling debt and followed. The ex-violinist had disappeared. Shrugging his shoulders over the enigma thus complicated, Curtis halted a pace or two from the entrance of the tea-rooms. He had only to chafe a moment before his expectations were crowned with fulfilment. Miss Hilda Watson stepped out into Bond Street bearing her mandoline-case and buttoning a plain black glove.

In her quiet, even severe costume, she declared herself undoubtedly a lady. Curtis bowed as she went by him and raised his hat. For an instant she faltered, then paused. A second more and Curtis had gained her side.

Tell your friends about Hazel Harlow.

"Good afternoon," he said; "so we meet again. Let me confess that I—I waited for you."

The mandolinist blushed and her brown eyes evaded his. Allan Curtis was infected with her embarrassment.

"I—I wanted to ask how the world has been treating you," he added. "You have often been in my thoughts—more often, perhaps, than I comprehended till I saw you just now. You were going down Bond Street when I stopped you, and I am bound for St. Luke's Hospital—I think you heard at Dirriecomb that I am house surgeon there—so our way lies in the same direction. May I—may I carry your case?"

Hilda Watson relinquished it, half unwillingly, and they walked on together. So far the mandoline player had not spoken. The first of the autumn evening was descending upon the West-end. As they passed the occasional openings of adjacent thoroughfares they could see that the sky was ablaze with a gorgeous sunset.

"When you left me that day on Dirriecomb beach," pursued Curtis, "you seemed hurt because I had offered you some slight pecuniary assistance. I am sorry you regarded the proposal as an insult; I honestly desired to serve you. However, I should like to apologise, if I may, for my clumsiness."

The mandolinist turned to him with an impulsive gesture. "Please don't dream of it!" she cried; "I was ungrateful—I know I was. And you—you were twice as kind to me as I deserved."

"Nonsense!" answered Curtis. "Any man would have done as much. And also he would have made sure that you had got safely out of the mess you were in. That is what I blamed myself for after. But I'm awfully glad you're running straight, I am indeed."

Miss Watson winced and bit her lip. They had reached the bottom of Bond Street, and were hesitating, instinctively, before crossing. Ere Curtis could continue his remark, or Hilda Watson respond to it, a voice broke in upon them, a voice at once smooth and insolent.

"Good evening, Miss W.," it said. "You've given me quite a chase. I popped in to buy some cigarettes and you slipped by, I suppose. Pleased you've had company—introduce me."

The speaker was the man Curtis had encountered at the cash-desk, in spite of his flashily correct attire and flaring jewellery, the vulgar violinist of the Dirricombe pocket-picking gang.

Curtis recoiled. His tone to Hilda Watson had been familiar, even intimate. The mandoline player perceived it and grew white. Then, in a tone that was strangely hard and cold, she complied with the newcomer's request.

"Mr. Curtis," she announced; "this is Mr. Charles Weldon, musician, thief and blackguard, and only a fortnight out of gaol, after serving two months for abetting larceny. I am past redemption, you see, since he is able to claim acquaintance with me."

The person thus brutally depicted spat out an oath. "Shut up, you jade!" he hissed; "or I'll pay you, curse me if I don't."

Hilda Watson flung off the hand he had laid on her wrist. "You shall persecute me no longer, Charles Weldon," she declared. "If you follow me I will have you arrested. As for Mr. Curtis, let him forget that ever we met or that he is responsible for saving my wretched life."

The young surgeon would have delayed her, but she caught her instrument from him and was gone before he could protest. He saw that she mounted a 'bus rolling towards Knightsbridge. With another oath, the ex-violinist faced in a similar direction and slouched down Piccadilly.

Pitiful, yet undecided, Allan Curtis hailed a hansom and was driven to St. Luke's Hospital. Duty is the best remedy for heartache. And he might truthfully have confessed to an attack of that extremely unprofessional malady.

CHAPTER III.

A Miracle of Cupid's.

"Will Mr. Curtis come to the accident ward at once, please. There's a serious case just in."

The message was received from the ear-piece of a short-distance telephone by a nurse in her neat print working costume. She threaded the aisle between the rows of beds and delivered the request to Allan Curtis, who was paying an early evening visit to an interesting patient. He nodded absently, gave her some instructions, and strode out of the tall and airy apartment into an adjoining one.

A ward nurse met him as he entered; it was she who had sent the summons. "A lady, sir," she said explanatorily, "quite young and pretty, poor thing. She's been stabbed in the right shoulder, high up, but the hæmorrhage is rather bad. They brought her in a cab from Kensington, and that hasn't done her any good. But she asked, they say, to be taken to St. Luke's, so they humoured her. She's in Number Six."

A shiver passed over Allan Curtis; a half-conscious thought flashed through his mind. He hurried to the side of the indicated bed. In it there lay a deathly white face and languid form—the face and form of Hilda Watson.

As he looked at her astounded in spite of his sudden premonition, she opened her eyes and smiled wanly. "I'm so glad you've come," she faltered; "you see—he—he did pay me out, as he said he would. He followed me in a cab, got ahead of me and caught me as I was going into my rooms. But—but he got away."

Curtis struggled for his self-possession and began to examine the wound through which so much of the mandoline player's life blood had ebbed. It was narrow but terribly deep—the lung had been undoubtedly pierced. The young surgeon plugged and bandaged it with infinite care and skill, but with a heavy heart. The injured girl's breath was short and broken, her pulse alarming. He motioned to the nurse, who fetched a screen to put about the bed. It hid the doctor and his patient from the inquisitive gaze of the other inmates of the ward.

Hilda Watson glanced at it. "That means I'm dying, doesn't it?" she murmured with difficulty. "I guessed I was when I fell down. So I asked to be bought here—I wanted to see you again."

"You mustn't talk," Curtis got out, "it's bad for you. Nor must you despair—there—there's a good chance yet for you." It was a kind falsehood, and yet it hurt him to lie to her.

The mandolinist made a vague gesture of dissent. "I don't want to get better," she said; "I'm all alone in the world—and—and very poor, and I've not been well lately. That—that thing at Dirriecomb; you didn't give me an opportunity to explain. I—I only answered an advertisement for a mandoline player in a seaside troupe. I didn't know they were thieves, at first. And then Weldon took a fancy to me, and—and wouldn't pay me all my salary, so's to keep a hold over me. I know I ought to have left them, but it was hard to lose my money I had worked for—and—and I liked Dirriecomb—and—and swimming. I was sorry though that you should see him with me this afternoon. He's been worrying me ever since he came out—to be fond of him. But there, you always thought badly of me."

"Forgive me," gasped the young surgeon. He was wrestling with something more than pity. He felt that he had loved this brave, solitary woman for the past two months—loved her as a memory, as a dream. Yet all that time she had been really unknown to him. And now she had revealed herself as she was—a simple, sensitive, honourable girl. She had vindicated herself—only to die!

Hilda smiled once more and groped for his fingers.

"I'm frightened a little," she whispered feebly, for her long explanation had weakened her. "You helped me in the current. May I hold your hand now?"

Curtis clasped her nerveless palm and turned away his head. He could not see her die. With his free hand he brushed away a tear. Hilda did not observe the action; her dark lashes had drooped over her large pupils. But the soft smile lingered round her mouth.

Moment after moment stole by. The quarter became half-an-hour, the hour a whole one. Yet Hilda Watson breathed, breathed faintly but smoothly. At last she sighed heavily. Allan Curtis looked at her. Her lips were parted and her bosom rose and fell. She was sleeping. There was even a rose-leaf flush upon her cheeks.

An iron band seemed to loosen about the surgeon's heart; for an instant he fancied he would faint, so overpowering was the revulsion of feeling. Then he collected his professional dignity, and, extricating his fingers from those of the slumbering girl, he rose and crossed to the nurse.

"She will do," he said coolly. "For a while it was touch and go. I will see her again after dinner. Keep the ward as quiet as you can. And—there's a good soul—don't gossip."

* * * * *

Gossip, however, there was in plenty, both then and thereafter. For that day three months Allan Curtis married Hilda Watson, and all the medical students and half the nursing staff of St. Luke's went to the wedding. The other half attended the reception, by special request.

Mr. Charles Weldon succeeded in making his escape from justice. Nor were Mr. and Mrs. Curtis sorry, since it saved them the annoyance of figuring in a newspaper sensation.

◆

"My son," said the old gentleman who had been asked about his boy, "is deeply interested in law just now." "Ah! In a lawyer's office, I presume?" "No' in the criminal court."

"I ain't going to school any more," said a discouraged urchin. "Why?" tenderly inquired his mother. "'Cause it 'tain't any use. I can never learn to spell. The teacher keeps changing the words every day."

"I suppose you told her that she was the only girl you ever loved?" "Of course not. What kind of a fool do you take me for? Do you suppose I wanted to ruin my reputation for truth and veracity at the very outset?"

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SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"It is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Felix in vain protests his innocence.

But the cloud of suspicion gathers around him. Meantime, the child Brian has been kidnapped, and Felix is suspected of this too. He discovers a riding whip with some peculiar marks upon it.

One day an old sailor named Foley is attacked by Otto Hare's dogs.

Kraft is summoned to dress the wound, and gives Foley a draught, which results in his death.

Judith Garland resumes her threats against Dering, who replies by saying he knows the guilty parties. Geddes discovers from analysis that Kraft had poisoned Foley, but is trapped and captured by unknown gaolers.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

In Which a Chestnut Trots.

"What has brought you down here?—surely after all that happened during your last visit you might have seen the prudence of giving Wyresdale a wide berth."

Judith Garland had just closed the door of the library at Dering House, and advanced into the apartment. Against the large carved mantel-piece her brother was lounging—he answered her fretful question with a sneer.

"If you particularly want to know," he said, "the same influence that fetched me down once before—that of a German blackguard named Kraft, Dr. Joseph Kraft, to be polite. He is a retired medico, a friend of Mr. Otto Hare's, the Golden Dwarf, whose mongrels you warned me about that morning at the cross-roads."

His sister looked at him, and a characteristic disdain curled her lip. "Well, you are a fool, Neal," she retorted; "I wouldn't blame you for keeping a card up your sleeve if you understood how to play it. But you must be a born bungler to conceal from me your acquaintance with Dr. Kraft. He called on me a while ago and referred casually to you; I denied your existence."

Neal laughed. "Oh, I'm posted up in your little tarradiddle," he said; "I saw Kraft in London afterwards and the beggar sprang it on me. But don't talk of bungling; you were to get a hold on Dering and make his gooseship lay the valuable eggs we promised ourselves. You've registered precious small progress."

Judith took a seat near her critic. "I miscalculated Felix Dering's strength of mind," she murmured, biting her pink nails; "he comprehends to a nicety the power of passive resistance. He will do nothing; he challenges us to do our worst. Recently," she added, and her face darkened, "I have been studying to revenge myself upon him—his slights have galled me to desperation."

Her brother drew himself nearer. "Judith," said Neal Garland, "you spoke of my bungling the card I had kept in my sleeve. You accused me too soon—the card is not yet played. Yet the game in which it is a trump affects you. That game, my dear revengeful sister, concerns the love of Otto Hare for Esther Carew, Felix Dering's best girl. My friend Kraft is bent on getting Miss Carew for Hare—he is Hare's jackal and parasite in one. Now I—I am the ace of spades in Kraft's hand."

Judith Garland breathed heavily and her eyes glittered. "Go on," was her sole comment.

Neal rubbed his lean palms and chuckled. "Kraft," he proceeded, "not aware of the fact that I did see Dering in Wyresdale on the night of Sir Christopher's murder, has bribed me to say I did. He, of course, knows I was in the village then—I interviewed him very late the same evening. To be frank, I had come down the previous day in the hope of raising some cash out of him. The hope failed me and I wrote you for some, dating my letter from Pimlico—I wished to preserve my visit to Kraft a secret. I was in a fine rage when you twigged the post-mark."

The other was knitting her fingers indeterminately. "How," she demanded, "will your assertion, that you noticed Mr. Dering that night, affect Hare's chance of gaining Esther Carew?"

Neal grinned. "To save Dering from public scandal and possibly the gallows," he explained, "she is expected to marry Hare for the purpose of silencing him. I am merely introduced to convince her that they have a witness to the damning point in question. So, you perceive, Dering may yet require a fair comforter."

Judith abandoned herself to thought. "What is there between Kraft and you," she asked, "that warranted you in expecting to extract money from him? You confess he has bribed you at last; at first he refused you—you are disingenuous, as usual, I will have the whole truth."

Hazel Harlow will be in Belfast next week.

Her brother's jaw set. "You will, will you?" he snarled; "curse you, drop the word, I won't have it. My business is *my* business, except when it directly concerns you, and this doesn't. I've told you everything you need learn."

A pronounced yawn was Judith's answer. "You make me tired, Neal," she told him, rising, "with your stupid duplicity. If we are to work together, trust me—if not, conduct the affair yourself. But recollect, I have you by a strong cord; if Dering was in Wyresdale that night, so were you—and you are a trifle less respectable than Felix Dering. It was you who took away Brian, it was you who disposed of the child."

Neal started up, his fists clenched. "You threaten me, do you?" he cried; "Keturah Schwartz was right—you would round on me if it suited you, as soon as not."

"And so you would on me," said his sister; "therefore we are quits. But as you won't be candid about Kraft, you won't. If I require to fathom your pretty mystery I will. And be sure of this, Neal, Felix Dering is mine, to betray if I choose, to spare if I choose. Sometimes I am in the mood to ruin him, sometimes I would barter him his safety and his freedom for a moment's tenderness, a simple token of regard."

Her keen orbs moistened with irrepressible feeling, and her firm scarlet mouth quivered feverishly. Neal watched her.

"Give him his freedom and safety," repeated her brother; "which means owning who took the kid, destroying the blood-stained links of his chain, warning him against me, and letting him marry the Carew girl. 'Twon't do, Judith—I've got a stake in the matter. Not but what, if he'd any cash, I'd let him bribe me over Kraft's head. For a stiffish price, if he was on the virtuous lay, I'd sell him back the kid Brian."

There was a footfall in the room and both turned. Felix Dering, his movements deadened by the thick mat at the threshold, had entered the apartment. With a bow and a quiet apology, he passed to a book-rack, reached down a volume and left the library.

"Triple fool," muttered Judith; "what—what if he heard!"

"Not he," said Neal, abashed; "unless he was deliberately spying. But if he were he wouldn't have disturbed us at the mention of the kid's name. He'd have stayed to hear more. Not that his book mightn't have been an excuse."

Thus arguing, Neal approached the rack from which Felix had lifted a substantial tome.

"Volume four of Bruce's 'Evidence in Crimes and Misdemeanours,'" reported Neal; "bah! some magisterial job he's got charge of."

"Felix Dering is not a Justice of the Peace," demurred Judith, glancing shrewdly at the shelf; "see, it is the L to M volume that is missing. Dering's brain is still busy with one subject; the book he has carried off will contain a section on 'Murder.'"

As she spoke a clock on a bracket chimed the quarter after two. Neal started.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated; "I shall catch it if I don't skip—I have an appointment with Kraft at half-past. Ta-ta, Judith, keep a watch upon Dering, and write me if he tries any detective business on me. Its a bit thick, a common murderer posing as an amateur sleuth-hound. Luckily he doesn't know who I am, if he should have heard me mention the kid's name."

Judith pointed to the glass. "Look there," was all she said.

Neal did so. Both their faces were reflected in the polished crystal. There was no question as to the similarity; even an owl in broad sunshine could have discerned a kinship. The man winced. "Let the bounder guess," was his decision; "we can bring him to his knees, if he should suspect the truth. Not that he's likely to, if you don't blab." The speaker caught up his stiff felt hat and clapped it on his brow. "You love this Dering," he added, with a fierce deliberation, "and Keturah Schwartz says no woman in love is a really safe pal so long as her chap's not in the gang. Now you fling us, either for Dering's sake or to spite him in some cat's fashion, and I'll make you sit up. Yours is too pretty a throat to cut, so take a hint from your affectionate brother."

A shudder ran through Judith; for her own ends and in the pursuit of a subtle plot to intimidate Felix Dering and, at the same time, to retain his respect by enlisting his sympathy, she *had* blabbed. She shrank from Neal aghast, a horrible sensation checking her breath

Pleased by the effect of his "hint," Neal swaggered off, twisting his moustache, to thread the bye-lanes of Wyresdale on his way from Dering House to Wyresdale Park. He did not perceive that, as he went, a figure, on a chestnut gelding, kept pace with him by dexterous parallels and devious paths.

The expression of sinister content had not died from Neal's countenance when he rang at the massive portal of the Golden Dwarf's stately residence.

Tickled by his brutal empire over Judith, he was too absorbed to observe, in his usual acute manner, the smart dog-cart, that, harnessed to a fidgety bay mare of great size and strength, waited, under the charge of a trim groom, on the gravel terrace in front of the house.

The door swung wide, and Neal Garland, rousing, saw that in the splendid hall Joseph Kraft and Otto Hare were strolling side by side, one huge and meditative, the second diminutive and impatient.

While he entered, they turned, and the German strode forward, peering at his heavy chronometer as he came.

"Ah, there you are, my dear Mr. Garland," he cooed, softly; "punctuality is a virtue, for rogues as well as honest folk. We, on our part, are anxious not to waste your time; so, we anticipated your exactitude."

He motioned to the servant, who threw the doors wide.

"After you, Mr. Garland," observed Kraft, waving a plump palm in the direction of the dog-cart. Neal glanced inquisitively at the singular form of the Golden Dwarf, but climbed the vehicle, nevertheless. It had a double step—Otto Hare was compelled to use them both. Kraft followed and the groom completed the quartette.

Otto Hare caught up the whip and dashed off at a reckless pace, unconscious that, as the dog-cart whirled down the lower half of the avenue, a tall chestnut was walked out of a leafy by-path and cantered after it.

When the vehicle cleared the gates and swerved into the lane beyond, the chestnut had rounded the curve of the avenue; its rider noted the route selected by the Golden Dwarf. Some moments subsequently the former marked from the gates the turn taken by the bay mare at the top of the lane.

The Golden Dwarf drove with consummate skill but obvious impatience, Neal studied his handsome, delicate features and slender limbs. Otto Hare awakened to the scrutiny and frowned.

Near the Rosery he halted the bay mare, flung the reins to Kraft, and descended; Neal prepared to scramble down also. But the German laid a fat finger-tip on Neal's shoulder and arrested him.

"You are staying at the Wheatsheaf?" he said. Neal replied in the affirmative.

"Good," responded Joseph Kraft; "it is not far.

Tell your friends about Hazel Harlow.

When your task is over, Mr. Garland, I will accompany you to the Wheatsheaf for your bag, and then convey you to Duchester to catch the express. It leaves at four o'clock. You understand?"

"I suppose so," growled Neal, "and what about pay?"

Kraft patted a vest-pocket. "I have an envelope in reach," he said; "containing ten notes for twenty pounds each. We will transfer them as we go to Duchester. And now be off; Mr. Hare is waiting."

Joining the Golden Dwarf, Neal Garland went beside him through the Rosery garden. Once Otto Hare looked up.

"You have arranged everything with Dr. Kraft?" he queried, almost scornfully.

"Everything," admitted Neal, "but I don't like being hustled out of the place as though I couldn't be trusted."

Otto Hare shrugged his shoulders. "You should have told Dr. Kraft that," he retorted, and knocked at the neat entrance of the Rosery. Barbara opened to them and the Golden Dwarf led Neal Garland into Mrs. Carew's pleasant sitting-room. Its mistress was reading her inevitable novel; Esther was playing softly at the piano. Mrs. Carew started from her seat, and Esther, growing suddenly pale, abandoned the keys.

"My dear Mr. Hare," said her mother, with effusion, "what a delightful surprise!"

Otto Hare bowed. "May I introduce Mr. Garland?" he replied, "a friend of mine who I am anxious should make your daughter's acquaintance."

Mrs. Carew greeted Neal cordially, but Esther quailed as she encountered his insolent dark eyes. So much did she fear the Golden Dwarf that her terror extended itself even to his associates.

Otto Hare drew Mrs. Carew away, leaving Esther and Neal together. Neal leaned over the piano—Esther had sunk upon her music-stool.

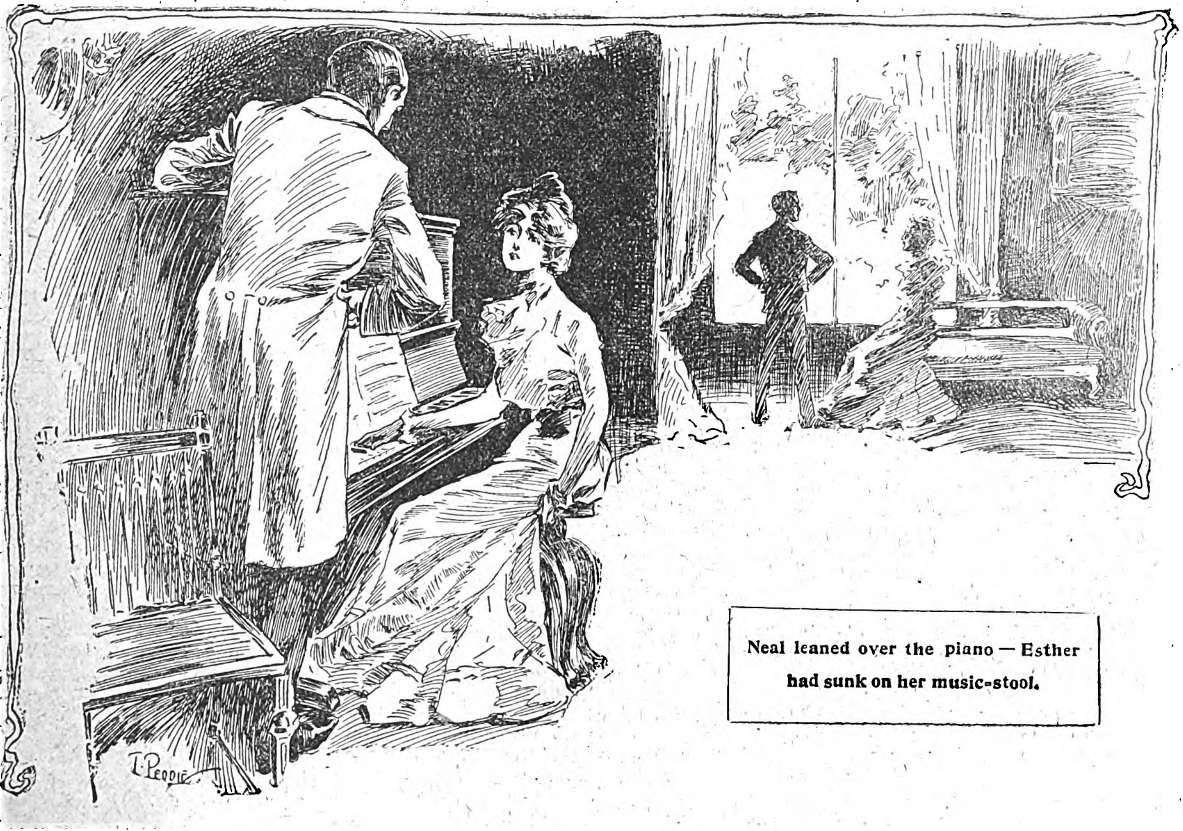
"I am here, ostensibly, Miss Carew," he began, "as a casual caller. In point of fact I have a duty to perform. I happen to be under considerable obligation to Mr. Hare and have travelled down from London at his request to make a short private statement to yourself."

At the mention of the Golden Dwarf Esther's cheeks had waxed deathly white; her wrist slipped from its resting-place on the rosewood cover and struck a shrill discord.

"In the night of Wednesday, the twenty-third of July last," added Neal, "I was coming from Wyresdale Park when I saw, purely by accident, a young fellow, in a tweed cap and suit, with tan riding-boots. He was walking, apparently seeking to evade observation by the cross-roads. I have been in Wyresdale now for a day or two and have seen him once more—I believe his name is Mr. Felix Dering."

Esther's blue orbs, wandering distressfully about the apartment, met those of Otto Hare. The Golden Dwarf smiled—a cruel, vindictive smile. Esther remembered his pledge at the garden-party, "In two days I will satisfy you of Dering's crime." This was the second day—and he had, indeed, revealed to her the depth of his power over the fate of her lover. There was a low moan and a fall, Esther, slipping from her seat, had swooned. Mrs. Carew hurried to her.

"Oh, these faints," she cried, supporting the girl upon her knee; "they grow more and more frequent.



Neal leaned over the piano — Esther had sunk on her music-stool.

Hazel Harlow will travel from town to town.

Mr. Hare, I—I fear I must ask you to run away; it is better for her to recover alone. If you would kindly ring, Mr. Garland."

Neal obeyed and Mrs. Carew shot a fretful whisper to Otto Hare. "You always agitate her in this fashion," she murmured; "I—I almost begin to despair."

The Golden Dwarf surveyed the pallid visage of the motionless girl. "I think you have commenced to despond in the hour of victory, Mrs. Carew," he answered. Then, Barbara responding to Neal's summons, Otto Hare took the latter's arm and led him away.

At the earthern kerb close by, the dog-cart waited—the groom had changed his position, and held the reins while Kraft dozed beside him. The German leaned from his place as they approached.

"Well?" he demanded. The Golden Dwarf laughed—an icy, pitiless merriment.

"Miss Carew fainted suddenly," replied Otto Hare; "hence our brief stay. Mr. Garland, we part here, the Doctor will accompany you to your hotel and then to Duchester. Good afternoon."

He bowed to Neal as that worthy climbed to the back-seat of the dog-cart. When it drove off he was still gazing at it, his features wrinkled by their cruel laughter.

As the vehicle diminished in the vista of the macadam thoroughfare, a chestnut gelding was spurred from an adjacent by-way and followed it at a swift trot. The rider was Felix Dering.

Half a mile further on, the dog-cart paused at the Wheatsheaf—a gaunt, brick-built public-house. Felix leapt the chestnut into a field and tarried behind a screening hedge. Its brief halt terminated, the dog-cart took the main road to Duchester. The gelding was spurred on to the macadam again, and cantered forwards, holding in sight the fast bay, the dog-cart, the groom, the fat German, and the figure of Neal Garland.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"MAD AS A MARCH HARE!"

"I'M afraid you must wait a little for this, Barbara. father is out just now, but he'll make it up and send it down immediately he comes in. We're—we're short-handed at present."

Barbara Preston, the trim maid-servant from the Rosery, gazed in astonishment at the pretty face of Connie Forester. It was tear-stained and pitiful, and the ripe nether lip trembled uncontrollably.

"Dear heart, Miss Connie," she said; "what is the trouble?—you do look wretched, worse than Miss Esther, poor soul, and she's miserable enough. It's her the prescription's for; Mrs. Carew called in Dr. Vavasour last night. Miss Esther was out of one faint into another."

Constance Forester wiped her eyes and sobbed. "I'm sorry about Esther," faltered the chemist's daughter, "but perhaps I'm a bit worse off than she is. I don't mind you knowing, Barbara: it's—it's Mr. Geddes. He went off yesterday afternoon and he hasn't been home since. We are afraid some—some accident has happened to him."

The other sighed. "Hope for the best, Miss Connie," she said; "I don't despair yet of hearing from my Ted, as was took out of the cell at the police-station six weeks ago, where he ought never to have been, for he wouldn't have hurt Sir Christopher to save his own life. Though I do dread harm's come to him, else he'd have written to me, sure."

Connie choked down her grief. "Of—of course I've no right to—to cry over Mr. Geddes," she declared, "and if I'd the least scrap of self-respect I shouldn't do it. But he was so kind and cheerful and—you understand what father is."

"I'd worse luck," rejoined Barbara; "but as for you're not crying over Mr. Geddes, I'll promise he's thinking about you wherever he is. Why, Miss Connie, there's not a woman in Wyresdale that doesn't realise how it's been with you and Mr. Geddes. And if you have taken your time to say 'Yes,' it's what we all have to do, or what would people think of us?"

"People might think anything they choose," gasped Connie, "if he'd only come back. I wouldn't feel so frightened, but Wyresdale hasn't seemed the same place lately, what with murders and deaths and disappearances, it's as bad as London must be."

"True, for you, miss," agreed the maid-servant: "well, I'll be getting off—you'll send Miss Esther's medicine—not that medicine'll do her much good as long as she can't see Mr. Dering without creeping out at the kitchen door like a thief. Mark my words, Miss Connie, if her mother marries her to Mr. Hare, who isn't more than half a man at the most, she'll die. And so I'd tell the old cat, if I lost my situation through it."

With which valorous assertion Barbara departed, and Connie, retiring to the corner behind the dispensing-screen, perched herself on the top of a wooden stool and dissolved into tears. Her fit of passionate despondency was at its crisis when Caleb Forester walked into the shop. Connie leapt up and ran to him.

The chemist glanced at her anxiously and shook his head. "No news yet, my dear," he murmured. "Brasher was not at the station, but the sergeant in charge said he would ask him to step round as soon as he arrived. You—you mustn't weep like this, Connie, what will the Inspector imagine?"

"I hate the Inspector," snapped his daughter, plying a damp handkerchief; "if it hadn't been for you wanting me to sweeten him, Archie—Mr. Geddes and I might have understood one another by now."

"Then, for his sake, you must not be reckless," retorted the chemist. "As you wish Mr. Brasher to restore Geddes to you, and, more particularly, to me and the shop, don't awaken the demon of jealousy in his bosom. The green-eyed monster plays curious tricks, even with police-officers, and it was only yesterday I gave him formal permission to sue for your young affections. Recollect there is no great occasion for alarm—Geddes may have sprained an ankle, or wandered too far afield to return conveniently over-night."

Connie threw off her father's palm, which he had laid persuasively on her wrist, and darted into the shelter of the screen; Michael Brasher—upright, military, correct, was crossing the road towards the Wyresdale Pharmacy. He saluted Caleb Forester as he entered the latter's establishment.

"Good-morning, Mr. Forester," he said: "I believe you were at the station five minutes back—sorry I was out. What's this I hear—something about Geddes having taken French leave."

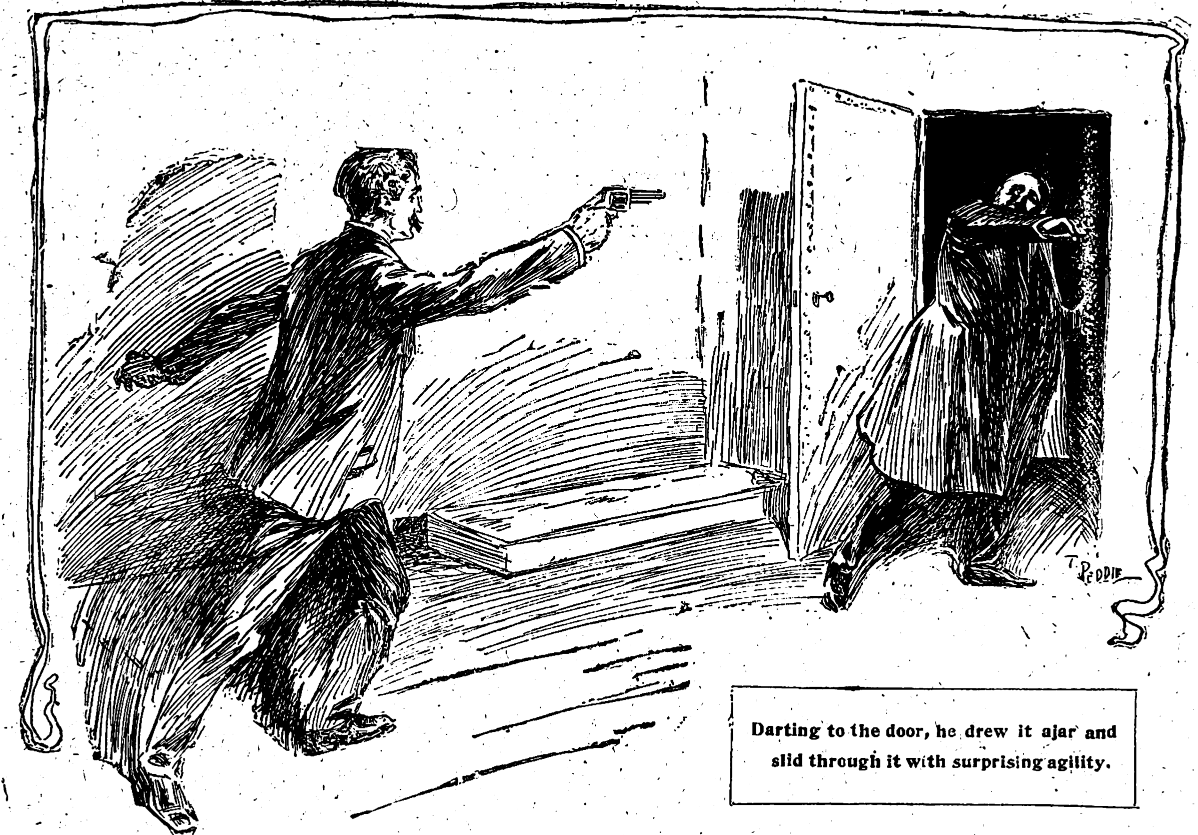
There was a stamp of a small foot behind the screen—Connie was dabbing her hot cheeks with her handkerchief, wetted under the dispensary tap, and had selected one means of expressing her view of the Inspector's observation.

"Not quite," responded Caleb, nervously, comprehending himself between two fires, Michael Brasher's jealousy and Connie's indignation; "Geddes went out yesterday afternoon, when he had summoned me to speak to you, in fact. Since then he has not been seen or heard of. As he was most regular in his habits, the thing is peculiar."

Mr. Brasher produced his pocket-book. "Any idea of his probable movements?" demanded the Inspector.

"None whatever," explained the chemist; "but my daughter may have gathered, by chance, some indication of his purpose in going out. Connie, my dear."

Hazel Harlow is in Rugby this week.



Darting to the door, he drew it ajar and slid through it with surprising agility.

At the signal Connie marched from behind the mahogany panels, calm and indifferent. Michael Brasher bowed deferentially.

"Did you happen to learn from Geddes, my dear," queried her father, "where he was bound yesterday?"

"No," said Constance Forester, biting her lip to conceal its still obstinate tremor.

"Thank you," answered the Inspector, "have you noticed anything exceptional about his bearing of late—any suggestion of personal worry or ill-health?"

"No," repeated Connie, and Caleb echoed the disclaimer. Michael Brasher recorded them both.

"How was he dressed?" pursued the Inspector, "usual brown serge suit, I suppose, and stiff felt hat, as usual—Geddes was a conservative type. I'll trouble you in a moment, Mr. Forester, for a memo. of his underclothing, so far as you know his wardrobe. Had he a stick or an umbrella?"

"He seldom carried either," said the chemist. Michael Brasher shrugged his shoulders.

"Ordinary costume, unknown destination," he summarised; "Not much to start on, is it? However, I'll do what I can, Mr. Forester. He may turn up on his own—he's been wrapping himself up a great deal in amateur detective work, with reference to Sir Christopher Dering's murder and the death of your brother-in-law, Mr. Forester—Foley, I mean, and I thought Geddes rather incoherent on the subject yesterday, I must admit—he had a dead mouse and talked of secret poisons."

Constance Forester stood pondering; when she roused it was to speak decisively. "Mr. Brasher," she said, with much coldness; "your sneers at Mr. Geddes are his business and not mine. But perhaps I ought to tell you this. He had a curious article in the shop a while before he left—a thing like a revolver, but with a rubber bulb instead of a butt. He was filling part of the tube with ammonia—he explained that it was arranged to discharge the stuff at—at tramps or—or dogs—for self-protection."

Michael Brasher wrote down the item of information. "Looks to me a case of temporary aberration," he commented, "if you'll pardon my voicing the opinion, Miss Forester. He wasn't a cyclist, I think?"

Caleb Forester responded in the negative.

"Exactly," responded the Inspector; "what value would an ammonia-pistol be to him—unless, indeed, he wanted it for his amateur detective proceedings."

Mr. Brasher paused to stroke his smartly-cropped Geddes' clothing," he said; "in the next half-hour, beard. "You can let me have a full inventory of Trot your boy round with it. Good-day, Mr. Forester," he added; "good-day, Miss Connie—I will communicate any clue I get upon."

Saluting deliberately, Michael Brasher strode into the High Street; he muttered to himself as he stalked down it.

"Mad, for a thousand!" he said; "mad as a March hare. That is what comes of trying to be cleverer than the practised brains of an intelligent police-force. Yes, my canny Scot, I shall find you in a ditch with straws in your curly brown locks. You'd better have stuck to your pills."

The Inspector was referring to no less a person than Archibald Geddes.

(To be continued.)

Hazel Harlow will be in Belfast next week.

CHECKMATED.

A Story of a Song.

When Matthew Stoneleigh set his mind on having a thing he usually got it in the end, no matter how impossible it seemed at the outset. But the less said about the means he employed the better. He was a music publisher by profession, and had built up a business of enormous proportions; one, moreover, which still continued to grow. What Stoneleigh had on his mind would have kept most men awake at nights, but he contrived to sleep like a top. Strange tales could have been told of certain business-like transactions in which he had had a hand. Struggling composers had received a few pounds for work which had afterwards yielded him the same figure in thousands. This fact did not prevent him from posing as their benefactor.

He was terribly ambitious and inordinately vain. His first ambition had been to get rich. Money, he told himself, was power. And now he was rich, but not satisfied. Certainly he had acquired power, but hardly the sort which suited his fancy. Society's doors, open to many composers of songs he published, were closed to him. Now, he was of the opinion that there was not half so much difficulty attached to composing a song as to selling the same. Still, that was neither here nor there. He wanted to get into Society. It was his supreme desire, as, indeed, it had been the ruling passion of many before him. By this time he was firmly convinced that money could not furnish the *entree*, but it occurred to him that ability might. What was he to do?

He made up his mind to become a composer. He was in possession of more than ordinary musical gifts, or he had not risen to the position he now occupied; but he lacked the creative faculty. However, a large number of manuscripts passed through his hands, and by these he profited. He composed songs, though how much of these productions traced their origin to his own head was a question. He chuckled to find that the composition of a single song had earned him more honour than the publication of a hundred and one had done.

One morning he was seated in his private office, on the best of terms with himself, when a clerk came to him with a lady's card. Close on the clerk's heels followed the owner of the card, no less a personage than Madame Carruthers, England's premier soprano.

Stoneleigh bowed low, as much to conceal a look of exultation as to express his homage.

"I want a song," said the lady, coming immediately to the point of her visit. "Not an old one, mind. I desire to know if it is in your power to furnish me with a new one which will exactly suit my voice. You are acquainted with my style. Really, I have not had a satisfactory ballad for ages."

"That is not surprising," said Stoneleigh, "since it is impossible to produce a melody worthy of your interpretation."

Madame laughed, but did not seem displeased.

"Just think of Constantine, the tenor," she continued. "The song he got from your house last autumn has turned the heads of half the musical world. Can you not serve me as you have served him? I declare that my stock of songs is growing quite stale."

Stoneleigh appeared to be turning something over in his mind.

"May I venture to offer you a song I myself have composed?" he asked presently.

"Oh! certainly. Charmed to try it, I am sure. Have you it with you?"

"No. The fact is, it happens to be in my head at present," he said, with a covert smile. "I have not yet committed it to paper."

"When can you let me have it?"

"In eight days, if that will be soon enough."

"Say five. To-day is Monday. Can you manage it by Friday night?"

"It shall be at your house by then," he replied.

She took her departure.

"The chance of a lifetime," murmured the publisher, the moment he was alone.

Presently the door reopened, and his clerk appeared a second time.

"Well, Johnson ?" he inquired, slightly raising his eyebrows.

"That fellow Macdonald is here again, sir," said the clerk. "Can't get rid of him anyway."

"What's his game this time ?"

"Can't guess. Says he wants to see you most particularly, and has almost gone on his knees for an interview. Poor beggar ! he looks as though he's got to the last straw."

"Starving ?"

"Not far from it."

"Hum ! Better show him up."

The clerk did so.

"Well, what do you want ?" demanded the publisher, when Macdonald and he were alone.

"I've brought a song to show you, sir," said the newcomer, in a husky voice ; "and I want you to consider it. Oh, sir, I beseech you to give it a trial. You will never regret it, I assure you."

"Hum ! I suppose it's similar stuff to the rot you've thrust on me before ?"

"No ; it is the best thing I have done in my life, and the only hope I have left. Oh, sir, I am starving, and I have not only myself to consider. There is my wife and my little lad. I beg you to help me for their sakes."

"Why don't you turn your hand to something else, instead of wasting your time composing songs that won't sell ? Why don't you get coals in, or clean windows, or sweep a crossing ? Either of these will prevent you from starving."

Macdonald was silent.

"I haven't time to bother with you," continued the publisher. "Take your precious song elsewhere and leave me alone."

"I have already been with it to eight publishers, and not one of them will see me."

"Hum ! You've failed elsewhere, and now your only chance is to fall back on me, eh ? This is what comes of me being tender-hearted."

"Mr. Stoneleigh !" said the man, with sudden passion, "If you send me away, do you know what I shall do ?"

"No idea."

"I shall tear my song up, and then I shall go to the dogs."

"Tut, tut. Empty words, my dear fellow. However, I suppose I shall have to look at your precious song." (He had intended to do so all along.) "What's it about ? Tennyson's 'Tears, Idle Tears !' Phew ! What a coincidence. I happen to be setting the same words to music myself. But leave your manuscript, and I will consider it."

"And when may I call for your decision ?"

"Oh, in about two days."

"I trust it may be favourable, sir."

"Anyhow, you will not be kept long in suspense. Good-day."

An hour's study convinced Stoneleigh that Macdonald's song was a veritable masterpiece.

"Good idea, that of mine, to say I was setting Tennyson's poem," he told himself. "Rather rough on Macdonald, I must confess, but it's entirely the beggar's own fault. Besides, he'll pull through all right, and if he turns his attention to a more lucrative employment I shall have simply done him a kindness. When will idiots learn sense ?"

Macdonald remained idle during the two following days, his state of mind putting any work of importance out of the question. He was passing through deep waters. Most of the time he sat staring into the fire, his elbows supported by his knees, his chin buried in his hands. At length the hour of his appointment with the publisher drew near.

"You will not be long away, Richard ?" said his wife, handing him his hat. "I shall count the moments till you return."

"If it is accepted I shall be back in half an hour," he said

"And if not ?" She just managed to whisper the words.

A look shot into his eyes which terrified her.

"I—I—don't know," he stammered, "what I shall do."

He walked out of the room. Her hand flew to her heart. Oh ! what—what would her husband do if his manuscript were rejected ? In the hour of her direst need her eyes rested upon her son (a lad of ten summers), who was carving quaint figures out of cork with a small pocket-knife. She darted to his side, caught his arm and cried :

"Quick, Charley ! Attend to what I say. Run after your father. Don't let him know you are following him. He must not be out of your sight a single instant. You understand ? Now run. Make no mistake."

A look of comprehension dawned in the boy's eyes, and, grasping his cap, he hastened out of the room.

Some time later Macdonald was ushered into Stoneleigh's private office.

"Oh ! take a seat," said the latter, without raising his head. He was writing a letter.

The composer did not sit.

Stoneleigh finished his letter, inclosed it in an envelope, and put his pen behind his ear.

"Well, I've tried over your song, Macdonald," he said, moistening the envelope flap with his tongue.

There was a blank pause. Stoneleigh was hoping there would not be a scene.

"And—er—I'm sorry to say it, you know, but there's absolutely no way out of it——"

He placed the envelope on his blotting pad, addressed it, and then tossed it aside.

"The fact is—er—your song is nothing whatever in our line. So I am reluctantly compelled to return it to you."

He opened a drawer at his right hand, took out the manuscript, and extended it to its author.

"I won't have it !" cried Macdonald, with a choke in his voice.

"My dear fellow ! You—Halloa !"

The door had opened a few inches, and a boy appeared in the aperture. It was Charley, who had somehow eluded the clerk's vigilance, and was bent on fulfilling his mother's injunction to the letter.

"Here's a queer pass," said the publisher. "Who are you, I should like to know ?"

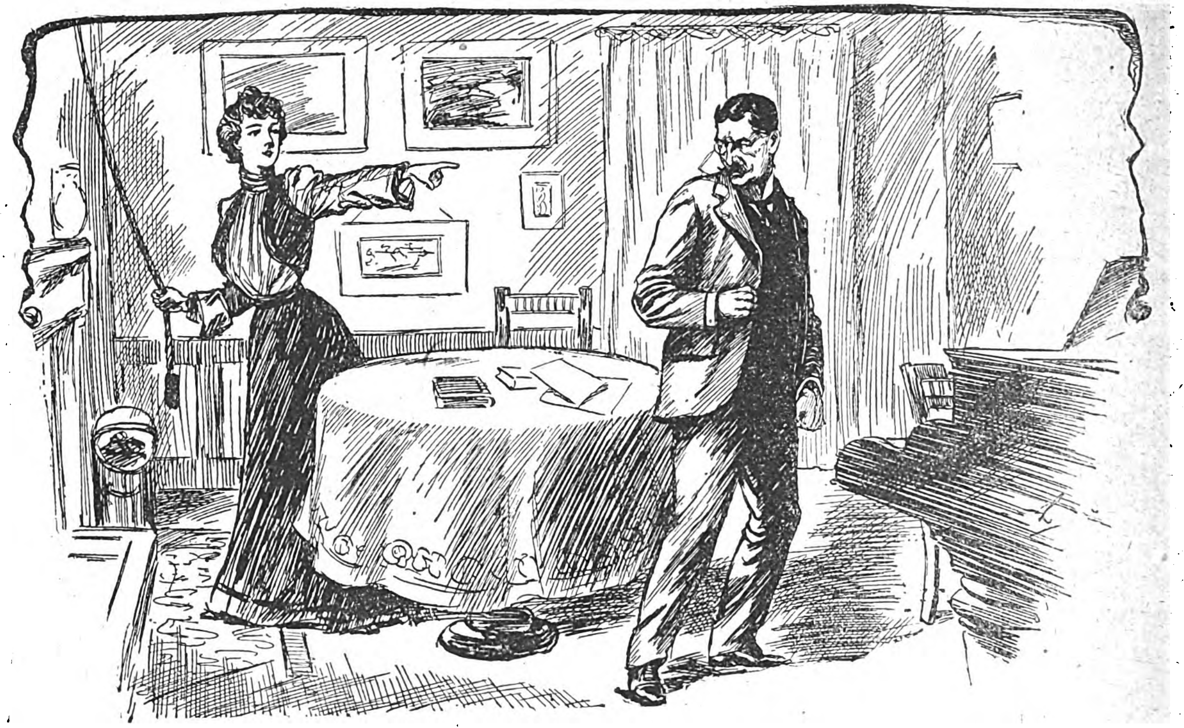
"Please, sir, this is my father," said the boy, utterly at a loss for another answer.

There was a moment's inaction, which afforded Stoneleigh an opportunity of gently, but firmly, forcing the song upon the unwilling Macdonald.

Then an unexpected circumstance happened. Macdonald, almost maddened by the torture he was enduring, dashed the manuscript to the floor and fled from the room.

"How confoundedly awkward," exclaimed Stoneleigh.

Hazel Harlow will travel from town to town.



Madame ran to the bell and placed her hand on it.

His eyes fell upon Charley, who was following in the wake of his distracted parent, and an idea was conceived.

"Hi! boy; half a minute. Take this song to your father, and here's a shilling for you. That's right; stuff it up your coat. Now cut."

This time the publisher's inward comment was: "How decidedly fortunate."

The same night, upon reaching home, he took a roll of manuscript from his desk. It was an exact copy of Macdonald's song, and the end he now had in view was to make many cunning alterations, write out a fresh copy, and then claim the composition as his own work. The fruit of his endeavours was a song similar to Macdonald's, yet not the same.

Did he feel any remorse by reason of having wronged Macdonald? Not he! Selfish to the heart's core, no thought of another's suffering crossed his mind, or had disturbed him, if it had done so. His only fear was lest Madame Carruthers should disapprove of the song he was taking her. Yet the more he thought of the song, the more he regarded as unlikely that she would be anything but charmed. This accounted for the confidence he manifested as he made his way to her house at the end of the allotted time, a confidence almost disdainful.

Yes, madame had given orders for him to be admitted to her presence. He followed the footman like one in a dream, seeing before him the attainment of his ambition. Presently he was bending over his patron's hand, voicing the gratitude he experienced on account of the signal honour she was conferring upon him. But she regarded him coldly. Something in her attitude should have warned him of impending calamity.

"You've brought the song, I suppose?" she said.

He handed her a case. This she unfastened and withdrew the inclosure. She opened the song and ran her eyes down the first page. What was that expression dawning on her face? Surprise? Nay, bewilderment. An adroit movement caused her to stand with her back to her companion. It was well he could not see her face.

The publisher had seated himself on the softest of chairs, and was gazing around the room appreciatively. A beautiful room, very large, and artistically appointed. In one corner, quite twelve yards away from him, was a grand piano and a piece of music open on it. He was curious to know the name of the song the distinguished soprano had been practising, but his eyes could not span the distance.

Madame still had the manuscript in her hand, but she was not studying it. Her busy brain was formulating a scheme whereby to compass a most desirable end.

Presently she approached the piano, removed the song, and in its place put the one the publisher had brought.

"Will you be so kind as to play it for me?" she requested.

He bowed and seated himself at the piano. The next moment the room was filled with melody, to which madame listened almost spellbound.

"Exquisite!" she murmured, when the last note had died away. "If it would not be trespassing on your

Hazel Harlow is in Rugby this week.

generosity, there is another song I should like you to play for me."

"Delighted," he said, and she placed the song in question before him. It was Macdonald's manuscript!

Stoneleigh went white, and beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. He was a man difficult to rob of self-control, but there was a limit to his endurance.

"Why don't you play it?" inquired Madame Carruthers, with simulated surprise.

What could he say? What could he do? The lady's move was so powerful that nothing, absolutely nothing, could stand in face of it.

"Stoneleigh, the game's up," she said. "And now I know that reports which I refused to credit are true."

Stoneleigh saw a picture of himself thrust from the society of pure women and honourable men. He sprang to his feet, a bitter curse on his lips. Madame ran to a bell and placed her hand on it.

"If you move, I ring," she said calmly.

He did not move.

"Don't ring yet," he said hoarsely.

Her hand fell to her side.

"What shall you do?" he asked.

"Proclaim you to the world for what you are."

"Who will believe you?"

"Who will disbelieve me?"

He took a step forward. Her hand flew to the bell. He stopped.

"Have you a price?"

She shook her head.

"You have not spared others, and you shall not be spared. You have had your day, and the reckoning time has come. You felt sure that you had seen the last of Macdonald's manuscript, but Fate ruled otherwise."

"I could have believed anything but that he would come to you with it."

"He didn't come to me. Two days ago, as I was driving from the city, a block occurred, and upon lowering the glass I perceived a crowd and a policeman emerging from their midst bearing the unconscious form of a boy, who, it transpired, had been knocked down by a passing vehicle. I offered the use of my carriage to convey the sufferer to the nearest hospital. Upon being informed that the boy was not really hurt, but only stunned, I decided to take him to my house instead.

"Now comes the most curious part of the whole affair. When I removed my patient's coat I discovered the manuscript of a song. Need I say more? Perhaps a few words may not be out of place. I tried the song and was charmed by it, and that same night I dispatched a messenger to bring the father and mother of my patient to their son, having got their address from the song. Macdonald shall receive the recognition he deserves, and as for you, what I now know others shall know before many days are past. The wrong you have done shall be redressed."

The following night the newsboys were shouting: "Mysterious disappearance of Matthew Stoneleigh."

* * *

SCIENTISTS claim that smoking injures the eyesight. But this is not true. The boy with a stump in his mouth can see his father ten streets away.

WATTS: "It is a lucky man who can truthfully say that he has lived with his wife for ten years without her once calling him a brute."

POTTS: "I can make just that boast—that is, if you except the occasions when she has insisted that I was a donkey."

A POLICE INSPECTOR'S DAUGHTER

SAYS BILE BEANS SAVED HER LIFE.

ULCERATED STOMACH, INDIGESTION and DEBILITY CURED

SEVEN YEARS OF TORTURE ENDED.

From the brink of the grave to perfect health is a tremendous change. Yet this is the change which Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness have worked in Miss Jenny Newton, daughter of the late Police-Inspector Newton, of Grove Street, Wakefield. Here is her own story as a *Wakefield Herald* reporter had it from her lips: "I have been a martyr to indigestion and ulcerated stomach for nearly seven years. It would startle people were I to write down the list of so-called remedies that I have tried for my complaint. I went to the Clayton Hospital for two years, and the doctors at that institution did me some little good, but only for a very short time. Then I was treated by three well-known doctors in Wakefield, but none of them did me any real good; and I became very weary and downcast. Abandoning hopes of obtaining a cure by consulting medical men, I commenced with patent medicines, and on these my mother has spent a small fortune. It was all to no purpose, however. I became thin, weak and emaciated—a very wretched-looking object, I know, and no wonder, I could eat nothing for weeks. Nothing would stay on my stomach, and for a long time I lived on hot milk alone. My head was always aching, as was my body; I had terrible pains in the region of my stomach and heart; I lost flesh rapidly and I could not sleep, I felt always low-spirited, and I got so bad that I could not go upstairs without stopping once or twice to rest. I felt as though I didn't care whether I got better or not. My mother had given up all hopes of my recovery when one day she saw an advertisement about Charles Forde's Bile Beans, and what wonderful cures they had effected in some cases. She bought a box and I began to take them right off. In a few days I began to pick up splendidly. It was really marvellous! All the pains I had gradually disappeared. I commenced to sleep soundly, and got up refreshed; began to take solid food, and to be able to digest it. I kept on with the Beans, and as the result I was soon perfectly well again. I can now eat and digest any food. This I owe to Bile Beans entirely! They are worth their weight in gold! Nearly everyone who has seen me has asked what it is that has brought about the great change, and I have told them with the utmost possible pleasure." Miss Newton's mother, who was present, brought the interview to a close with the remark: "You may tell everybody if you like, that Bile Beans, and nothing else, have saved my daughter's life! She is now a bright and happy girl."

Charles Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness are without doubt superior to all known medicines for stomach disorders and diseases, indigestion, liver and kidney disorders, constipation, headache, debility, nervousness, anæmia, female ailments, chill, rheumatism, pimples, face sores, as a restorative after influenza, as well as for palpitation, pains in the chest, difficulty in breathing, and pains between the shoulders. All chemists stock Bile Beans, or you may obtain direct from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 and 120, London Wall, London, E.C., by sending price, 1s. 1½d. or 2s. 9d. per box (2s. 9d. box contains three times 1s. 1½d).

A FREE SAMPLE will be forwarded you if you write for same to above address, enclosing a penny stamp to pay postage, and mentioning this paper.

THE SEA'S RESTITUTION.

The third day out from Havre a fog came up and made the world opaque. For two days it did not lift or thin, and it was difficult to believe, in spite of the log, that the ship was making any headway at all. It seemed almost as if the world had ceased to be, or as if it existed but in a state of flux, and as if we enchanted ones, accursed with an immunity from the common destruction, were left to contemplate the nothingness.

Then, to add to our sense of doom, a young baby was said to have died on shipboard. At first everyone took it for granted that its mother must have been a steerage or, at the least, a second cabin passenger. It seemed unlikely that death would be so impertinent as to enter the first cabin. But it was learned that the destroyer had been even more insolent than that—it had taken a child much favoured of fortune, the heir to great wealth.

I went to visit Mrs. Morell, the child's mother. She was tall and white, with wide eyes, which must have been beautiful when she was happy. Now a sort of blankness, like that of the air and the sea, had come into them.

I could not see her soul for her sorrow. She offered no confidence ; indeed, my sympathy could not reach to her dulled sense. Her grief was between us, impenetrable as the fog through which the ship crept cautiously.

"The captain asked me if I would be willing to have my baby buried at sea," she said to me in a voice which reminded me of a mournful bell, "and I told him I had no objection whatever."

"No !" I ejaculated in amazed surprise.

"Nothing is more peaceful than the depths of the sea," she responded, and it being night she asked me to walk upon the deck with her under cover of the darkness.

More in sympathy than from curiosity I inquired :

"Your husband is awaiting you in America ?"

"Yes," she replied, her voice strangely colourless. "He will be at the wharf. He will expect to see the baby in my arms. He has never seen the baby, you know. I have been with my mother, who lives in Paris, and the day that baby was three months old I started for home."

We paused by the bulwark and she looked down into the shadowy trough of the wave.

"It will make a soft cradle," she said. Her courage wrung my heart.

"Where do you find the strength to endure such a grief ?" I cried.

"Indeed," she responded, with the mournful shadow of a smile, "that I cannot tell. It does not seem as if it were really I who has met with this great misfortune. If it were I whose plans have been so altered and whose hopes have been so dashed, surely I would not be tearless like this. It is Adele, my nurse, who weeps."

The next morning the captain read the burial service with solemn accent, and into the colourless sea, through the white vacancy of the fog, the little one was lowered reverently. I stood beside the mother, and I would have sustained her with my arm but that she gently repulsed me. She swayed a little from side to side, but there were no tears on the face that looked out of the quaint pointed hood of her sea cloak. She stared ahead of her at the stupid fog — she looked baffled, into obscurity.

Suddenly, an hour after the funeral, the mist lifted. It rolled up as a curtain rolls up, and it was a saffron colour, gleaming and splendid. When it had lifted, a sparkling sea was revealed and a cloudless sky. The world became radiant. It seemed to exult in its beauty. Mrs. Morell cast a look of reproach at this vaunting of nature's youth and joy and went to her cabin.

Through the day messages were sent her, and delicate evidences of sympathy, but her maid alone returned thanks. The next morning found her still in seclusion. More than one of us thought of invading that sacred solitude, but at the last forbore.

It was the afternoon of that day that the man on the bridge espied an object upon the horizon at the south. It was a black speck, visible in a short time to all of us.

"It's a ship's longboat," was the verdict at last. "It is manned and flying a flag of distress."

The course of our ship was changed. We went racing through the green water, rejoicing in the zest of the hour, in the action, the event.

Presently we were standing off cautiously from a longboat manned with haggard men.

"Who are you ?" shouted the captain as the companion ladder was being lowered.

"All that are left of the crew and the passengers of the *Nina Celeste*, sir."

"How lost ?"

"By fire, sir, two nights ago. The first boat lowered capsized. The women—there were two—were lowered into it. But the men were frightened, the flames made such headway, so they jumped. We are all who remain. Three of us were picked up from the overturned boat, but the others were dragged down in the swirl of the boat ; it got to going round and round."

"Was the *Nina Celeste* a freighter ?"

"A freighter, sir, bound from Bermuda to New York, carrying a cargo of lilies and hemp. It was out of its course owing to a fog."

The boat's load came on board—fifteen pale men—and one of them carried something in his arms.

"What do you carry ?" asked the captain. "Is it a child ?"

"Yes, sir. It is the babe of one of the women who were lost. I was just about to hand it down to her."

There was a sharp cry from among the crowd of passengers. Mrs. Morell was coming forward, her arms outstretched. She was entirely unconscious of the crowd apparently. Someone whispered to the man who held the babe :

"Her little one was buried yesterday at sea."

The man shuffled his burden awkwardly in his arms and took his hat from his head. Mrs. Morell reached him, and her hands seemed to hover above the coverings of the child's face as an avid bee hovers above a flower.

"It is alive !" she half whispered, after she had bent above it, all trembling. "It is breathing !" It seemed as if she thought that fact a sort of miracle.

She lifted the babe eagerly from the man's arms, and, straining it close to her, walked with rapid, uncertain steps toward her cabin, and as she went she, who had hitherto shed no tear, sobbed aloud.

Tell your friends about Hazel Harlow.

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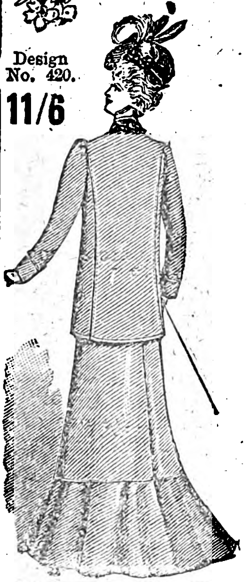

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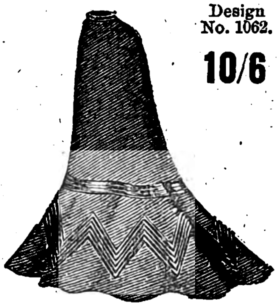

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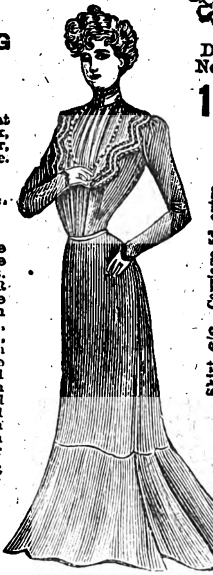

Skirt, 6/6. Carriage 5d. extra.
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(Romany: "GENUINE," "GOOD," "TRUE.")

And why, pray, is the successful poet, playwright, and journalist an eminent authority on hair restorer? Eager for an explanation, a *Daily Mail* representative sought out Mr. Sims. . . .

Now Mr. G. R. Sims, as many people know, is one of the busiest men in the kingdom, but hastily affixing his signature to a letter, he looked up and extended a characteristically cordial welcome. Then he said: "I will explain. I found that I was rapidly going bald. Not seriously, you understand, but the thinning out was sufficiently marked to set me thinking out a remedy. I went to two specialists, both of whom cheerfully assured me that I should be absolutely bald in two years.

"Then I discovered the preparation which is now placed upon the market. **I found that I had hit upon a remedy capable of working wonders. Look at my hair now, isn't that convincing evidence of the value of my preparation.**

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Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, September 16th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Mr. D. Magee, of 4 Lancaster Street, Belfast, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

"WILLIE, do you and your brother ever fight?" "Yes, sir." "Who beats?" "Pa."

BELLA (coyly): "I have only seen twenty summers." Her Dear Friend (sarcastically): "Really? Why don't you consult an oculist?"

"THERE'S a lesson in that would-be epicure, who died after eating six pigs' feet." "What is it?" "That four feet are enough for any pig."

BOBBIE: "The lobster bites hard, but he must be very timid, mamma." Mamma: "Why so, Bobbie?" Bobbie: "Why, because he always wears his tail between his legs."

A NATIVE wrote this to an English missionary at Lagos, apologising for not coming to see him: "Had not distance preponderated, I should have approximated to see you."

MRS. NEURICH: "Why didn't you come when I rang the bell?" Servant: "Please, ma'am, I didn't hear the bell." Mrs. Neurich: "Well, hereafter, when you don't hear it, come and tell me at once."

"THERE is nothing like settling down," said the retired merchant confidently to his neighbour. "When I gave up business I settled down, and found I had quite a comfortable fortune. If I had settled up I should not have had much."

H.: "Is your boy fond of books?" D.: "Very. I gave him a copy of 'Robinson Crusoe' the other day and he got lots of fun out of it." H.: "I didn't know he could read." D.: "He can't read, but he tears the pages out and makes boats of them. Oh, yes, he's fond of books."

"DAD, were you ever a fish?" The individual thus addressed lowered his chin and gazed over his spectacles at the boy in speechless astonishment. "Oh, don't get mad at me, dad, for asking you," continued his inquisitive offspring. "Mrs. Cooly came in after you had gone yesterday, and asked ma what she would do if you were dead, and ma laughed and said she guessed there were just as good fish in the sea as you are."

*A NATIVE in Africa, who had been married by one of the missionaries, at the end of three weeks brought his wife back to the clergyman, and requested him to take her back. The clergyman asked what was the matter with her. "Why, sar, she no good. The book says she obey me. She no wash my clothes. She no do what I tole her." The Minister: "But the book says you were to take her for better or for worse." "Yes, sar, but she all worse, an' no better. She hab too much worse, an' no good 'tall."

MRS. WABASH: "Who is your favourite writer, Mrs. Ogden?" Mrs. Ogden: "My husband." Mrs. Wabash: "Your husband? Why, what did he ever write?" Mrs. Ogden: "Cheques."

PEDAGOGOS (severely): "Now, sir, for the last time, what is the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle equivalent to?" Boy (desperately): "It's equivalent to a licking for me, sir."

"I SHOULD like to see a nice fat goose," said a customer entering a poultry shop in a hurry. "Yes, sir," replied the little boy who had been left in charge. "Father'll be downstairs directly."

YOUNG WIFE: "Oh, I'm so unhappy! I am more and more convinced that my husband married me only for my money." Friend: "Then you have at least the consolation that your husband isn't so stupid as he looks."

LITTLE GIRL (weeping): "Somebody has stolen my doll." Mother: "Your doll? Which one?" Little Girl: "The oldest and nicest one of all; the one that didn't have any legs, or arms, or hair, or eyes, or anything."

OLD MR. GOODFELLO (accosting child): "Ah, what a pretty little one! Will you tell me your name, Miss?" Miss Hautton (age seven): "Nurse, if you have one of mamma's cards with you, will you kindly hand it to the gentleman?"

GOODFELLOW: "So you think John Gotrox's will is a masterpiece of legal ingenuity and acumen, do you?" Lawyer Sharpley: "Sir, I drew it; and I will stake my reputation upon that will's lasting in the courts as long as the property does."

HE: "Suppose I should ask your father if I could marry you. Do you think I would stand any chance?" She: "No; your case would be hopeless." "Do you think he would really say no?" "Not that; but he would leave it to me."

MUTUAL FRIEND: "It really is shocking, dear, the way in which you and your husband quarrel and carry on. I wonder you don't separate from him." Injured Wife: "What! go away and leave him alone to do just as he likes? Not me."

PAPA: "You saw that big boy beating the little one, and you didn't interfere? Suppose you had been that little boy?" Bobbie: "I did think of that, an' was going to part 'em; but then I happened to think, s'pose I was the big boy? So I let 'em alone."

HE was quite newly married, and when he returned home one day to find his wife in tears he was sorely troubled. "What are you crying for, Mary?" he asked. "Oh, John, I simply cannot help it! How those poor men must have suffered! That Jessop is a brute!" "Great Scott! What's he been doing?" "Haven't you read it? Why, it says that when he came in he started punishing the bowlers severely. He cut Hirst twice in his first over, and he knocked Haigh all over the field. Wainwright interfered, but he didn't do much good, because Jessop drove him to the boundary out of the way. Next Rhodes came up to see what he could do; but Jessop ran out to him and knocked him over the pavilion. Brown came on, and what do you think Jessop did to him? Why, he skied him, and I think he would have been killed, but, fortunately, a man with square legs ran up and caught him."

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

When a young man's in love, he thinks of nothing else than his sweetheart. He wants to talk about her, and to extol her beauty. Likewise, when a young man has just had his firstborn presented to him, he tells all his friends about it, and generally makes himself a nuisance by recounting the child's latest achievements. This sort of thing may be annoying, but it's natural, and, therefore, excuses may be found for it.

Similarly, when an editor persists in talking about his paper, allowances ought to be made.

With these few prefatory words, I trust I may be pardoned for once more pointing out to you the fact that the "Adventures of an Actress" are becoming more popular than ever. Readers in all parts of the country testify to their popularity.

Next week Miss Hazel Harlow will appear in Belfast.

* * *

Advice on Love and other Matters.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

"Dilemma" tells me that a year or so back he made the acquaintance of a charming young lady with whom he became fast friends.

"After keeping company for about ten or eleven months, she suddenly changed her mind and left me for another fellow. It caused me a lot of pain at first, then I thought to myself. 'Well, I am sure it has been all for the best, perhaps.' Since then she has been twice instrumental in preventing me from having another young lady. She told a friend she did not want me and yet won't let me have another? What am I to do? I still love her and will always do so, but can't for the life of me find out her motive in treating me thus. I am great friends with her family, and we are constantly together, which makes it all the more unbearable for me."

If I were you, "Dilemma," I should have a very straight talk with her. If she tells you seriously that she does not desire your further acquaintance, then your only course is to part with her for good. As to her preventing you becoming friendly with another girl, such "dog-in-the-manger" policy is certainly strange. But surely if the other girl likes you she will take no notice of any words of your old sweetheart. In any case, have a correct understanding. You might let me know how you get on.

"Polly's" case is really one which needs great consideration. When fifteen years of age she made a vow to become a missionary. At that time the thought never entered her head that she might fall in love. That is precisely what has happened, however, and she is sure he cares for her, but she feels she would be doing wrong by breaking her vow. I do not think, "Polly," that a vow of that sort made at fifteen is really binding, as you are at that age scarcely old enough to understand it. Special qualifications are required to become a missionary, and from what you tell me about yourself, I think you are better fitted to look after a home of your own than some wider field in a far-away country.

"Mother of Seven" writes a pitiful letter. She cannot help feeling intensely jealous as she sees her girls growing up and gradually taking her place in society. What can she do to stamp it out? I know it seems hard, "Mother," but think for a moment. When you were a girl you had your day, and now they have theirs. Be proud of them, take an interest in their pleasures, and you will find that your feeling of jealousy will disappear once for all.

You are quite right, "Trixie," in supposing that you may write to your former sweetheart and ask him to send your letters back, as he does not do so when you ask him personally. If he does not send them at the first request, you should write again and appeal to his honour. Of course, if he does not send them then you cannot do otherwise than let the matter drop. If you have written nothing you are ashamed of, you can afford to smile at a man who shows such a lack of good taste.

"Jehu" is very miserable. For years he has secretly loved the daughter of his master. He knows that by rights he ought to leave the situation and try for another, but cannot bring himself to do so as he feels the parting would be more than he could stand. She has no idea of his feelings towards her, and is a very proud young lady.

You are quite right, "Jehu," in saying that you feel you ought to leave your situation; I see no other way out of the difficulty. Some day you will marry a nice girl in your own class of life, and forget all about this hopeless infatuation.

I certainly think, "Poppy," that your lover should write to you more often than he does, seeing that he is so many miles away. Only four letters in twelve months is indeed a very small number. I think he ought to write to you at least once a week. By-the-bye, you do not tell me how often you see each other. Next time you see him telll him how glad you would be if he would write more often. I shall be pleased to hear from you again.

* * *

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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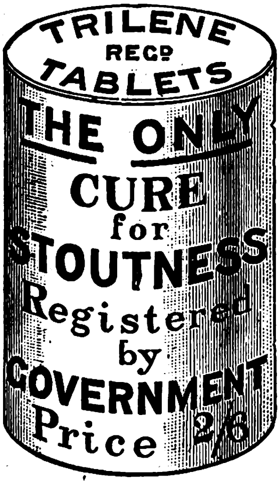

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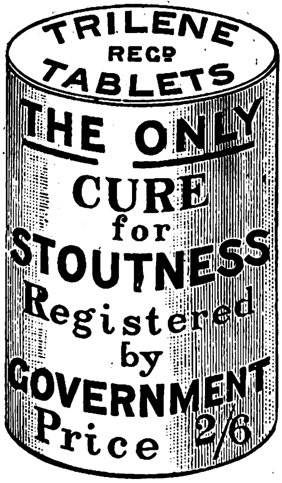

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. **CANHAM**."

Mrs. **DARNLEV SMITH**, Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, writes: "Trilene Tablets have reduced my weight very much. I am so much lighter in every way, and better in health."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse **CROUCHER**, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.

"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 21lb. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me.

"Yours sincerely, M. A. **HEYWOOD**."

Mrs. D. **BURTON**, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss **NORTHLEDGE**, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. **WM. USHER** says: "A sistor of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. **MCLEOD**, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

A. M. **PRATT**, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. **COX**, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mr. **WALKER**, 236 London Road, Hazelgrove, Stockport, says: "I have used one box and am 14lb. lighter. Send another soon as possible."

Col.-Sergt. **WHITTLE**, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. E. **ALEXANDER**, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They have reduced me quite 2 stone, and I am now quite cured."

Mrs. W. A. **RADFORD**, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess **FURSTENBERG**, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess **LIECHTENSTEIN** writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. **WEAVER**, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. **CROSSLEY**, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. **CONRAD** writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Mrs. **TAYLOR-ROBINSON**, of Tweed Green House, Whalley Range, Manchester, says: "I feel so much lighter and better since taking your Tablets, and am so much thinner that I hardly recognise myself."

Miss A. **LONG**, of 9 South Parade, Waterford, writes: "Your Tablets have reduced me 14lb."

Miss A. **DAWSON**, 62 Orchard Street, Weston-super-Mare, says: "Glad to say the Tablets have sufficiently reduced me. I shall always recommend them."

Miss F. L. **BALL**, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

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Mrs. **DREW**, of 1 Bellevue Gardens, The Nursery, Devizes, writes: "I took Tablets some years ago; they soon reduced me and I have not got stout since. Send me a box for my mother."

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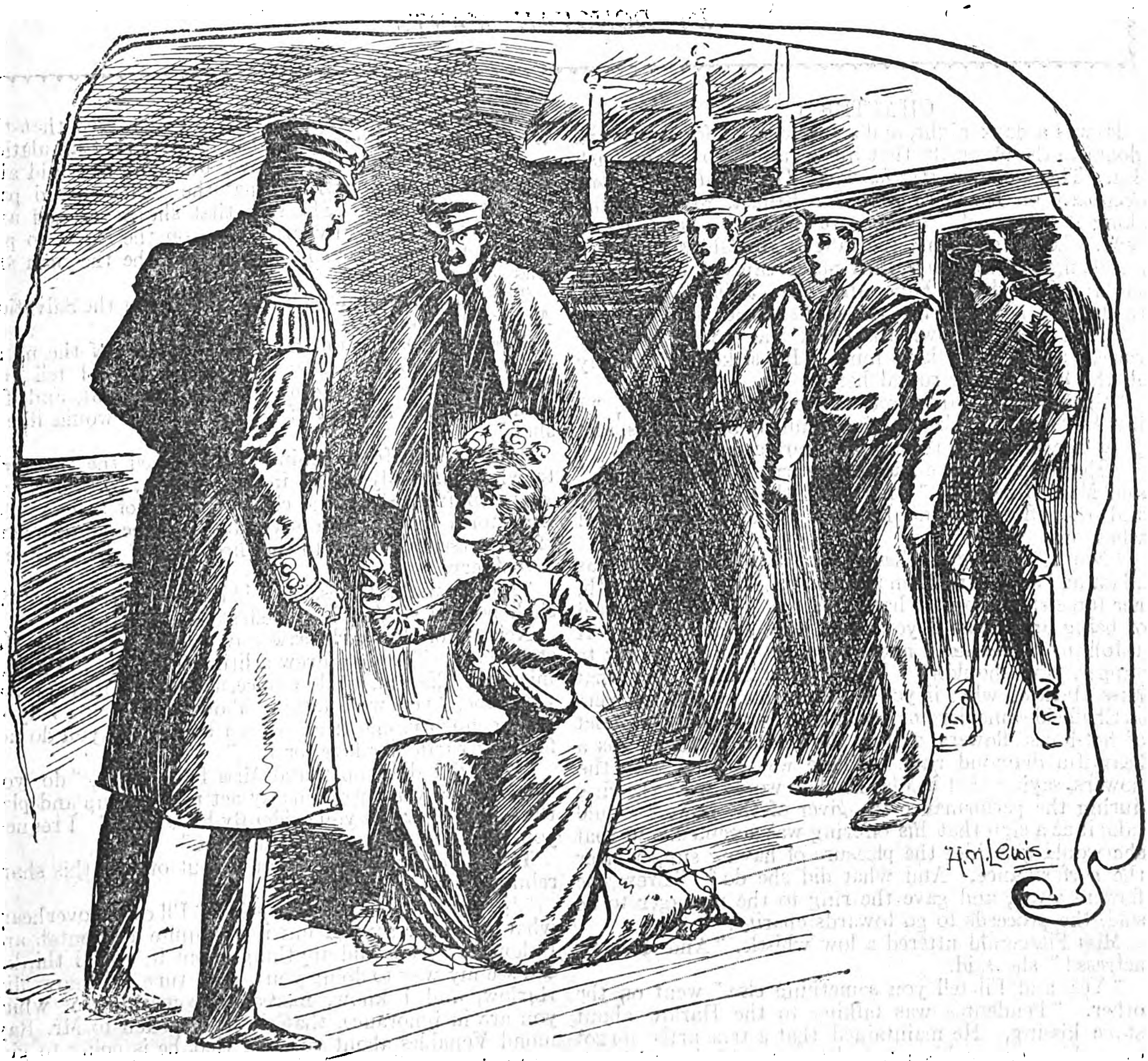
SHORT STORIES

No. 634.] For the Week Ending September 21st, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

The Adventures of an Actress.



"Save me, sir, save me," she cried. "Take me away anywhere so long as I escape from him."

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A THRILLING INSTALMENT.

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

VII.—At the Mercy of the Ocean.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

It was a dark night, and a suspicion of fog lent extra gloom to the obscurity that hung pall-like over the Irish Sea. The steamer *Mystic*, with *The Good Samaritan* Company on board *en route* for Belfast, was steaming along at half-speed. There were but a few passengers on deck. Leaning against the taffrail amidships were two female figures, known in their public capacity as actresses as Miss Templeton Fane and Miss Juliet Fitzgerald, the latter a new-comer in the ranks of the company.

"That Miss Harlow," the latter was saying in a low voice, "seems a stuck-up minx. It's sickening the way all the boys dangle round her."

"She's a cat," answered the other vindictively, "I just hate her. She's just like a Sunday-school miss, and gives herself airs as though she were a duchess."

"She seems to have had some stirring times, though," said Miss Fitzgerald, "what with the fire at Newcastle and the adventure at Rugby. I never quite heard what that was."

"Nor I," answered Miss Fane, "but I believe it was all for an 'ad.' And then there's that Mr. Eric Monteith, her tame sheep-dog. I hate him, too. What's the good of being an actress if you can't have a bit of fun? If a Johnny writes me a note and offers to take me out to supper, why shouldn't I have a good time? But, that Miss Harlow, why, if you'll believe me, when we were at Sheffield some lord or other sent her a lovely bouquet of hot-house flowers, and in the middle of them was a beautiful diamond ring. There was a note with the flowers, saying that if Miss Harlow would wear the ring during the performance the giver of the flowers would take it as a sign that his offering was accepted, and that she would give him the pleasure of having supper after the performance. And what did she do? Threw the flowers away, and gave the ring to the manager to be sold, the proceeds to go towards charity."

Miss Fitzgerald uttered a low whistle. "And she's an actress!" she said.

"Yes, and I'll tell you something else," went on the other. "Pendennis was talking to the Harlow about stage kissing. He maintained that a true artist forgot everything except his art, and in stage kissing it didn't matter whether the kiss was real or not. In love scenes, he said, you ought to be consistent, and do just as you would do in real life. Miss Harlow answered that the true actor could not only trust to his powers of simulation to make believe he was in love, but that he could also simulate a kiss so artfully that the sham should pass for the real thing. She said that she never had and never would allow any man, even on the stage, to put his lips to hers unless he happened to be the man she was going to marry."

The other laughed. "She ought to join the Salvation Army," she said.

Miss Fane looked out into the blackness of the night for a few seconds, and then said: "Well, I tell you frankly, I hate her. She's an underhand cat, and if I could only get her out of the company I would like a shot."

A low cough from behind them caused the two girls to wheel suddenly round in some alarm, to find themselves confronted by the cloaked figure of a man who had stolen up to them without their becoming aware of his presence, owing to the throbbing of the steamer's machinery.

"A dirty night, ladies," he said in a pleasant voice. "We shall be late getting into Belfast at this rate."

Neither of the girls saw any reason to answer the statement. The man drew a little closer. "If I'm not mistaken," he said, in a low voice, addressing Miss Templeton Fane, "you were talking about the leading lady of your company, and from what I overheard, you do not feel any particular love for her."

"And if I did," answered Miss Fane hotly, "do you think it is a very gentlemanly act to sneak up and play the eavesdropper as you evidently have done? I request you, sir, to mind your own business."

The man seemed not an atom put out by this sharp rebuke.

"Not so fast, madam," he said. "I'll own I overheard what you were saying, but it was quite accidental, and I shouldn't have said anything about it, only I think I can see my way to doing you a good turn. I know Miss Harlow, and I know, moreover, something of which you are in ignorance, that she has spoken to Mr. Raymond Venables about you and that he is going to give you notice for dismissal after the week at Belfast."

"How do you know that?" muttered the actress quickly.

"That's soon told," the man answered, "I was sitting aft, not a quarter of an hour ago, when I suddenly woke up—I suppose I must have dozed off—on hearing voices quite close to me. I was in shadow, and the other three, who were Miss Hazel Harlow, Mr. Eric Monteith, and Mr. Raymond Venables, had no idea of my close proximity. Miss Harlow was speaking; these were her words: 'Not only in my opinion is Miss Fane a poor actress, but she is also a girl who exercises a bad influence over the other ladies of the company. I don't want to be unchar table, but I think she ought to go.' Whereupon Venables answered: 'My dear Miss Harlow, you know perfectly well that your word is law. Miss Fane leaves us after Belfast.'"

It was too dark to see the expression of rage that suddenly transformed Miss Fane's face. "You'll swear that those were her words?" she hissed, forgetful in an instant of her former resentment of the stranger's intrusion.

"Why, certainly," came the calm answer.

"I know why she said it," went on the infuriated actress. "I had a mash note from a Johnny last week and the letter fell into Miss Harlow's hands by mistake. She gave it me and begged me not to go out to supper with strange men. I told her to mind her own business, and now she's taking this dirty, underhand way of getting her own back. What wouldn't I give to be able to pay her out?"

The man seemed to hesitate, then he looked at the other girl. "I take it this lady is a friend of yours, Miss Fane," he said. "I say that, because if you really do want to get even with Miss Harlow, I think I can show you a way to do it that has no danger and that will effectually 'queer her pitch,' if you will pardon the expression."

"Oh, you can trust Julie," answered the girl recklessly; then her voice changed, "I'm not in for murder or anything like that," she said.

The man laughed. "You needn't be afraid of that," he answered easily. "If you give me your word of honour to take what I am going to say in the strictest confidence, I'll tell you a little story that will throw some light on to my proposition."

"Oh, I've said you can trust us," said Miss Fane. "I can keep a secret, and after what you have just told me I am ready for a good deal as long as I can pay Miss Harlow out without any bother."

"Good," answered the stranger. "Then listen to me and I'll throw a little light on to the private life of the good and virtuous Miss Hazel Harlow. I daresay you will have thought it strange that a girl such as she is should have suddenly taken to theatrical life. Some time ago Miss Harlow fell in love, or gave out that she was in love, with a young gentleman named Caldecott. The marriage day was already fixed. Squire Caldecott had got everything in readiness for his beautiful young bride, when suddenly Mr. Eric Monteith appeared upon the scene. Miss Harlow discovered that this gentleman was possessed of a fortune far in excess of Squire Caldecott's. In a moment she put about on a new tack, chucked her first lover, and made the running for all she was worth with Master Eric. But Caldecott was not to be put off so easily. He ran the fair Hazel to earth; and she, determined to win Monteith, induced him to get her, by means of his money, a position in *The Good Samaritan* Company. There they thought she would be safe from Caldecott, and Mr. Monteith was to join the company himself at the first opportunity. Well, it was a pretty scheme, and it's worked out all right. But Miss Harlow is as deep as you make them. She wants to have her fling through the world before settling down in Park Lane or Belgravia as Mrs. Eric Monteith, so she keeps him tied to her apron strings and thinks that she can play fast and loose with her first lover to her heart's content."

Now this story, as those who have followed Hazel Harlow's career will recognise at once, was an absolute misrepresentation of the case. Not only had the villain Caldecott driven Hazel from her home by reason of his unwelcome attentions, but he had also pursued the girl with all the cunning of his black heart, and had only been thwarted by Eric Monteith's devotion and the girl's own steadfast purity and courage, from achieving his base ends.

But Miss Fane, who had already, previous to the meeting with the stranger, conceived a fierce jealousy and hatred for her noble-minded and more beautiful fellow-actress, was ready and indeed willing to believe any vile story that could detract from the blameless character of Hazel Harlow.

"Then if that's the case," she said, "it only strengthens me in my resolve to help you in any way I can to punish Miss Harlow for her duplicity."

"And in helping me to punish her," went on the man, "you will not only pay off old scores, but you will also probably save yourself from dismissal from the company. You will in addition help Mr. Caldecott, who has been so cruelly wronged, to gain the girl who should long ago have been his wife."

"Every word that you say is true," answered Templeton. "You can speak out quite frankly and tell me how I can help you."

"You must know then," went on the other, "that Mr. Caldecott has determined to accomplish by secret ways that which he cannot do openly. He has determined to spare no expense in the achievement of his object; he wishes to strike when Miss Harlow least expects it, and in the most unexpected way. The day before yesterday he went over to Port St. Mary, which as perhaps you may know, is a seaport at the southern extremity of the Isle of Man. He has there chartered a most compact and seaworthy steam yacht. In a short time we shall be skirting the island. He will have put out in his vessel to effect, with your aid, the capture of Hazel Harlow."

"Is this boat, then, armed with quick-firing guns and torpedoes? Does he mean to blow up the *Mystic*, to be a twentieth century pirate and carry off his lady-love by main force? I don't see what chance he has of success."

The other laughed. "Oh, dear no," he said, "he has a much better plan than that, and one which I have already said, will necessitate your co-operation. And if all goes well I am deputed by Mr. Caldecott to make you a present of something to show you his gratitude and thanks."

"You seem to have laid your plans pretty well," said the girl in an almost awestruck voice.

"They say love will do anything," answered the man with a touch of cynicism, "and I must say that poor Caldecott is about as lovelorn as anyone I have ever seen. There's no accounting for tastes. I don't care for your statuesque, soulless beauties. I like something more piquant and emotional. I can't bear your tall women.

Putting all flattery aside, I think it's a good thing for Mr. Caldecott's affections that he never happened to meet with Miss Templeton Fane."

The actress laughed with would-be carelessness, but it was evident that the stranger's subtle flattery had not fallen on barren ground.

"But I'm afraid there is no time to pay compliments," the fellow went on quickly, "though if I only had myself to think of, I'd rather stay here and talk to you than get to business. Now if you will give me your attention for just ten minutes, I'll put you in possession of all the details of our little scheme, after which I don't see why we shouldn't be able to congratulate ourselves in a short time that we've got a dangerous enemy out of your path and made an exceedingly worthy young man the happiest in all Great Britain. You're an actress, Miss Fane, I've watched you with pleasure many times myself; all you've got to do now is to see whether you can act as well off the stage as on. So now let us get to the final details. Come up to the far end of the ship there, where we shall be free from observation, for I don't want Miss Harlow or any of them to see us talking together."

"There's not much fear of that," answered Miss Fane, "Jenny Lovelace, our soubrette, who is as thick as thieves with Miss Harlow, is luckily a terribly bad sailor. Garden, Pendennis, Lindsay, and our other men, are playing nap in the smoking-room, but still, as you say, it is as well to be on the safe side. Come on, Julie, you may just as well be in this business as I, for I daresay, if all goes off well, as this gentleman seems to think it will, Mr. Caldecott will stand you in for something as well as me."

Accordingly the two girls with the stranger discreetly following in their wake, some yards behind them, and walking as though he had no connection with them, so as not to arouse suspicion, passed down the deck of the gently heaving vessel, wet with the autumn fog.

"This fog's a godsend," muttered the man. "I hope it holds till everything's over, it'll add immensely to our chances of success."

CHAPTER II.

Jenny Lovelace lay prostrate upon her berth. She and Hazel had managed to secure a cabin to themselves. Hazel, although this was the first time that she had ever ventured upon the sea, suffered from no qualms of sickness. Her splendid vitality, fostered by years of country life, had made her immune from all such petty ailments.

"Oh, how bad I feel," moaned Jenny, "I shall look a positive scarecrow when we get to Belfast, and then it'll be a pleasure to feel the solid stage beneath one instead of this horrid insidious rise and fall."

"Poor Jenny," answered Hazel, "I wish I could do something to alleviate your sufferings. Personally I never felt better. Somehow I don't like the idea of climbing on to that narrow shelf they call a bunk. I don't think I shall go to bed. I shall have a good long rest and a bath when we get to Belfast."

At that moment there came a knock at the door. Hazel opened it to find herself confronted by Miss Templeton Fane, on whose face there seemed to be traces of tears.

"Oh, Miss Harlow," said the girl in an almost piteous voice, "I wish you'd come out for a little. I do so want to have a talk with you."

Hazel's surprise may be imagined. Hitherto Miss Fane had always treated her with a certain amount of curtness, mingled with resentment. On the few occasions on which Hazel had tried to make advances to her fellow actress the girl had only repulsed her, and, only a few days ago, when Hazel had tried to dissuade her from accepting the invitation of a strange young gentleman to supper, Miss Fane had broken out into words of anger and defiance. And now had come this sudden change of front. Small wonder at Hazel's mystification.

"I am in trouble, Miss Harlow," went on the actress in a low voice, "I know that I have given you little cause to like me, but I want to ask your advice about a question that has been worrying me for a good many days."

Hazel's warm heart leapt up in pity at the girl's evident distress. Good actress though Hazel was on the stage, yet in private life she was the embodiment of a pure and natural simplicity, and thus she did not, when dealing with others of her own sex, look for duplicity and guile. In this way she laid herself open to the attacks of those whose only weapon was deceit.

"Of course I'll come with you, Miss Fane," she said warmly, "and if I can help you in any way, you know I shall be only too glad to do so. We will let byegones be byegones." Then she turned round to Jenny. "I'm going for a walk on deck with Miss Fane," she said, "try and get some sleep, dear."

Jenny was feeling too ill to make any comment, otherwise it must assuredly have struck the warm-hearted little soubrette as peculiar that Miss Fane should have sought out Hazel's company at so late an hour. And so Hazel, closing the door of the cabin softly behind her, followed the actress down the long passage that led to the stairs that had access to the main deck.

Having reached the deck, Miss Fane led the way past the saloon towards the forward part of the vessel, and finally came to a halt close to where one of the steamer's jolly-boats hung suspended from its davits.

"I think we shall be quiet here," she said, "and I have a good deal I want to say to you. In the first place I want to apologise to you for my rudeness the other day in connection with that going out to supper. It is about that that I want to ask your advice,"—the girl paused.

"You owe me no apology," said Hazel gently. "Everyone has a right to their own opinions. I only told you what I thought about going out to supper with strange men, because one can't help seeing in stage-life what terrible temptations lie in the path of all virtuous women."

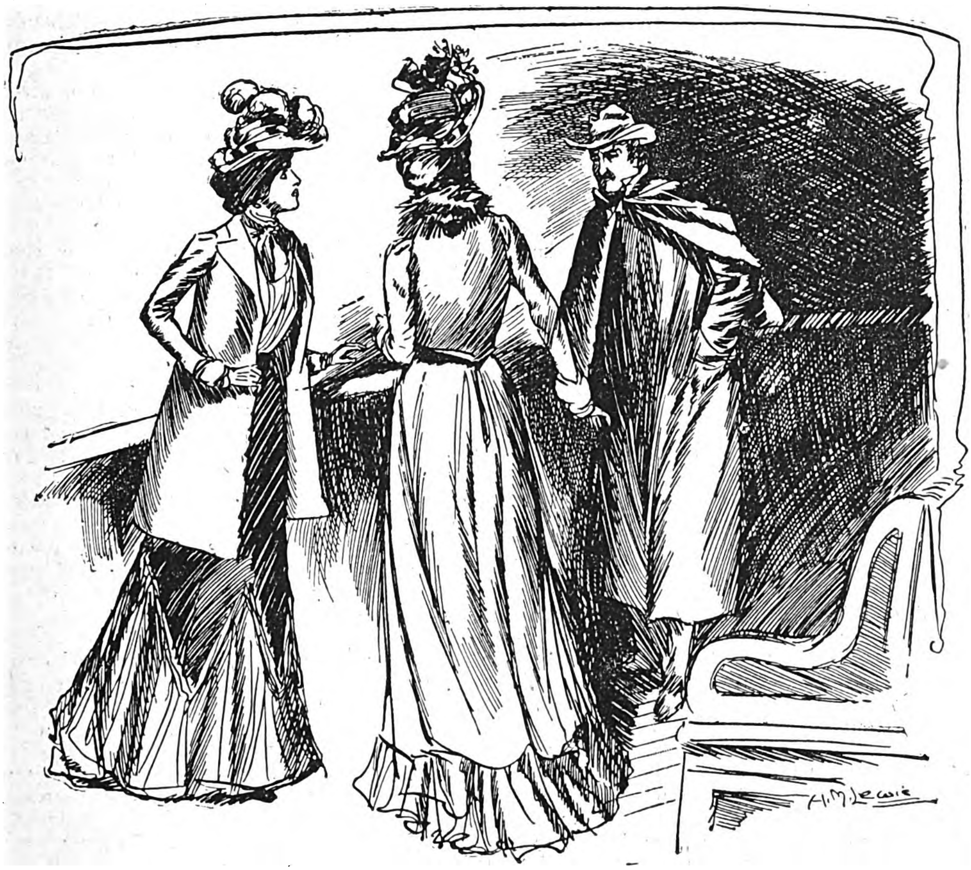
"You are quite right," replied the other in a low voice. "I wish I had never gone to supper with that man; there was no actual harm in it, I know, but he is coming over to Belfast. I have promised to see him there and I don't want to. I have fallen in love with him, and he, well, he only cares for me in the same way as a child might care for a new toy. You see how difficult the situation is for me."

The girl was acting as she had never done in all her life before; her voice was full of pathos, low-pitched subdued, tears seemed to be trembling upon her downcast lashes.

Hazel's warm heart leapt up anew; "I am so sorry for you," she said, "of course there's only one course open for you. You must have nothing more to do with him unless you think he intends to marry you."

"But I love him," murmured the girl. It was all that she could do to keep from bursting into a fit of hysterical laughter. Could Hazel have only seen into her soul for one brief instant, she would have realised the spirit of vindictiveness that had sent her enemy to lure her to disaster.

Yet it must be borne in mind that Miss Fane, eager as she was for revenge on Hazel, really believed that the story told to her a little while ago by the stranger was true. She really believed that Hazel was a hypocrite of the worst description. She had not been used to meet, amid all the thorny paths that run through the stage world, women of the whole-hearted simplicity which was Hazel's. It seemed to her that Hazel, as well as herself, was acting a part, the part of a thorough-paced "goody-goody." It was then only a case of "diamond cut diamond."



"I request you, sir, to mind your own business."

"Will you introduce me to the man you love when we get to Belfast?" said Hazel, in the same sweet, gentle voice, "I should so like to be a friend to you and to help you if I can."

The other made no answer, for just at that moment a faint cry sounded. "Help!" said a voice. Where had the voice come from? Not a soul was in sight. The fog by this time had settled down almost more thickly than before. Even the bridge upon which the captain stood was invisible. "Help!" said the voice again, this time somewhat more loudly.

The two girls pressed together almost convulsively.

"What can it be?" whispered Hazel in an awestruck voice.

"It seemed to come from above our head," answered the other in the same terrified accents.

A low moan followed her words. "It *was* in the boat," murmured Miss Fane, "whatever shall we do?"

Now Hazel was a girl to whom cowardice was a stranger. Someone was in trouble, in pain maybe; there was unmistakably a human being lying stricken in the boat that swung above her head.

She did not stop to think, did not pause to reflect that it was assuredly a somewhat curious event that the sound should come from one of the ship's jolly-boats. Her one idea was to succour whoever it was that lay in that extraordinary situation. She was agile and lithe as a panther. Templeton Fane seemed overcome with terror.

"I'll climb up into the boat," whispered Hazel, "and see what's amiss."

The next moment she placed her hand upon the gunwale of the swinging boat, another upon the rope that ran through the block connected with the fall of the davit. In quicker time than it takes to tell it she was over the side of the little vessel, to find that the tarpaulin which was usually spread over it to keep out the wet had been pulled aside and that a moaning figure was stretched out between the thwarts.

Hazel's heart began to beat more quickly. What on earth could be the meaning of so mysterious an occurrence?

"Who are you?" she whispered. "What's the matter? Shall I cry for help?"

"No, no," muttered the figure hoarsely. "Stoop down, I can't move. It's pain to me to talk as loudly as I am doing."

The warm womanly pity in Hazel's heart was stirred to its depths by the piteous appeal. She bent down as well as she could in the somewhat narrow space and tried to distinguish in the gloom the face of the speaker. In an instant the man's arms shot out and the unsuspecting girl was pulled down forcibly. She tried to scream, to struggle, but the man's arms held her like a vice.

"Keep still," he hissed, "and I won't hurt you." He uttered a low whistle. In an instant the sound of creaking cordage was followed by a perceptible lowering of the boat from the falls of the davits that secured it to the steamer. Again Hazel tried to scream. "Then there's no help for it," muttered the man. As he spoke the boat fell with a dull splash into the water of the sea, where it lay gently rocking on the oily swell, while the steamer slid past it with engines throbbing unceasingly, to be swallowed up in the gloom of the fog-laden night.

The man had followed up his last words by thrusting a gag with the hand of one practised to the use of such a fell instrument into the captive's mouth. Then with a piece of rope he managed, despite Hazel's struggles, to secure her so that she was powerless to move either hand or foot. This done he got to his seat and shipped a pair of sweeps between the throle pins, and turning the little craft's head, began rowing out into the black darkness.

The fog still lay thick upon the face of the waters. Suddenly the man ceased rowing. He could hear the faint sound as of a ship's engines pulsating through the gloom. In a moment he gave vent to a peculiar whistle uttered thrice. At once an answering signal came out of the darkness. Again he whistled; again the answer, drawing nearer and yet nearer. There was no mistaking the sound now, the steamer was approaching the spot where he and Hazel lay.

Before long a shadowy shape loomed up on his port bow. "*Mermaid* ahoy!" he cried.

"Aye, aye," answered a voice. "Lay to, and we'll draw up alongside."

Then came another voice. "Is all well?"

Hazel's blood seemed to turn to ice in her veins. It was the voice of Horace Caldecott. What hope could there be for her now?

In the meantime it may perhaps be as well to recapitulate and to explain Miss Templeton Fane's action in that night's black deed. It will be remembered that the unknown abductor of Hazel Harlow had explained to the girl the whole plot whereby she could aid in the discomfiture of her lovely fellow-actress.

Miss Fane had been directed to lead Hazel to where the boat hung suspended, the tackle that confined the craft to the steamer had been explained to the girl. All that she had had to do was to unfasten the rope at a given signal and let the boat fall into the water as has already narrated. Her task accomplished, Miss Fane, as though pursued by an unseen foe, fled away in a sudden access of terror from the scene of her base deed. She felt like a murderess. The girl was not wholly bad. Remorse seized hold of her; she sped away to her cabin and got into her bunk, yet there was to be no sleep for her that night.

CHAPTER III.

With some difficulty Hazel was lifted out of the *Mystic's* jolly-boat and conveyed up the side of the steam-yacht *Mermaid*. It was all like some horrid nightmare; the damp obscurity of the night; the sound of feet hurrying along the deck in the dark; the flaming of lights; the muffled sound of orders issued in hoarse voices.

She was carried down to a well-lighted, beautifully appointed cabin. Her bonds were taken off, the gag removed from her mouth. Beside her was an elderly woman, of somewhat weather-beaten appearance, with prominent cheekbones and hard, angular chin. Of Caldecott there was no sign.

Hazel turned to the woman in an access of terror.

"Save me! save me!" she cried piteously. "Is my life to be one long sequence of hideous villainies? What have I done that I should be persecuted so? What have I done that I should be made the victim of so dastardly a plot? By the woman's heart that must beat within your breast I implore you to save me from the monster who has lured me hither."

The woman's mouth seemed to grow a trifle harder. Her cold passionless eyes looked unmoved upon the pitiful picture of this lovely girl pleading for help.

"It's no good your making a fuss," she said. "Why, there's hundreds of girls would give their heads to be where you are at this moment. What's the good of talking nonsense about persecutions and all that? It can't be such a hardship to become the wife of a rich and handsome man like Mr. Horace. Why, I've known him all my life. I owe him everything I've got in the world, so it's no good your trying to blacken his character before me."

Hazel's heart sank within her. Her eyes filled with tears of hopeless agony. She looked wildly round the cabin as though seeking for some means of escape. The woman noted her action.

"Now do be reasonable," she said. "You can't jump out through the port-holes, and you're miles away from any chance of rescue. Mr. Horace has deputed me to tell you that if you will consent to become his wife when we reach Port St. Mary in the Isle of Man, which is not far away from where we are, he won't come near you till we reach land. What shall I tell him?"

"Oh, wait a few minutes—wait a few minutes," cried Hazel beseechingly. "Let me think. I can't realise that it's all true; that I have been trapped away like this; that I'm not really on board the *Mystic* with my friends all round me."

The woman sat down. "You can think for ten minutes," she said coldly; "Mr. Horace doesn't want to hurry you."

In the meantime all was bustle and confusion on the deck of the *Mermaid*. The fog had settled down now like a wall; it was hardly possible to see one's hand before one's face. Horace Caldecott was talking to his skipper.

"We must get rid of the *Mystic's* jolly-boat," he said, "It won't do to leave her floating derelict."

"I don't know," said a voice at his elbow, that of the man who had been responsible for Hazel's capture. "They're bound to get to know of the jolly-boat's disappearance. I should have thought that if you sent her adrift bottom upwards they would think when it was found that I and Miss Harlow were in Davy Jones's locker."

"You're right, Sam," said Caldecott quickly. "It shows that two heads are better than one. If I can once get people to think that, it'll be all the better for my future schemes."

"Confound this fog!" put in the skipper of the yacht. "We shall just have to lie to till it lifts. We can't get any bearings in this, and I for one don't want to be cut in half by a big ship."

Caldecott uttered an oath. "We can't stay here," he said savagely.

The sailor shrugged his shoulders. "Well, perhaps you'll kindly take the wheel," he said; "I've got the engines slowed down to quarter speed now. As far as I can judge we're heading the right way, but I'm not enough of a seaman to be able to take a vessel through a basin of pea-soup."

Caldecott realised that nothing that he could do or say would get him out of the dilemma. He could only curse the fate that prevented him from pushing on to the Isle of Man with all the pressure that the gauges of the *Mermaid's* boilers could stand.

"Well, perhaps the delay will give Hazel time to come to her senses," ran his unspoken thoughts.

The ten minutes specified by the woman who had been constituted Hazel's chaperon were drawing to a close. Hazel had sat mutely on the luxurious settee that ran all round the cabin trying to think out a solution of the terrible problem with which she had been so suddenly confronted. Her only chance now was a respite. If she agreed to marry Caldecott when they reached their destination, it would at least ensure her immunity from his hateful presence until land was reached, and perhaps she would find at Port St. Mary some means of frustrating her captor's resolve. Think as she would she could see no other course open. She sprang to her feet.

"Tell Mr. Caldecott," she said, "that I agree to his terms. He is not to attempt to see me until we reach land. Then"—her voice sank to almost a whisper, and every word seemed to be dragged from her mouth—"I will marry him."

"That's speaking sense," said the woman; "I'll go and tell Mr. Caldecott your decision at once."

She hurried out of the cabin, carefully locking the door behind her. In a moment Hazel sprang to her feet and began hurriedly looking round the room. Her first care was to examine the port-holes, four of which were set in the side of the state-room, but which, with the exception of one, were all screwed tightly down and much too small to allow the passage of a human body. One of them was, however, slightly unfastened, and of this Hazel made a mental note. She could find nothing else in the room, and was just about to resume her seat when her eye was caught by something bright that lay beneath a moveable oak buffet at one end of the cabin. A hurried examination proved this to be a tiny dagger of Oriental workmanship, more of a toy than a weapon —probably used as a paper-knife—yet with a point of surprising keenness. This Hazel thrust in her bosom, "For the worst," she muttered. "In case there is put before me the alternative of one of two crimes—either that of becoming Horace Caldecott's wife or of my own self-destruction, and I think that Heaven would account the latter of the two acts the least criminal."

She resumed her seat and took up exactly the same position as that in which she had been when her duenna had left the cabin. Hardly had she done so when the woman returned bearing in her hand a sheet of paper. This she laid down on the table in the centre of the cabin.

"Mr. Caldecott begs me to compliment you," she said grimly, "on your exceeding good sense. He also told me to remind you of the old proverb 'There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and lip.' He said that unfortunately that had been his experience on more than one occasion, and he didn't want to go through the same chapter of accidents again. He therefore asked me to beg you to be so kind as to put your signature to this document which I will witness." So saying she laid the paper, which was type-written, before Hazel's eyes.

The document ran as follows: "I, Hazel Harlow, late of *The Good Samaritan* Theatrical Touring Company, do hereby faithfully promise that I will go through the ceremony of holy matrimony with Horace Caldecott, of the Manor House, Honeycote, Oxfordshire, at any place or time to be settled by the said Horace Caldecott as he shall think fit, to which witness my hand and signature, ————, in the presence of ————, and the aforesaid," here followed Caldecott's signature in a bold flowing hand. Beneath this was a Somerset House agreement stamp.

The cabin seemed to go round before Hazel's eyes. The business-like appearance of the agreement, the formidable red stamp below, seemed to her unsophisticated eyes to constitute a covenant from which, if it were once signed, there could be no withdrawal. Visions of all the terrors of the law ranged against her seemed to rise up and add realistic terror to the situation.

The woman put a pen in her hand.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" murmured Hazel, breaking out into a paroxysm of tears.

"Do?" came the cold answer; "just sign this paper."

CHAPTER IV.

Eric Monteith had gone to his cabin, and lying down upon his bunk, had tried to sleep. But try as he would he could find no repose. The cabin was unbearably stuffy; the dull throb of the slowly-moving engines droned unceasingly in his ears; the creaking of the vessel's sides, the faint wash of the sea outside, the thousand movements that go on aboard a steamer, combined to help in driving away all thoughts of sleep from his pillow.

At last he could bear it no longer; he determined to go up on deck and seek the fresh air above.

As he reached the hatchway that led up to the deck a woman brushed past him in wild haste and sped down the corridor that led to the ladies' berths. It was Miss Templeton Fane, her face was pale, her hair disordered. She took not the faintest notice of Monteith; her one idea seemed to be to get away to her cabin.

"I wonder what's up with her?" muttered Eric.

When he got up on deck it was to find that the fog had become very dense. The *Mystic* was moving along with painful slowness. Every now and then her syren emitted a dull reverberating hoot. The sound only seemed to add to the gloom of the night.

Eric made his way along the deck, keeping close against the taffrail, until he finally reached the place where not so very long before Hazel and her false fellow-actress had stood.

A noise as of something striking gently against the side of the vessel attracted his listless attention. The closest scrutiny revealed the fact that one of the ship's jolly-boats had disappeared, the noise he had heard was caused by the tackle which should have kept the boat in its place flapping against the ship's side.

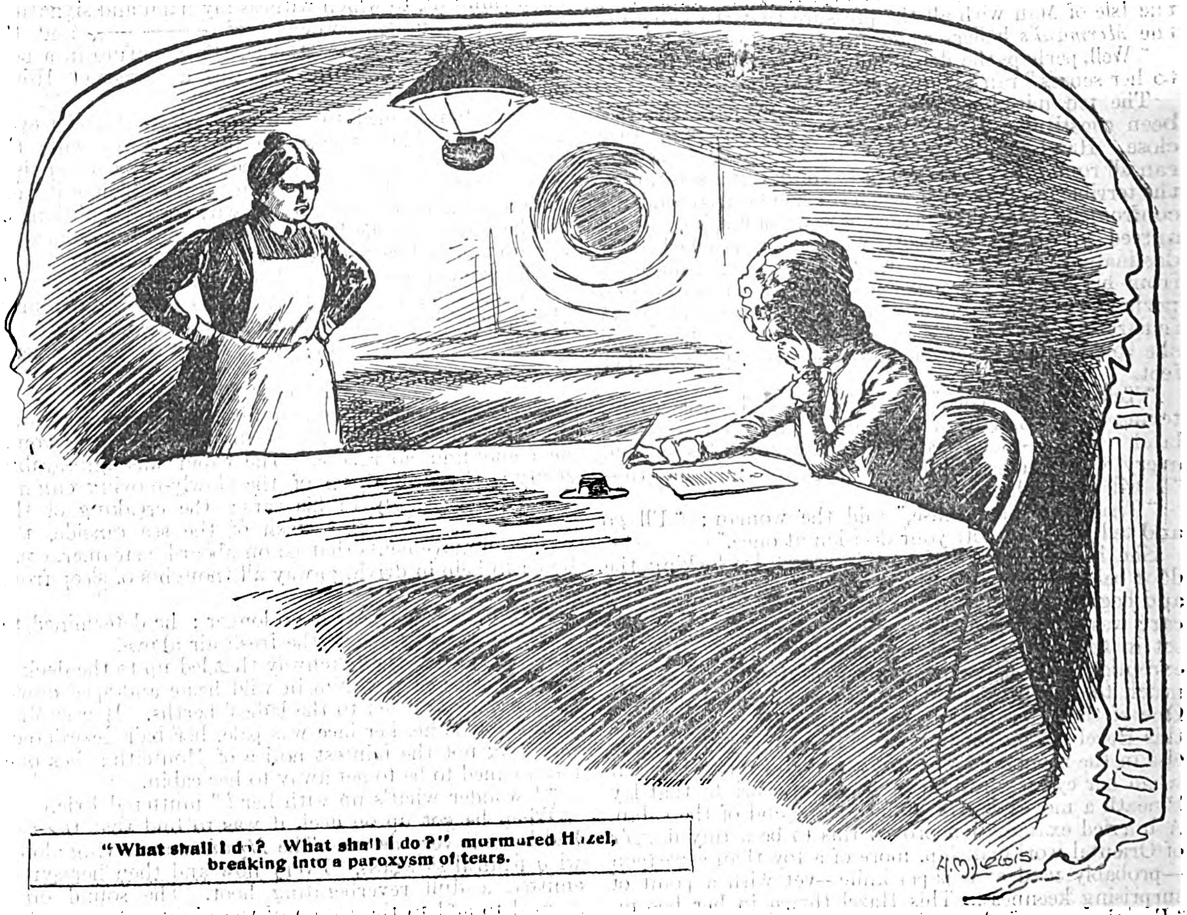
"There's something wrong here," he muttered. "Why has that boat gone? It must have been badly fastened to the davits and slipped away into the sea. The captain ought to be told of this. And yet surely," he went on, "the boat could not have come unfastened of its own accord. It strikes me that there's more in this than meets the eye."

He hurried back along the way he had come and suddenly ran full tilt into a cloaked figure female. Both recoiled from the shock.

"Is that Mr. Monteith?" asked rather a feeble voice.

"Yes," answered Eric. "And surely I am addressing Miss Lovelace?"

"Yes," replied the actress quickly. "Have you seen Hazel?"



"What shall I do? What shall I do?" murmured Hazel, breaking into a paroxysm of tears.

"No," replied Eric, a sudden fear gripping at his heart. "Isn't she with you?"

"No. Some time ago Miss Templeton Fane came down to our cabin. I was feeling awfully bad, but I heard Miss Fane ask Hazel if she would come on deck. She wanted to ask her advice about something. That was more than half an hour ago, and I thought Hazel ought to have returned by now."

"But I just passed Miss Fane on the stairway," cried Eric, "alone. She seemed very much excited about something."

"Alone!" echoed Jenny. "Then where can Hazel be?"

A cry fell from Eric's lips. "Good Heavens!" he said hoarsely. "Can there be any connection between Hazel's disappearance and the missing boat?" And in quick, hurried speech, he told Jenny about the discovery he had just made.

The obscurity that reigned on every hand hid the deadly pallor that crept over Jenny's face as she listened to her companion's words.

"Let us call the Captain at once," she cried, "and get him to institute a search all over the ship. How can it be possible that Hazel can have gone off in the missing boat? Why she would never have got into it of her own free will; and there surely could have been no cause for her to have left the ship. Anyhow, we must lose no time in finding her. If anything has happened I shall never cease blaming myself for not having gone with her and Miss Fane. I'll go at once to the latter's cabin and hear what she has to say about the affair." So saying, Jenny sped away forgetful now of her sickness, mindful only of the need for instant action.

Eric darted away to find the Captain, to apprise him of the loss of the ship's boat, and to hint that there had been perhaps foul play afoot that would necessitate instant and imperative action.

Monteith's news, as can be readily understood, caused a great sensation throughout the ship. The stewards and stewardesses were at once told off to visit every cabin and to thoroughly search the vessel to discover if any of the passengers were missing. It then transpired that Miss Hazel Harlow and a passenger who had booked at Liverpool under the name of Herbert Jones, were both missing. In the meantime Jenny had interviewed Miss Templeton Fane.

"Where is Miss Harlow?" she cried, bursting in upon the actress's berth without any ceremony.

A look of fear came into Miss Fane's face. "I don't know," she began, with a would-be air of bravado. "What do you mean by bursting in upon me like this? I am not Miss Harlow's keeper."

"You're lying!" answered Jenny, trying to keep calm. "I heard you myself come and ask Miss Harlow to go on deck with you. Since then no one has seen her, and you were observed coming down the staircase alone."

The actress thus driven into a corner determined on a bold course of action. "Miss Harlow swore me to secrecy," she said in a low voice; "but as you have driven me into a hole, I will tell you the truth. She has eloped in one of the ship's boats with a former lover."

The other uttered a cry. For a moment she stood motionless, her burning eyes fixed upon Miss Fane's face.

"I don't believe you," she cried out; "there has been foul play afoot. I know you hated Miss Harlow. You were jealous of her beauty and her goodness. What have you done with her? What have you done with her?"

Miss Fane was far too much involved now by her complicity in Hazel's abduction to betray her own part in the sinister affair.

"Prove that I am lying," she said defiantly. "What I am telling you is true. Miss Harlow is like other women; she plays her lovers off against one another. You will see that I spoke the truth some day perhaps."

For a moment a murderous desire to fall upon the girl's throat and drag the truth from her by main force almost beat down Jenny's forbearance. With an effort she restrained herself, and without another word left the cabin, her heart a prey to a hundred sickening doubts and fears.

The fog was so dense that the Captain was firmly convinced of the futility of altering the course of the steamer and instituting a search for the missing boat. Amongst the passengers generally, with the exception of course of the members of the Touring Company, the story that Miss Fane had circulated was accepted as the true one. One of the sailors, moreover, declared that he had heard the sound of engines of a steamer apparently lying to in the vicinity of the *Mystic*, and at about the time that Miss Fane had given for the enactment of what everyone was ready to believe a most romantic elopement.

"I have my duty to my employers," the captain of the *Mystic* said, in answer to Eric's impassioned appeal to try and make some effort to find the missing boat and its occupants. "We're late as it is. No, sir, I must push on for Belfast as speedily as possible."

Raymond Venables, in his capacity as manager of the theatrical company, was distraught. He had lost his leading lady and the biggest "draw" in his cast. He had never disguised the fact, moreover, that he was madly in love with the beautiful actress. Yet nothing could be done. As far as he and Eric could see Hazel was lost to them for ever, and could they have known her real plight their feelings would not have undergone any change.

Try as he would Eric could not gather up the threads of the mysterious disappearance of the woman he loved. Miss Fane was not to be shaken in her account of the occurrence, yet Eric could not bring himself to believe that the girl was speaking the truth. Hazel had no former lover save Horace Caldecott. On that point Monteith was positive. And he had been equally positive that Caldecott was not on board the *Mystic* when the steamer left Liverpool. Of the man Herbert Jones nothing was known, yet Monteith was forced to the opinion that somehow Caldecott and Jones were mixed up together in this black, inscrutable mystery.

Would he ever know the real truth? Would he ever see Hazel again? He pictured her at that moment lying cold and dead beneath the waves. Misery unspeakable filled his heart.

As for Jenny Lovelace, her feelings of agony were most poignant. "I shall never cease reproaching myself," she said to Eric, "for having allowed Hazel to go out alone with Miss Fane. Yet how could I think that any danger menaced Hazel out here upon the lonely sea?"

Monteith stifled a groan. "I am sure you have nothing to reproach yourself with, Miss Lovelace," he said in a low voice, "and besides, you were prostrate with sickness. It was no fault of yours. It was the fault of that cruel destiny that hems Hazel in—Hazel, the most beautiful, the most blameless of women, whose path should be strewn with roses instead of being beset by such cruel dangers."

CHAPTER V.

THE captain of His Britannic Majesty's cruiser *Wasp* was in a bad temper. He had been ordered to sail from Belfast to Liverpool at forced pressure to test the capabilities of a new type of boiler that a capricious Government had installed on his vessel, and now a dense fog enveloped sea and sky, and added to the darkness of a night that was, by the almanac, moonless.

By his side on the bridge stood his first lieutenant, as annoyed as was his chief at the climatic discomforts.

"Was ever man pursued by viler luck?" said Captain Bambridge. "The old women at the Admiralty aren't here to see the confounded state of affairs, and as likely as not they'll refuse to believe that there was anything more than a Scotch mist about to-night. I've a jolly good mind to signal 'Full steam a-head' and trust to luck. At the most we could only ram a tramp or run down a fishing smack; and what's that when the efficiency of the new boilers is at stake."

The first lieutenant laughed at his chief's saturine humour. "It's a case of being between the devil and the deep sea," he answered. "You can't serve the Admiralty and the owners of tramp steamers."

But although the captain had threatened to signal "Full steam a-head," he knew perfectly well that such a thing was impossible. There was nothing for it but to move slowly forward and to trust to the fog lifting.

Suddenly something happened that brought renewed alertness to Captain Bambridge and Lieutenant Styles. A faint cry rang over the face of the waters.

"Help! Help! Help!" they heard distinctly. The voice was a woman's.

"Great Scott! What's that?" said Styles. "Don't you hear the sounds of a ship's engines, sir?"

The captain's answer was to press a knob at his side, the next moment a great beam of light shot out from the bow of the cruiser, piercing the fog like a flaming ray of molten silver.

A bell rang down in the bows of the ship; men could be heard scurrying about on the deck; the cruiser swung round a point or two. As she did so a shadowy shape loomed up into the ray of the great search-light.

The captain seized a speaking-trumpet. "Ah-oy, there!" he cried, "what ship are you?"

"Steam-yacht, *Mermaid*, of Port St. Mary, Isle of Man," came the stentorian answer. "Who are you?"

"H.M.S. first-class cruiser *Wasp*. Were you singing out for help just now?"

"No," came the answer; "we're all right."

"I'll swear the cry came from the yacht, sir," whispered Styles hurriedly in his chief's ear.

"I think so, too," answered the captain. "There's something here wants investigating."

"Lie to," he roared in answer; "we're sending a boat alongside, and no bunkum mind. I've got the range of you."

A muttered curse was the answer to reach the ears of the two officers.

With that promptitude for which British tars are world-famous, a picked crew of bluejackets with the first lieutenant himself in command, manned one of the *Wasp's* long-boats, and in a marvellously short time was rowing with long measured sweep towards the suspicious steam-yacht.

Styles himself was the first to board the *Mermaid*. He was met by Caldecott, who broke out with: "What does this intrusion mean, sir? Have the officers of His Majesty's Navy taken to piracy?"

Styles took very little notice of his chagrin. "I heard a cry for 'help,'" he answered curtly, "in a woman's voice coming from this yacht. I must be under the necessity of searching your vessel."

He motioned to a couple of bluejackets. "Search the yacht thoroughly," he said, "and then report to me here."

A few minutes passed by, then the bluejackets appeared. With them was a girl at the sight of whom the naval lieutenant gave utterance to a sound of amazement. "Surely I know you?" he said blankly; "you're Miss Hazel Harlow, the actress about whom everyone is talking now."

"Yes, yes," answered Hazel breathlessly. Then she threw herself at the young sailor's feet. "Save me, sir, save me!" she cried. "Take me away anywhere so long as I escape from him"—indicating Caldecott with a gesture of horror.

The inflammable Styles, overcome by the sight of beauty in such distress, raised the girl to her feet.

"Certainly I'll save you," he said in a mystified voice. "What does it all mean? I have a boat here, and we can have you on board the *Wasp* in a jiffy, and perhaps we had better take the *Mermaid* in tow, so as to institute inquiry when we reach land."

"No, no," cried Hazel; "I want to get away from him; I never want to see his face again, and if he comes I shall have all the horror of publicity to face. Only take me to Belfast where my friends will be, and you will put me under a debt of gratitude that I shall never be able to repay."

Styles looked puzzled, as well he might. He had as yet only the most meagre details to help him in his elucidation of this mystery of the sea. He looked at Hazel's pale, beautiful face, and from her to Horace Caldecott, who, lowering and resentful, stood silently at his side.

"What have you got to say for yourself?" asked the lieutenant sharply.

Caldecott shrugged his shoulders. "Only that I picked up Miss Harlow drifting helplessly on the open sea in a steamer's jolly-boat. You will not deny that, I think," he said, turning to Hazel and trying to repress the smouldering passion that lay behind his eyes.

Hazel turned from him with a shudder. "Take me away," she said to the lieutenant faintly.

Styles, now more hopelessly mystified than ever, issued a few sharp orders; the result of these was that Hazel found herself snugly stowed away in the stern-sheets of the cruiser's long-boat and being rapidly rowed away from the hateful presence of Horace Caldecott.

She was taken on board the cruiser and conveyed to the captain's private cabin. To Bambridge, an elderly married man and eminently kind-hearted, she poured out the whole story of how she had been lured away from the *Mystic* and into Caldecott's clutches. Bambridge was furious.

"Why on earth did you let the fellow go, Miss Harlow?" he cried. "You could have had him locked up for this; a rascal like that has no business to be at large. From your account he must be a man of money and leisure. Say the word and I'll put about the cruiser's head," the *Wasp* was steaming back towards Belfast, "and have him in prison in a brace of shakes."

Had it been any other girl but Hazel, the answer to this proposition would probably have been in the affirmative, but Hazel was no ordinary girl. The modest retirement of her nature engendered by her long communion with nature when living at the farm at Honeycote, had never fostered in her heart the fierce extremes of love and hate that come so readily to some natures.

The danger put behind her for the present, she did not think of the future. She did not seem to realise that with Horace Caldecott she was dealing with a man whose nature was as far different from hers as the Poles are distant. He was a man of fierce passions, unscrupulous, almost a monomaniac where Hazel was concerned. She did not realise that in him she had found a lover who would never rest while life remained to him, from endeavouring to gain possession of the woman whom, as yet, all his most desperate schemes had failed to secure.

It was nine o'clock the next morning before the *Wasp* steamed into Belfast Harbour. The fog had lifted, and the *habitues* of the port were astounded to see the cruiser return. "A break-down," the more knowing ones uttered, "the Admiralty would have done better to have stuck to the old Scotch boilers."

But that there was no break-down soon became apparent. A boat put out from the cruiser's side in the stern of which a woman's form could be described. What on earth could be the meaning of such an extraordinary occurrence? But when it was seen that the young lady was exceedingly beautiful, and had, moreover, no luggage except the clothes she wore the mystification deepened. Where on earth had the *Wasp* picked up its beautiful cargo?

* * * * *

The members of *The Good Samaritan* Company were assembled on the stage of the Theatre Royal, Belfast. Consternation was depicted on every face save that of Miss Templeton Fane and her companion Juliet Fitzgerald, who were of course "in the know," to use a vulgarism.

Raymond Venables seemed beside himself. "It is a terrible thing," he was saying, "a terrible thing! And

"Adventures of an Actress" still going strong.

yet the performance must be got through somehow to-night. Miss Granville, as Miss Harlow's understudy, will take the part of Ruth to-night. I must ask you ladies and gentlemen to try and banish from your minds the remembrance of what happened last night. We must get to rehearsal at once." He gave vent to a deep sigh. Then something happened that was perhaps more dramatic than any scene in a play could ever be. A sound came from the wings, and the figure of a woman hurried to the centre of the stage. It was Harlow Hazel. For a moment the whole company stood as if spellbound. A cry from Miss Templeton Fane broke the silence. She dashed forward and flung herself at Hazel's feet. "Mercy ! mercy," she wailed. "I was tempted."

Hazel took no notice of the prostrate figure. She had only eyes for the three whom she knew despite the differences of their characters were her true friends—Eric, Jenny, and Raymond Venables.

Jenny flung herself into her friend's arms. "Hazel, Hazel," she cried, "is it really you ? Where have you come from ?"

"I will tell you the story another time, dear Jenny," answered Hazel gravely. "Thank Heaven, I am really safe and sound."

She held out her hand to Eric. There were tears in the young man's eyes as he grasped it fervently, tears of unutterable joy and devotion.

That evening Hazel related to Jenny and Eric the full story of how she had been induced to enter the *Mystic's* jolly-boat ; how Miss Fane had lowered her and her unknown captor into the sea ; how she had been taken on board the *Mermaid*, and how she had finally been confronted by the agreement that bound her to become Horace Caldecott's wife. "Half beside myself," she said, "I took the pen in my hand and was about to sign the hateful document, at my wits' end to know what else to do, when suddenly through the one half-opened port-hole of the cabin my straining ears caught the faint sound as of a ship's engines near at hand. In a moment I had leapt to the port-hole and flung it open. 'Help ! help ! help ! I screamed with all the strength of my lungs. The woman who had been put in charge of me flung herself upon me ; but I was stronger than she and overpowered her. Then suddenly Horace Caldecott came into the cabin ; his face was livid with rage. He made a step towards me, and for a moment I thought he was going to kill me, but just at that moment I heard the sound of a man's voice hailing the yacht. Caldecott turned, and, with an oath, dashed up the stairway that led on to the deck. In an incredibly short space of time two bluejackets burst into the cabin. I at once begged them to take me away, which they did." The rest of the story my readers already know.

In the theatre that night a large audience witnessed the first performance of *The Good Samaritan* in Belfast. Most of the warmhearted Irish people who applauded Hazel's performance had got some inkling of the romance of the night before in which Hazel had been involved. She met with a reception that eclipsed any of her previous triumphs, and few who beheld her passing through all the scenes in which the heroine of the play took part could understand what a strain it was to the young girl whose nerves had been so sorely tried by such a harrowing adventure as that which she had experienced.

As for *H.M.S. Wasp*, what looked at first sight a calamity turned out to be a blessing, for a glorious calm day followed the dense fog of the night before. The cruiser made a record run to Liverpool, and her boilers proved themselves capable of being worked at high pressure without fear of accident.

And on board the *Wasp* was a lovelorn first lieutenant. Styles had succumbed, as so many others had done, to the wonderful charms of Hazel Harlow, and near his heart lay a cabinet photograph of the young actress which had been taken in Sheffield. On the back of this was written, "To Lieutenant Styles, in grateful remembrance, from Hazel Harlow."

Thus ended what might have been, but for the merest chance, an end to all Hazel Harlow's hopes for the future. Once more by the aid of Providence she had baulked the man she hated of his fell desires.

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THE OPAL STUD.

"Hang the key! Why does it always stick when I'm in a hurry?"

The speaker was a girl about twenty-two, struggling to unlock a portmanteau. The exigencies of the situation take her at a disadvantage, and prohibit a description of her costume. On a chair hung a dripping coat and skirt, and a pair of neat boots set upside down within the fender suggested water draining out. Miss Clare West, while sight-seeing at Quebec, had been caught and drenched in a storm of rain and was now returning to the hotel Château Frontenac to dress for dinner, due in twenty minutes.

As she stood petulantly fumbling with the keys, uttering impatient masculine imprecations, she might almost have been mistaken for a boy, with her tall, athletic figure and short curly hair.

"The confounded thing!" she spluttered, and tried another key. This time it turned, and she flung the lid back.

"Great Scott! What's this? Who put this here?" she demanded, drawing out an embroglio of bands and buttonholes, and holding it up gingerly between her finger and thumb.

"Stocking suspenders? No! By Jupiter, it's braces or I'm a Dutchwoman!"

The next shock was a pair of trousers.

"It's not mine at all," she cried, in indignant dismay, "it's some beastly man's trunk."

Slamming down the lid angrily, she examined the surface. Sure enough there were her initials, "C.W."

"That's me. And so is the trunk to look at. But the contents aren't," she declared, with a wholesale massacre of grammar. "And now how the mischief am I to scuttle down to *table d'hôte* in seventeen minutes?"

She strode toward the bell to summon the chambermaid, when a vagrant fancy brought her to a halt, with a merry but daring expression in her handsome Irish blue eyes.

"By Jupiter! What fun it would be!" broke from her lips irresistibly. "What an ecstatic lark! Not a soul knows me here, and this time to-morrow I shall be a hundred miles on my way home by the *Dominion*. Why should I not chance it? Who's to find out? And oh! what copy it would make!"

* * * * *

The great function of dinner was in full progress in the magnificent *table d'hôte salon* of the Chateau Frontenac, as a handsome but foppish looking boy entered and stood vaguely gazing round the crowded tables with a cool self-assurance. He gave the impression of being one of stiff-starched, ultra-conceited masher youths, whom the average man of the world feels inclined to kick at sight. Fastidiously stuffing his silk handkerchief into his sleeve, and with his chin very high in the air, he strolled towards a vacant seat and was about to appropriate it, when the head waiter interposed with the notification that it was engaged and conducted him to a small, remote table, where, to his obvious disgust, he was placed next to the only occupant, an individual in tweed travelling suit, who looked like a sparrow amidst swallows.

The boy frowned, flicked out his coat tails, drew his chair under him and leisurely proceeded to unfold his serviette, craning his head as he did so to survey the visitors. Then he ran his hand daintily through his hair, cast a haughty glance at his neighbour, elevated his eyebrows in marked disapproval of his unconventional costume and applied himself with an ineffable expression to a study of the menu card.

"Aw—any sort of soup," was his order, "and—aw—bottle of champagne."

The man in tweed glanced at him, and resumed the section of his mullet with the freezing air of insularity Englishmen affect among strangers.

The bumptious boy absorbed his soup with exaggerated precaution against soiling his immaculate and expansive shirt-front and ostentatious applications of his serviette to his upper lip—a quite superfluous ceremony.

Then he revived himself with a critical sip at his champagne, scowled, filled up his glass, and turning to the man in tweed, so far descended from his pedestal of conceit as to observe:

"Beastly day."

"Foggy," was the laconic reply. He was a good-looking man, with a large moustache, and pleasant grey eyes.

"Stopping long?" drawled the boy.

"Can't say."

"Shocking bad cooking I call it," complained the boy, pushing his plate away peevishly.

"Do you? I call it uncommonly good," contradicted the man, with imperturbable calm.

The boy elevated his chin stiffly over his cut-throat collar, turned his head like an automaton, and regarded the man with supercilious surprise. "By jove, you're jolly easy to please. It's the worst I've tasted in my voyage round the world!"

The man looked up, a rebuke evidently hovering on his lips. But it dissolved as his glance fell on the conceited youngster, who apparently unconscious of his impertinence, was picking at an imaginary moustache, and spoiling his good looks with his abominable affectation. There was nothing to be gained by breaking this butterfly on a wheel, and the man contented himself with a survey of contemptuous pity, until his eyes happened to be arrested by the boy's opal shirt stud.

"Wine rank gooseberry," criticised the boy, choking over a too hasty gulp of his champagne.

You won't forget to get a new reader, will you?

"Did you get a better brand at school?" asked the man, with quiet sarcasm.

"I do not follow the drift of your observation," replied the boy haughtily, presenting the full and overpowering expanse of his shirt front to crush his neighbour.

The man was not intimidated. "No drift in it," he said coolly, as he bent forward and stared critically into the white field of linen, which caused the boy to repeat the ceremony of using his serviette.

There was a pause, and the boy leant languidly back, his hands buried deep in his pockets, and on his face a *blasé* air of being profoundly bored.

A couple of courses passed without remark. The boy sipped constantly at his champagne, and investigated all the people within view. At last he spoke.

"Not a bad-looking girl over there. The one in pink crêpon. Next the old ruin in grey."

The man glanced in the direction and grunted.

"Pity mothers are such fools as to parade daughters themselves. Ought to hire decent-looking women to show them off. Such a handicap to a girl when a fellow can tot up what she is likely to total. Puts a fellow off, don't you know. Now that girl, by herself——"

"Yes."

"Well—she's tolerably decent. Crumby, I call her. But I bet my boots she'll bake into crust, like the old mother."

"Supposing the elder lady is not her mother."

"Suppose rubbish! Look at the faces."

"Look at the facts."

"Hullo! Do you know them?"

"Slightly."

"Oh, I say, sorry I spoke. Awfully mortified, old chap. Hope I said nothing to wound your feelings."

"Don't distress yourself."

The boy puckered his handsome face. "But I really am awfully sorry. Wouldn't have done it for worlds. Makes a man feel such an accidental cad, don't you know."

Beneath the surface of conceit he was genuinely distressed.

"The best way to avoid that unenviable misfortune," hinted the man gravely, "is to treat every strange lady with the respect due to her sex—as if she were your mother or sister."

"Or your *fiancée*," sniggered the incorrigible youth.

"Or your——" The man stopped suddenly, his eyes focussed on the boy's shirt front, which was again presented with an air of patronising condescension.

The scrutiny seemed to disconcert the boy, who lifted his glass of champagne hurriedly and drained it at a gulp. By the way it made his cheeks flush and his eyes wink he seemed susceptible to the influence of what he had so disparagingly condemned as "rank gooseberry." With a sort of bravado he turned boldly to the man and laughed out:

"Well, luck to the ladies, anyhow! 'Pon my word, this fizz is a better tipple than I gave it credit for at first."

"I see you're a judge of champagne," said the man, with an amused twinkle.

"So, so," admitted the boy, falling back into his languid conceit. "Every fellow knows what suits him best. The best judge is the man who judges best—for himself. Let me choose my own wine, my own weed, and my own wife, and, by Jupiter, I won't go far wrong. But I say"—he branched off a little hilariously—"if you know that pretty girl, why the dickens didn't you get planted next to her at dinner? Hang me, if I'd only had such a chance——" and he shot his cuff and fondled his chin with the self-satisfied air of a coxcomb.

"I'm not exactly dressed to dine with ladies."

"No, by gad—no more you are! Rather wondered how you could face the music in that slump," assented the boy, impudently. "Makes a fellow feel so beastly out of it."

"No one notices a traveller," said the man, "and I hope to be off by the *Dominion* to-morrow."

The boy paused, hastily poured himself out another glass of champagne, gulped it down, and pushed his chair back.

"Confound it, I can't stand these long, dull dinners," he ejaculated, with unabashed effrontery. "So insipid and slow! I'm off to whiff a cigarette. Ta, ta!" and with a cool nod of his head he rose and sauntered out.

No sooner had he reached the hall than he quickened his pace, when, to his surprise, an arm was slipped through his.

It was the man in tweed.

"I think I'll join you, my young friend," and without more ado he gently but firmly guided the boy into the smoking-room. "Try one of my cigars," he added, as he closed the door.

"Oh, thanks. You're awfully kind. But I never whiff anything except a cigarette after dinner. Where's my case, I wonder?" He was diving awkwardly into his tail pocket with a single hand. "Hang it. I must have left it in my room. I'll go and fetch it."

"No, no," interposed the man. "I insist upon your trying one of my cigars. I should like to have your opinion. 'Wine, weeds, and a wife'—wasn't it?—you don't go wrong about?"—and with a good-natured perseverance the man forced a cigar into the boy's unwilling hand and held a lighted match for him.

"Come, there's a comfortable lounge over there," went on the man, linking his arm into the boy's again and leading him to one of the big bay windows; "ah—and here's the coffee."

"What number, sir?" asked the waiter.

"What number? Oh, I say. I never remember numbers, you know," declared the boy.

"What name, sir?"

The boy blew a hasty cloud of smoke from his cigar and plunging his hand into his pocket drew out—a lady's purse.

"I'll pay for the coffee," he said, handing the waiter a dollar. "Never mind the change," and he flurriedly crammed the purse back into his pocket.

The incident was not lost on the man in tweed, whose grey eyes were fixed curiously on the boy, in whom conceit had given way to a certain air of confusion.

"So you never remember numbers?" observed the man.

"Never could—except, ha, ha—Number One," answered the boy with a sickly grin.

"Ever find yourself in the wrong box?" asked the man.

The boy had no reply for this, but fidgetting about, crossing and recrossing his legs nervously, and continually shifting his position. To add to his discomfiture his socks had wrinkled down over his shoes, and he had to stoop and pull them up, displaying a rather uncommon orange and grey pattern. The man in tweed took deliberate observation of them, and then bent forward, and fixing his gaze on the boy's shirt front, asked him casually:

"How do you find the cigar?"

"Oh, uncommonly good," declared the boy, his pale cheeks contradicting his commendation, as he held it out at arm's length and pretended to admire the ash. "But it's a little too strong for me. In fact, I think I'll run up and fetch my own cigarette case. I'll be back directly." And he rose rather unsteadily to his feet.

The man rose, too, with a purpose in his features.

"Pardon me, but that's an unusually fine opal stud you are wearing," and he suddenly hooked his finger into the boy's shirt front to better expose the stone.

The boy sprang back, his face aflame.

"I only wanted to examine the stud," said the man quietly.

"Oh! All right. But hold on half a minute, old fellow. Fact is, that strong cigar you pressed on me has rather upset me. I can't wait. Feel queer and foggy. I'll send you down the stud to examine at your leisure. Sorry to have to leave you so unceremoniously, but—but——"

"Enough," said the man, in a low, meaning voice. "No more of this acting. Follow me."

"Follow you?" cried the boy, indignantly, drawing back and raising his voice. "I'll—I'll see you hung first." And he quickly whipped round for the door.

"Don't make a scene," whispered the man, catching him up. "It's no good. You are fairly caught. Be sensible and come along quietly."

"You brute!" hissed the boy between his teeth, "you must be drunk to behave like this. Hands off! I'll call the manager if you attempt to molest me."

"Excellent. We'll both call on the manager," said the man, as without further ceremony he gripped the boy's arm and marched him to the office.

"Where are you taking me to?" faltered the boy.

"To be searched."

"Searched, you scoundrel? How can you suggest such an awful thing?" choked the boy, struggling to free himself.

"Nothing awful about it—except your cheek. Come —in you go."

The manager jumped up from the table where he was writing. "Major Wargrave! Anything wrong, sir?"

"Yes," said the major sternly; "I've tracked the thief. With a lady's purse in his pocket, into the bargain. Search him and you'll see for yourself."

"Oh, you brute!" burst out the boy, blushing scarlet and retreating into a corner. "You cowardly, ungentlemanly cad to suggest such a thing."

"See here, you rogue," said the manager curtly. "Better own up and shell out and go off quietly to the police-station. We don't want any fuss in the hotel."

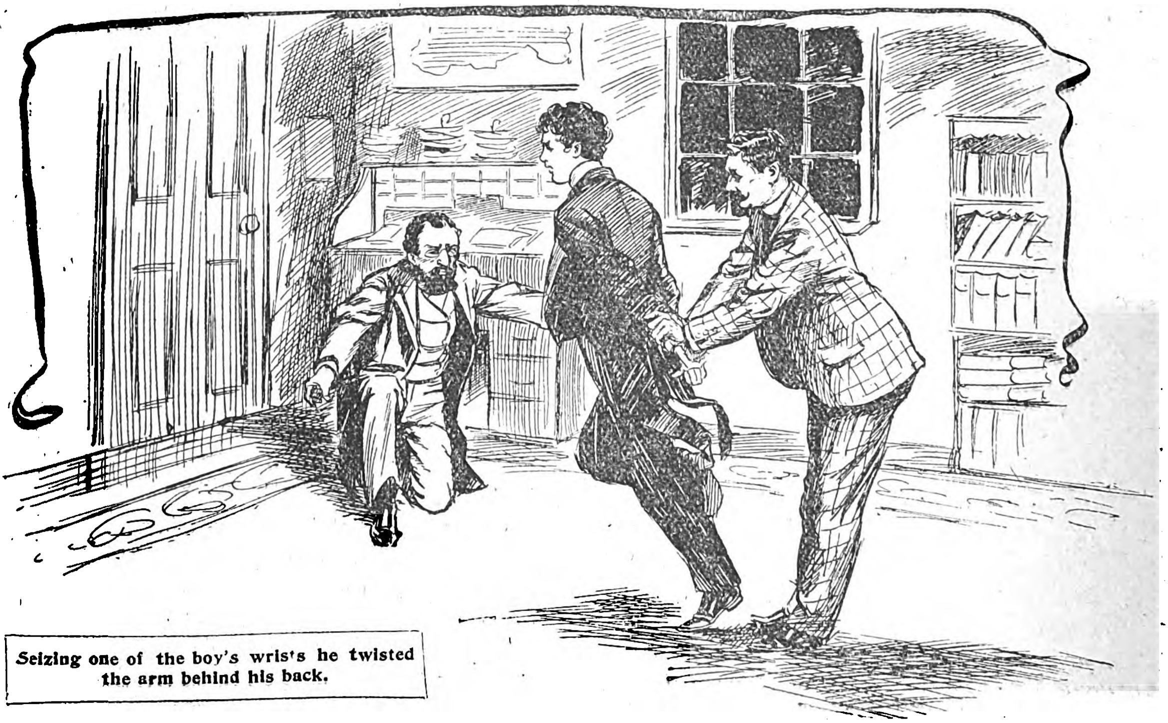
"What have I done?" demanded the boy. "How dare you treat me like this? Let me go at once!" and he made a frantic dash for the door.

"What have you done? Well, I never!" cried the manager, and he slipped in front of the door and bolted it.

"The lady's purse," observed Major Wargrave, "is in his right hand trousers pocket."

The manager approached the boy with the evident intention of abstracting it, when a blow, delivered with excellent aim and considerable force, sent him back.

Major Wargrave closed with the boy. "Is that how the cock fights! Well, you've only yourself to blame, you young cub, if you get roughly handled." And seizing one of the boy's wrists he twisted the arm behind his



Seizing one of the boy's wrists he twisted the arm behind his back.

back. "Now, Mr. Moore, get the purse from his pocket, and slip the opal stud out of his shirt front."

The boy gave a shriek. "Don't touch me—don't touch me!" he implored piteously. "There is a mistake. I'll confess all!" The ring of abject terror and horror in his voice induced the major to loosen his hold.

"Well, then—confess," he said briefly. "And be quick about it."

The boy turned pale and panting. When at last he did speak his whole manner had changed, and with it his character.

"And you call yourself a gentleman to take advantage of a girl like this?"

"A girl!" cried the major, falling back confounded.

"As if you didn't know!"

"I never dreamt of such a thing."

"You staring brute! You did know. Or you would not have stared at me as you did."

"Stared at you!" protested the major, blushing now as badly as the quondam boy. "I was not staring at you. I was staring at my opal stud. It was in my portmanteau, which is missing. I saw you wearing it. You wouldn't give your number. You wouldn't give your name. You grew white and uncomfortable——"

"White and uncomfortable!" cried the quondam boy with a stamp of his foot. "Were not your eyes enough to make me so? Not to mention that vile cigar. But I wasn't going to be out-tricked by you."

"Oh—ah—yes—the cigar. Of course. But the socks. I recognised them. Indeed, I seem to recognise the whole outfit now. That was why I asked you to let me examine the stud—a trinket I value very much."

"There! Take your stud! Do you think I wanted to steal it? Do I look like a thief?"

A pair of handsome eyes flashed sparks of fire at the major as with agitated fingers the stud was torn out, and flung down on the table. "And now, sir, be pleased to make way for me."

"Oh, no. Not just yet," interposed the manager. "I've come across many hotel sharps, but this is something quite new in hotel sniping. We must have an explanation. Why are you dressed in man's clothes? Are they Major Wargrave's?"

The quondam boy shrank back with face hidden.

"Who are you? How came you to sneak into the hotel?"

"Sneak into the hotel, you wretch! I am staying here. I am Miss West. Your porter brought the wrong trunk to my room, and left it there in my absence. A black one, with the initials 'C. W.' on it—the facsimile of mine. And one of my keys fitted it."

The manager glanced at the ledger. "Yes. There's a Clare West in No. 46. Are you Clare West?"

"Brute! I'm Miss West. Haven't I told you so?"

"Telling is not enough. You must explain this extraordinary conduct. And, if your story is satisfactory, leave the hotel instantly. We can't have women masquerading in men's clothes in the Chateau Frontenac."

Clare West gave a shudder. "I am not humiliated enough, but you must insult me. Oh, sir" (to the major) "you are very chivalrous, who preached chivalry to me at dinner!" Then a sudden resolution stormed and animated her features. Drawing herself erect she faced the two men. "You shall have your explanation. I only arrived this afternoon late. There was an hour to spare, and I went out, but was caught in the storm and soaked through. When I returned to my room there was a trunk there exactly like mine. I opened it in the belief it was. When I found out the mistake that had been made I was going to ring for the chambermaid when a—a mad freak entered my head to go down to *table d'hôte* as a man, and get copy for a letter. I am the round-the-world correspondent of the *Go-Ahead Girl*, and I thought—I thought it would make such a—a striking and o-original article, and be such—such—fun!" At which juncture, to illustrate humour of the situation, Clare West broke down and abandoned herself to tears.

The manager whistled incredulously, but a grim look from Major Wargrave silenced him.

"Miss West," said the major in a grave, kind voice, "I beg your pardon. Believe me, I laboured under an entire misapprehension. You acted your part so cleverly I mistook you for a boy. And now, if you'll slip quietly back to your room, I will cover your return, if—if you will let me."

* * * * *

It was inevitable they should meet on the Royal mail steamer *Dominion*, on which they had both booked passages. Most girls would have forfeited theirs a thousand times rather than subjected themselves to such a meeting, but Clare West (except perhaps for one swift glance of gratitude from her tear-washed eyes on the stairs) had not thanked Major Wargrave, and she persuaded herself that to sail in the same steamer, much as she dreaded it, would be a proper act of penance on her part. He had no suspicion she was to be a fellow passenger, and when, as the ship was passing the island of Anticosti, a lady addressed him by name, he was at a loss for a moment to recognise her.

"I am Miss West," she said, "and I want to apologise and say how sorry I am, and—and to thank you for your chivalry."

"Don't—please don't," he said, with a pained look in his face. "I haven't forgiven myself yet for being such a brute as to twist your arm."

"And so I really took you in?" she returned, with a little gleam of satisfaction.

"You took Mr. Moore in, who is as sharp as I'm stupid."

"And as cruel as you are kind," added Clare emphatically.

Somehow that audaciously conceived letter, "At *Table d'hôte* in Trousers," never made its appearance in the *Go-Ahead Girl*. In point of fact, it was never written, although there was an abundance of crisp material for copy. The article that took its place was headed "Nearing Home." It was voted sickly sentimental by the more robust readers of the journal, who wondered what had happened to "C. W."—generally so smart and cynical with her pen.

When it appeared in print, however, the familiar initials no longer stood for Clare West, and Major Wargrave's opal guarded a wedding ring on her finger.

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SHORT STORIES.

FOR NORA'S SAKE.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "Hate, the Destroyer," etc.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE WELLAM WOODS.

"CAN you tell me the way to the Mains, my good fellow—Mrs. Brabazon's place, I mean; it's on the river somewhere, isn't it?"

The person addressed was a tall servant in a quiet livery, who, aided by a subordinate, was setting forth, on a smooth stretch of greensward, the conveniences for a substantial cold lunch—knives, forks, serviettes, and wine-glasses. On the top of the large wicker basket which had contained these accessories was displayed, under a protecting gauze, an inviting array of viands—galantine of chicken, salad, bear's ham, oyster patties, and a seductive Strasbourg pie, flanked by a dish of trifle and an assortment of jellies. Close by a magnum of champagne poked its neck from the depths of a cooler, and some bottles of hock and claret kept it in countenance.

The man who had spoken twitched his cuffs nervously under the sleeves of his coat; his linen was soiled and ragged. Nor was the rest of his costume less suggestive of poverty. He wore a silk hat, it is true, but the once rakish shape of that article was sorely battered, and its brim saturated with grease. A dingy four-in-hand tie, a "flash" diamond pin, and a threadbare morning suit completed the querist's attire. His face was purple and bloated, and his mouth betrayed both impudence and astuteness.

The smart servant looked suspiciously at his questioner. "I'm Mrs. Brabazon's first footman," he said with lofty self-possession; "and these here woods is her private property. The road from the station leads to the lodge gates, as anyone could have told you."

The other smiled deprecatingly. "So I believe," he admitted; "I was trying for a short cut. But I find I've forgotten the lie of the land—I was ten years younger when I was last in these regions. How is Mrs. Brabazon—and—and the girls?"

"They enjoy excellent 'ealth," was the dignified reply; "but you'll excuse me, this is the luncheon place for the shooting party, and, being her own estate, Mrs. Brabazon won't expect to see strangers hanging around. If you cross the bridge yonder and keep the straight path, you'll get into the high road near the Mains."

"All right," said the wearer of the shabby garments and the disreputable hat; "I'm off. But may I ask if—if Miss Chisholm will be among those partaking of this—ahem!—elegant refection?"

"She will," retorted the footman; "she come up with us in the launch just now, not being, you may say, a sportswoman like Miss Olive and Mrs. Brabazon, as have been out with the guns all the morning, and shooting themselves. And nice and sharp-set the lot of them'll be; so I'll thank you to leave me to my work."

Shrugging his shoulders the inquirer lounged away and disappeared over the indicated bridge, a rustic structure of poles and split boughs. On the further side he swerved suddenly and crouched down, behind a mass of willows on the upper bank of the stream. In front of him was the edge of the Wellam Woods and the glade on whose carpet of emerald turf there gleamed the white damask and shining cutlery of Mrs. Brabazon's shooting luncheon.

Between, the brown waters of the Wellam slipped by, carrying on their ruffled surface the withered leaves of yet another summer. Warm as was the air, splendid as were the rustling forest trees, the month was September. A day of swift and ruthless reckoning had dawned for the partridges in the rolling turnip-fields that bordered for a full mile the south bank of the river.

While he gazed, a twig crackled hard by, and he shrank into his species of bower, to see saunter past a youthful Briton, handsome, bronzed, muscular, his gun under his arm and his eyes bent upon his companion, a girl in a simple flowered muslin and a big straw piled with roses. They moved on towards the bridge, laughing and chattering.

"You are an incorrigible sentimentalist, Miss Chisholm," reached the ear of the man behind the willows; "but there, I confess it is an unfashionable quality that seems to belong to a certain kind of girl."

"What sort of girl, Captain Lane?" was the gay inquiry; "'a certain kind' is terribly vague, it may hide a compliment or disguise an—well, the reverse."

Captain Lane bent his head and his firm tenor trembled a little as he murmured: "The sort of girl one's mother might have been, Miss Chisholm; the sort of girl that makes a fellow wish he'd tried to run straighter all his life; the sort of girl one can't chaff; the sort of girl that—that kiddies like to play with. Oh, Miss Chisholm, I'm a bad hand at stringing words together, but you know what I mean; the sort of girl that ought to have a sweet old name such—such as Nora."

They had stepped on the bridge now and were out of hearing, so far as the tenant of the willow copse was concerned. Nora Chisholm blushed and was about to descend in silence the wooden stairs at the extremity of the single rustic span, when her escort leapt down and offered her his strong palm for support. Nora leaned on it momentarily, but the warm colour grew in her cheeks.

"What a deal of flattery," she cried, "because I can't bear to kill the poor partridges and pheasants! Other people call me a coward and don't trouble to invent excuses for me."

"You need no better excuse than your own gentle heart," was the response; "why, I have been quite reluctant to pull a trigger this morning, just through your bringing me out yesterday and showing me that you knew more of the poor partridges than we who delight in slaughtering them. You are a born naturalist, Miss Chisholm."

"Indeed, I am no such thing," Nora assured him;

"I have only talked to the keepers, and crept about with a field-glass when all was quiet. But the birds and beasts got not to be afraid of me at last. That's why it hurts me to think of your cruel guns and dogs—no, the dogs aren't cruel, you teach them to hunt. But see, there is Mrs. Brabazon and Olive and Fanshawe with the lunch waiting to be popped into our mouths. Yes, and after come Sir George and the Admiral."

Captain Lane sighed as he broke off his *tête-à-tête* with Miss Chisholm to pass his gun to a keeper. Nora patted the dogs as they fawned upon her, whining with pleasure at the encounter.

"Ah, here you are, Nora!" exclaimed a good-humoured voice, whose owner was a plump, active woman of medium height and florid complexion. She was clad in a tweed shooting costume, and had that instant relinquished a double-barrelled sporting gun to an attendant. By her walked, or rather lounged, a fair girl with a proud, almost disdainful, cast of countenance and a fine figure, set off by her piquant dress, short skirt, and many-buttoned gaiters.

"Hope you enjoyed your dawdle, Nora," added the latter personage; "next time you can keep mamma with you. She's in shocking form—only got a couple of brace, and one bird the Admiral shot, for a thousand, though he says his got away, and, of course, mother swallowed the fib."

Mrs. Brabazon laughed jollily. "We can't all manage our twenty brace, my dear Olive," she retorted; "but if I can't shoot, I can eat, and I feel as famishing as the Admiral looks."

"I'll go and find you a comfortable seat," said Nora quickly, and ran off, glad to escape from the piercing scrutiny that Olive Brabazon had been levelling alternately at Captain Lane and herself. The gallant officer followed, intent on securing a position next her at lunch.

"My dear lady," observed the broad-chested, rubicund member of the shooting party whose expression Mrs. Brabazon had commented on. "I may or may not look hungry, but there is no question that I am. And so would Millard be, if Miss Olive hadn't spoiled his appetite by letting Lane load for her."

"S-s-sh!" pleaded Mrs. Brabazon, glancing at her daughter, who had left them to join the subject of this jovial reference. "Olive doesn't comprehend banter, Admiral, and really Sir George is most sensitive where she is involved. But Fanshawe is opening the wine, and Captain Lane has paired off with Nora, so Sir George will be happy for a while."

"But—will—will Olive?" queried Admiral Vallis, as he escorted Mrs. Brabazon towards the luncheon cloth; "she is quite smitten with Ernest Lane, though he is in tow of Miss Nora, if I'm not losing my eyesight."

"Don't!—don't spoil my lunch, Admiral!" cried his hostess, "the girls are trouble enough as it is, for Olive has a temper and Nora is as high-spirited as you please. Olive will make my life a burden if she thinks she has reason to be jealous of Nora, though why she should beats me, for Sir George is a fine figure of a man, and has twice Lane's fortune. But there's an end of it, Admiral, for I'm ravenous, and one can't talk family affairs at an *al fresco* lunch."

She reached the impromptu table, flung herself down on a convenient hillock, and called for a glass of claret. The Admiral devoted himself to providing for her comfort with the ardour of a boy. Sir George Millard studied him frequently from where he sat with Olive Brabazon; he was a stalwart country gentleman, to whose chivalrous character his blue orbs and grave yet kindly mouth bore witness.

"The Admiral retains his old tenderness for your mother," he said at length; "forgive the question, but do you suppose anything will come of it. It would be, in all respects, a most suitable match, except that it might divert your mother's attention somewhat from you. But you will be leaving the Mains one of these days. Flowers such as you must be plucked and worn, Miss Brabazon." And the speaker's tone was full of meaning.

"Mamma likes her liberty," snapped Olive evasively, picking a wishbone with her white teeth; "the Admiral has been her friend and confidant for years. I believe he is the only one besides her who—who knows all about Nora."

"Is there some secret, then?" asked Sir George, his blue eyes lingering affectionately upon Olive, too affectionately to fathom the grimace of irritation that had distorted it when she mentioned the name of Nora Chisholm.

"Certainly there is," he was told; "she isn't any relation to us—we have no Chisholms in our family. Ten years ago she came to the school where I was being educated. Mamma had sent her. From that day to this she has been treated as my sister. This is everything I know, and everything Nora will confess to knowing. She says that mamma forbade her to speak of her childhood to anyone, even me. Nora promised and she is the sort of girl that holds to her promises. As for me, I hate secrets."

Sir George raised his brows, heavy and slightly grey, like his moustaches. "Poor little Nora!" he reflected, "then she is alone in the world, and yet so bright, so gentle, and, I should imagine, so proud."

Olive tossed off her glass of champagne. "If I *must* listen to Nora's praises," she declared, "I shall talk to Captain Lane, he is the chief of her worshippers."

She changed her position with sullen grace, to interrupt the conversation between Ernest Lane and the girl at whom she had been sneering.

"I have been telling Sir George," she said, "what a mystery you are, Nora." There was a spiteful ring in her clear tones—Captain Lane detected it.

"Surely gossip must have done that long ago, Miss Brabazon," he answered sternly; "was it worth while to revive a problem which cannot but be painful to Miss Chisholm, though it is of no importance to those who value her for herself alone."

Olive drew back, her dark pupils blazing with anger. Under her vicious though smiling thrust Nora Chisholm had raised her head as if in resentment. But at Ernest Lane's reply she coloured and her bosom rose and fell tempestuously. Discomfited, Olive turned away, and Nora stole a grateful glance at her defender.

"Thank you," she murmured, "I didn't think you knew. And yet I—I hoped you did."

Captain Ernest Lane started. "You hoped," he repeated, beneath his breath. "Nora, you don't mean you were afraid it might make any diff—oh, I've no right to say that. But you must have seen that I care for you. I'm a fool to choose this place for speaking out, but mystery or no mystery, whatever you may be or whatever you have been, I love you, Nora, love you for what you are, the sweetest, cleverest, prettiest, dearest girl in the world."

Nora was pretending to be busy with her plate. But she flashed a look up at him that set the Captain's pulses beating like hammers. One of her small brown palms lay within Ernest Lane's reach, his fingers crept to it and clasped it. Nora Chisholm returned the clasp ever so lightly.

Neither of the lovers who had so impulsively arrived at an understanding evinced any further interest in the subject of luncheon. Their absorption in each other was remarked by all—by Mrs. Brabazon with anxiety, by Sir George Millard with satisfaction, by the Admiral with sly malice, by the servants with inquisitive sympathy, by Olive with a burning jealousy. Only she had observed that eager clasp which had revealed so much. She gnawed her lips in the bitterness of her misery; she had conceived an unreasoning passion for the young officer, a passion which he suspected as little as he reciprocated it.

Finally she sprang up, unable any further to endure the spectacle of Nora's happiness.

"Why do we ever lunch out!" she cried, "it is horribly uncomfortable, Admiral, mamma, Sir George, haven't you finished? It's no use asking Captain Lane and Nora—they have too much to talk about."

Mrs. Brabazon sighed, and, aided by the Admiral, abandoned her seat. "We go back with the launch, girls," she said, "and the men can have an hour or two of serious shooting, without a couple of amateurs to plague them. Though I suppose I oughtn't to call Olive an amateur after that twenty brace."

Colouring under Olive's direct attack, Nora had sprung lightly to her feet, avoiding Ernest Lane's offer to assist her. But her eyes met those of her lover and compensated him for her apparent coldness. The Admiral hallooed for the dogs and consulted with the keepers, while the other two men of the party loaded their guns.

Their hostess beckoned abruptly to her ally, the Admiral. "Take yourselves off," she ordered, "Olive is in a perfectly desperate mood about Lane and Nora—I must deal with her at once. The servants have to pack before the launch can leave, and we shall only waste your afternoon."

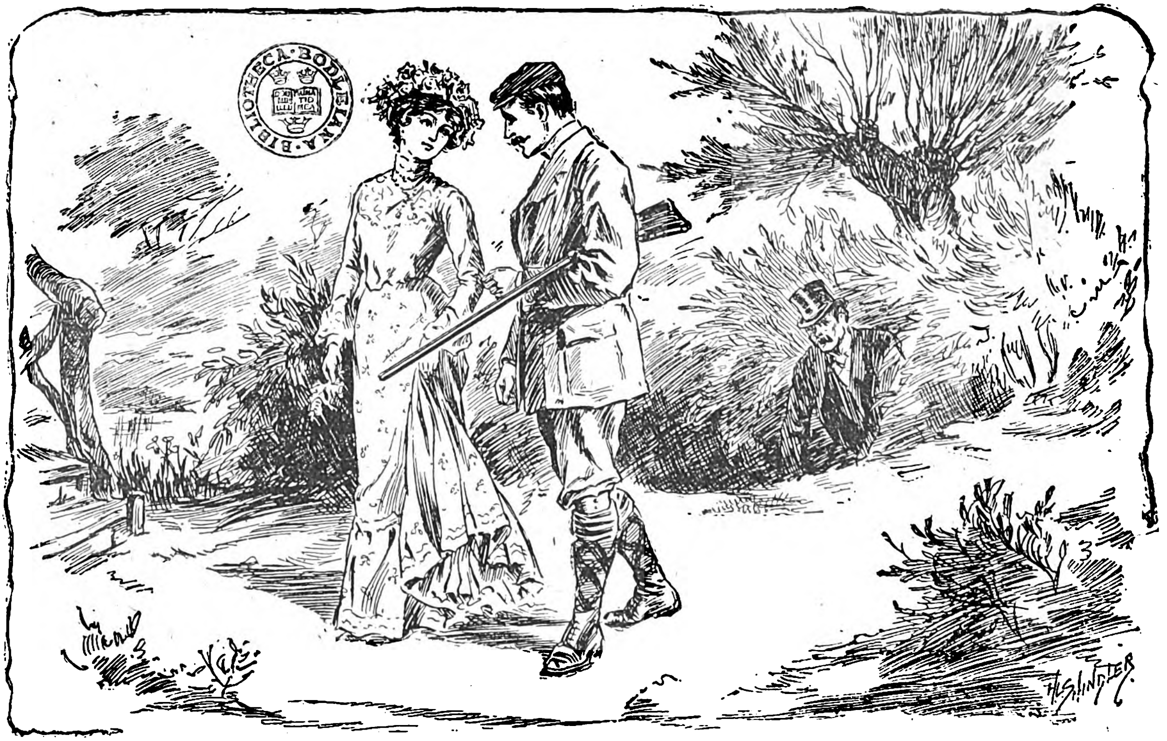
The Admiral bowed and bore off his companions tactfully. The three raised their hats, as they left the glade, followed by the dogs and the keepers.

Mrs. Brabazon turned to Nora. "Go and get a wrap from the launch, child," she said, "that muslin is far too thin for a north wind and an autumn day."

"You forget, mamma," intervened Olive bitterly, "Captain Lane admired it, and it must be worn at all costs."

Nora laughed. "Captain Lane only said," she retorted, "that it was charmingly old-fashioned. Would you be satisfied with a compliment of that sort?" And she ran down, singing, to the launch and the neighbouring back water. Mrs. Brabazon faced her daughter.

"Olive," she gasped, "have you lost all self-respect? Nora and you have grown up together, and yet because Captain Lane, who is nothing to you, chooses to show a fancy for her, you act like a tigress, or, what is the same species of animal, a jealous woman. Have you no dignity, no self-control?"



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A twig cracked hard by, and he shrank into his species of bower to see saunter past a youthful Briton, his gun under his arm and his eyes bent upon his companion.

"Adventures of an Actress" still going strong.

Olive Brabazon's answer was anticipated. A hand was laid arrestingly on her mother's shoulder, and the owner of the Mains beheld, standing at her side, the broken-down silk-hatted personage whom at an earlier juncture her first footman had warned off out of the glade. During the last few seconds he had been descending, with circumspect steps, from his willow screen on the farther bank of the river.

Mrs. Brabazon stared at him astonished. "You," she faltered, "I thought you were dead."

"Dead be——!" swore the other. "I'm alive right enough, and I want my child—my child Nora. She's in her minority and you can't keep her from me, Mrs. Brabazon. I can prove I never deserted her; you as good as stole her, you know you did, and I could prosecute you for it. Now am I going to have her back, am I going to be offered terms, or am I going to be nasty and consult my solicitor?"

The woman presented with this problem looked round—the servants had left the glade and were carrying the provision basket to the launch. "Why—why do you claim her," she stammered, shrinking from his menace, "what use can Nora be to you?"

Her threatener grinned. "She can help to support her loving father," he said; "she's the very thing for the stage. I've been watching her while the lot of you fed. A pretty face, a bright eye, a fetching smile, and thoroughbred manners. Come on, am I to have her, or am I to be bought off?"

Olive interrupted the debate—a fierce exultation in her young countenance. "So this is Nora's father!" she whispered, "I'm glad of it. But what reason could you possibly have for adopting her—for stealing her, if he speaks the truth. Of course you'll let her go; we can't have a scandal."

Mrs. Brabazon made an undecided gesture. "You don't know what you ask," she muttered. "I must have time to think. See, the servants are returning; what shall I do?"

The shabby stranger answered her query. "I'll look you up at the Mains to-night," he said; "you can have five or six hours to make up your mind, which, being a woman's, it'll probably need. I don't want a wrestling match with your—ahem!—your menials. *Au revoir.*"

He strolled away and crossed the bridge; the two footmen had seen him in parley with Mrs. Brabazon and surveyed his departing shape in utter amazement. Their mistress was wiping her fingers—moist with sudden perspiration—upon her lace handkerchief.

"The launch is ready, ma'am," she was informed. Mrs. Brabazon collected her scattered senses and linked her arm in that of her daughter.

"If you were different, Olive," she murmured, "my task would be easier, much easier." Then she added aloud, "tell the engineer we must reach home as quickly as possible."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Fanshawe, and, exchanging curious glances, the two servants followed her down to the waiting vessel.

CHAPTER II.

What Happened after Dark.

"Nora, dear, ask Captain Lane to spare you for a moment, I—I want your advice upon a little matter."

Ernest Lane rose from the palm-shaded corner where he sat with Nora Chisholm. Mrs. Brabazon—for it was she who had spoken—laid a plump white hand, the wrist of which was glittering with bracelets, upon the Captain's arm.

"You think me a nuisance, don't you, my dear fellow," she said, "but I don't suppose you are talking anything more important than natural history to Nora, and there is a choice which she must make at once if it is to be made at all. So you must pardon my carrying her off for a while."

"Certainly," answered the Captain, a trifle puzzled, and with a covert glance at Nora's bright face he sauntered off across the floor of the conservatory.

Mrs. Brabazon, too, looked at Nora—her own usually cheerful countenance was flushed and anxious, and she swept her black silk skirts round out of her way, to step closer to the girl who had been for so long her nominal daughter.

"You—you want me to make a choice. Mrs. Brabazon," ventured Nora; "what sort of choice—about a frock or—or a party?"

"You shall see," was the reply, "perhaps I ought to break it to you gently, but I haven't the heart. You've got a lot of pluck, Nora, though it's like mine—it won't keep. So I'm going to give you a shock, which I know you'll be equal to, providing I don't let you have time to think about it."

Thus chattering, as if to prevent any further questions on Nora's part, Mrs. Brabazon led her—a slender form in a gauzy evening gown of blue, through the winter garden to a small apartment between the conservatory and the hall, an apartment used both as a lounge and a museum. The Mains was a historic house, and in glass cases against the walls were pikes, swords, lances, daggers—armour and arms of a dozen periods.

The electric switches had been turned on, and in the glare of the pendants, his hat by him on a settee, lolled the person who, that morning, had accosted Mrs. Brabazon in the Wellam Woods.

Nora gazed at him, doubtful of his identity, yet vaguely alarmed. Suddenly the shabby figure started to its full height and with a melodramatic gesture, cried out: "Don't you know me, Nora, I am your father, Godfrey Chisholm!"

A frightened expression leapt into Nora's blue eyes, and she shrank towards Mrs. Brabazon. "I—I do remember you," she faltered, "years and years ago in a great dark house and up a lot of stairs, where I stayed with some poor people, you used to come and drink and swear, and—and say you wished I was dead."

Mrs. Brabazon drew the shivering girl into a protecting embrace, for Nora's cheeks were pale and her young tones strangely hesitating.

"Don't you be worried, dear," urged the elder woman, "he can do you no great harm now. But you're barely twenty, and the law allows him control of you till your majority. I'd fight him for you, but the truth is I didn't come by you quite straightforwardly. To forego his right to order you about for a year—until you're twenty-one—he asks ten thousand pounds, and as it happens I've put by ten thousand pounds for your dowry."

She patted Nora's fingers with tender sympathy, and regarded scornfully the other party to the interview.

"I needn't tell you that I'm not going to have you beggared by a piece of impudent bluff," pursued Mrs. Brabazon, "and as a law-suit would render you notorious, my advice is to go with him. If he neglects to maintain you or if he dares to treat you unkindly, communicate with my solicitors, and we will see how he

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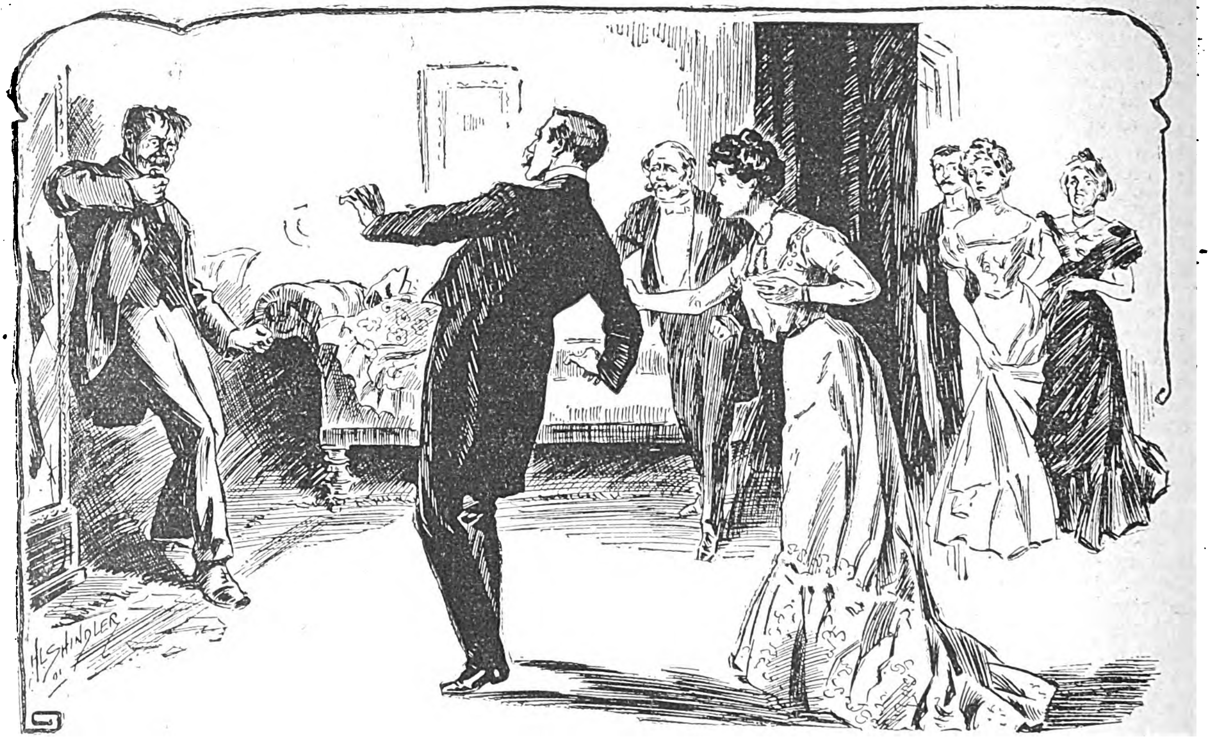


They were too late. The deserter, forcing himself free from his captor, poised the dagger and buried it in his heart.

appreciates the legal noose into which he has popped his head. Were I to bribe him into leaving you alone for the present, he could reappear in six months and repeat the process. So we will surrender you to him for a year, and much good may it do him. You shall meet with no harm, I'll take care of that."

Godfrey Chisholm scowled. "Don't think to stall me off that road, Mrs. Brabazon," he growled, "I'll give you the slip with the girl and see if you can discover our trail. You'll hardly expect me to believe you're fond of her when you won't stump up a little ready cash to keep her with you."

"Believe what you choose," he was advised, "you won't get me to part with Nora's dowry. Only the income from the estates is mine, and I'm a lavish spender. Olive is all right; she will step into the entail, so what I've saved I've saved for Nora. And she, and not you, shall have it. That's my decision."

"As you please," retorted Godfrey Chisholm; "so, Nora, you are my property at last. And, with Mrs. B.'s permission, we'll have a cosy talk—a pleasant *tête-à-tête* while your trunks are being packed."

He opened the door for Mrs. Brabazon to pass out, which she did, pausing to kiss Nora and whisper a sentence of consolation. The girl clung to her.

"I don't understand," murmured Nora bewilderingly, "why has he come back, and why, oh, why did you ever take me away from that terrible world if I must return to it again?"

The elder woman coloured. "Tut," she said under her breath, "a year is nothing, and I'll see you're comfortable. Credit me, darling, it is for the best." And, snatching another embrace, she slipped from the room.

Godfrey Chisholm put his hands in his trousers-pockets and confronted his daughter. "So you remember me," he snarled; "that's as well, you'll realise that I'm not to be played with. When you leave here to-night bring any jewellery and fal-lals you may have. We're going to be hard-up, deucedly hard-up. But I'll soon put you in the way of earning your own living and a trifle of mine, too."

Horrified by the savage determination of the visage that was thrust towards her, Nora recoiled, and, dropping into a seat, began to weep convulsively. At the height of her grief a voice reached her ear—it was that of Captain Ernest Lane. Another moment and he had entered the apartment.

"Well," he exclaimed, "and has Mrs. Brabazon finished with you. I saw that you had chosen this spot for your mysterious consultation—my darling!" he broke off, "what is the matter?" He stopped abruptly, to survey the insolent figure of Godfrey Chisholm.

"I—I beg your pardon," he said, addressing himself to Nora, "I thought you were alone. Shall I—shall I retire?"

Nora shook her head and brushed the blinding tears from her eyes. "No," she sobbed, "you had better know at once. Ernest, Captain Lane, this is my father—he was the terror of my childish life till Mrs. Brabazon rescued me, why she did so I never understood. But before that I did not guess what happiness meant. And now he demands that he shall resume his legal authority over me. I must go away with him. You see what he is; I am not fit for the great honour you offered me—you are free. I—I release you from your promise."

A change had come over Godfrey Chisholm, he had clapped his hat on, pulled it over his brows, and assumed the most slouching attitude he could contrive to evolve from his long limbs and square shoulders.

Ernest Lane looked at him and a light sprang into the young officer's countenance; it grew stern and commanding. He took a stride to Godfrey Chisholm and seized him by the collar.

"I see," he said harshly, "you want your legal rights over this innocent girl. Since you wish for law, you shall have it—military law. Godfrey Chisholm, I recognise you as James Seymour, otherwise 'Gentleman Jim,' of B Company, in the first battalion of the Wessex Regiment, who deserted in South Africa at the beginning of the war, after treacherously killing his senior major, whom he bore a grudge. What rights have you, Godfrey Chisholm, *alias* Seymour, except to be tried by court-martial, and—"

Ernest Lane stopped; after all, he was in the presence of the woman he loved, and the man before him was her father. He could not complete his question by indicating the dread fate of the soldier who murders his comrade or his superior officer.

Godfrey Chisholm turned to bay. "Curse you," he hissed, "it's a trap. But I'll break through it. Stand back, Captain Lane, or I shall do you a mischief."

The Captain hesitated; what would Nora think of him if he were the means of bringing her father to the fate which he so richly deserved. While he meditated, dragged one way by duty and another by affection, the deserter darted past him towards the window. There was a rattle of curtain-rings, a click as he unhasped the French casement, a footstep on the veranda, and Godfrey Chisholm was gone.

Not sorry to be saved the trouble of a decision, and willing to allow the deserter time to make good his escape, Ernest Lane turned to Nora and would have taken her into his arms. But she repulsed him tremulously.

"All is over between us, Ernest," she said, putting her hand to her throbbing bosom; "I was a nobody before—I am worse than a nobody now. I am the daughter of a deserter from your own regiment—a deserter, and, if I understood your terrible words, worse than a deserter. I wish I had never crossed your path."

"I won't give you up, Nora," answered her lover whitely. "I can't lose you, you are mine for ever."

"In heart, yes," murmured Nora pitifully, "but nothing more. Don't be cruel, dear," she begged. "I am doing what is right. You saved me from him; thank heaven you were able to save me. And I must save you, your position, your reputation."

She would have slipped by him but there was an interruption. A figure sprang in at the window—the figure of Godfrey Chisholm.

"A constable is guarding the gate," he gasped, closing the curtains behind him, "and there are others round the house. I've been spotted by the local police—curse my luck; who'd have thought it in this sleepy hole? But I won't be taken—I won't be taken!"

He was unnerved and his teeth were chattering. Ernest Lane glanced irresolutely from the deserter to his daughter, and back again from the girl to the man. Godfrey Chisholm's gaze was wandering about the room as if seeking a chance to escape; his eyes rested on one of the glass cases. It was full of small steel weapons—short swords and daggers of twenty patterns. The deserter—galvanised into life—bounded to it, dashed his foot through the protecting pane and caught down a dagger of the Tudor period, heavy-handled, razor-edged. Nora screamed and Ernest Lane flung himself upon the ex-soldier.

"Let me be, Captain," whispered Godfrey Chisholm; "it's for myself I want it. It's easier than the rope or the bullet, and less fuss. Don't grip me like that, you fool—curse you, I will do it."

Nora's cry had brought a group from the conservatory, Olive and Sir George, the Admiral and Mrs. Brabazon. Olive smiled ferociously; she recognised Godfrey Chisholm in the Captain's antagonist, and, satisfied that the exposure which she had so keenly desired was in progress, drew her yellow silk gown about her and studied the scene from the door.

The Admiral had leapt to Ernest Lane's assistance and, in the same moment, the window-curtains were flung wide, and a police-sergeant appeared, escorted by a couple of constables.

They were too late. The deserter, forcing himself free of his captor, poised the dagger and buried it in his heart. Nora covered her face and fainted—in Ernest Lane's arms.

* * * * *

That night, while the servants sat up to gossip nervously, while the Admiral and Sir George Millard smoked innumerable cigars in the conservatory, while Olive Brabazon brooded gloomily in her room—Godfrey Chisholm slept the last sleep in the apartment where he had so unexpectedly found means to take his own life. Upstairs, in her boudoir, Mrs. Brabazon was revealing to Nora and Ernest Lane the mystery which had united the dead man and her.

"My mother, poor soul, married again soon after my wedding," she said, "and this dangerous wastrel was your father, Nora. Not that you've a drop of his blood in your body, dear, you're my precious mother every inch of you. When you were a few years old she died—impoverished and miserable and in hiding, even from me. I lost sight of you and your father, and not till you were ten years old did I discover and practically kidnap you. As your father was paying for your maintenance—doubtless hoping to profit by you when you grew up—I was breaking the law, and so had to keep my conduct secret. Your father did suspect me and came down here on a furlough—he had joined the army by then; but I sent you away and put him off the scent. How he got on to it at last is more than I can tell. But you see, the truth of the mystery is this—that you are really my own dear little step-sister."

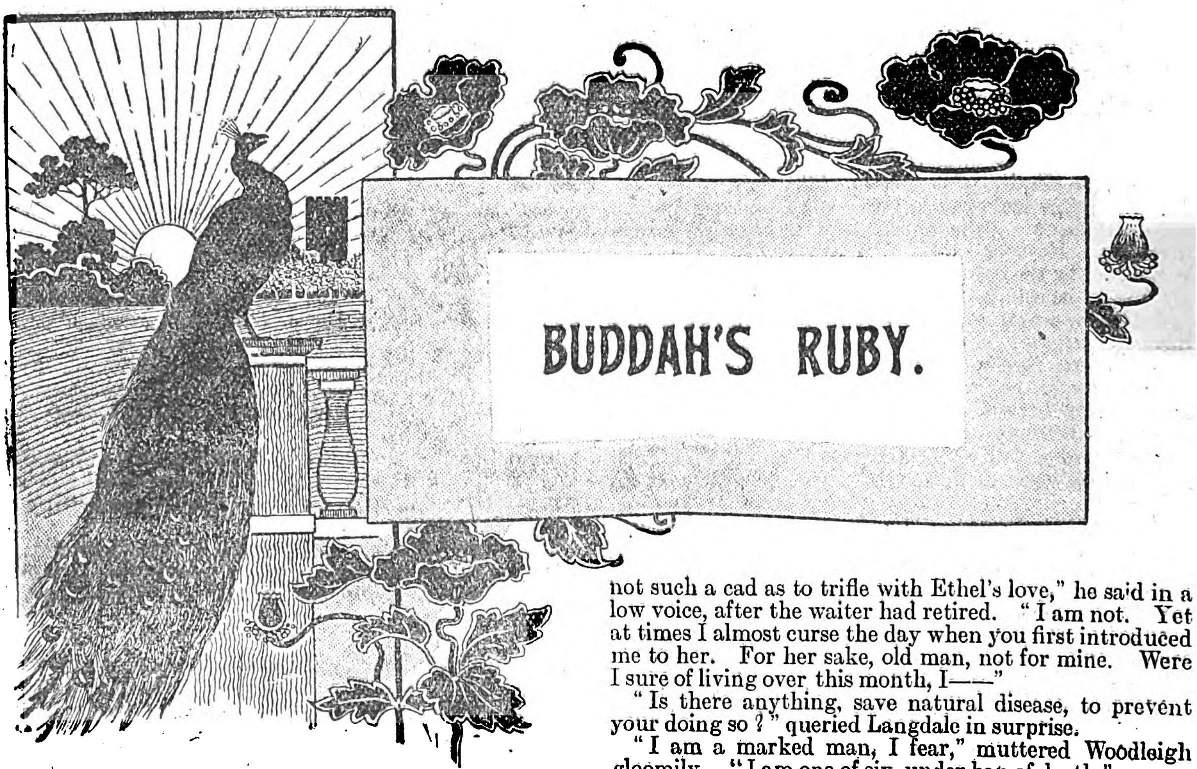
"And my future wife," added Captain Ernest Lane. Nora blushed and smiled, for the cloud had lifted from her sun and the sky of her young life was blue once more.

"By the way," remarked Mrs. Brabazon casually, some months after, "Sir George asked my permission this evening to put a certain question to Olive. You may be sure she will say 'Yes' when I tell her that Nora is to be Mrs. Lane so soon."

"And you will be left alone at the Mains," said Nora softly, stroking her newly-found sister's hand.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Brabazon, "I shall actually have to marry the Admiral!"

Mr. H. T. Johnson writes our next serial. See Editor's Page.



BUDDAH'S RUBY.

The fact of the matter is, Herbert, that I daren't propose to your sister."

"Why, not, Charlie, old man?" queried Herbert Langdale. "Why not? Take my tip, old boy, and do; for—mark you, I am giving away a confidence—she loves you."

Charlie Woodleigh's face flushed with pleasure.

"Let us see if Frascati's champagne rivals that of the Savoy or 'Jimmy's,' and let us drink the health of yours cheerily on the strength of your statement. Waiter! Roederer '87, if you please." Then, as the waiter vanished to execute his order, he turned his head wearily to his friend, exclaiming: "It is useless for me to tell you how I love your sister. But, to be candid with you, Bert, there is an impediment in the way which debars my proposing."

"An impediment? What the dickens do you mean, man?" exclaimed Langdale in surprise, stopping eating to look scrutinisingly at his friend. "Explain yourself, Charlie. By jove, if you have been trifling with Ethel's feelings towards——. Sorry, old chap, I forgot that you are not a cad, for you love her every whit as much as she does you. Is——"

"Hush, old man. I'll tell you what the impediment is," interrupted Woodleigh hastily, glancing round the spacious hall. "Here comes the waiter with the champagne."

Frascati's was nearly empty, it being only just seven-thirty; thus it came about that Charlie Woodleigh, the reticent, came to talk of his private affairs in such a public place.

"You are perfectly right, old boy, when you say I am not such a cad as to trifle with Ethel's love," he said in a low voice, after the waiter had retired. "I am not. Yet at times I almost curse the day when you first introduced me to her. For her sake, old man, not for mine. Were I sure of living over this month, I——"

"Is there anything, save natural disease, to prevent your doing so?" queried Langdale in surprise.

"I am a marked man, I fear," muttered Woodleigh gloomily. "I am one of six, under ban of death."

"How the dickens did you get so?" exclaimed Herbert in amazement. "What arrant cant you're talking."

"It is neither cant nor bosh," replied Woodleigh gloomily; then he added a short laugh, "I wish to Heaven it were. Five years ago, as you know, I was with the 53rd out in the Punjaub, and I belonged to a click of six, comprising four lieutenants and two captains, viz., Wilson, Luic, myself, Anstruther, and Seymore-Leyton. A rowdier crew than us six it is difficult to imagine. We got into hot water at Madras, brought the regiment into bad odour at Lucknow, and our final freak at Simla caused me to sell my commission. Luic was the head of our clique, being ably seconded by Seymore-Leyton, and it was owing to the latter's suggestion that we determined to appropriate Buddah's ruby, and thus shatter the priest's boast for ever."

"What boast?"

"Ah, true, I forgot to tell you. In the environs of Simla there is a Buddist chapel, or rather temple, and on the idol's finger was a massive ring of rudely chased gold, in which a gigantic ruby was set. The boast was that two thousand years ago Buddah descended from the Heavens and placed this ring on the image's finger as a proof of his good favour, leaving a note to the effect that it should never be stolen. It was a mad freak, for the temple was always guarded by priests, but the said freak was proposed under the influence of fizz at mess one night. Someone dared us, and we carried the thing through, replacing the ring the following night.

"We thought we had managed the thing very cutely, for beyond the shindy which lasted for a day when the ring was discovered to be missing, nothing more of the

Try for our guinea post-card competition.

matter was heard for some time. We divided the stakes, and talked big of daring anything. The ring business was forgotten till a year passed; then on the very night our escapade occurred Seymore-Leyton was discovered transfixed to the heart, with a *dagh* bearing the legend, 'Buddah the outraged needs him!'

"Detectives tried a year to elucidate the matter, but in vain. Once more the fatal date came round, and Anstruther failed to turn up at mess. Going to his bungalow, we found him lying on the verandah, his throat discoloured by purple finger marks. He was quite dead, a scroll pinned on his jacket by a thorn detailed enigmatically that:

"'Buddah the outraged needs him!'

"A gloom fell over our mess, bets were taken as to who next was doomed. I was the favourite, but Luic was discovered in the jungle killed by a tiger, the fatal scroll being tightly held in his hand. Wilson died by snake bite on the fatal day, Branstone expired from black jack at Aden also on the 8th of November, and each had a scroll beside them detailing that Buddah required their presence. Are you then surprised that I am superstitious enough to consider myself a doomed man?"

Langdale smiled awkwardly, then drank his champagne.

"Quite a romantic tale," he remarked at length.

"A sight too romantic to please me," muttered Woodleigh moodily.

"What is this mysterious date?"

"The 8th of November."

"To-day, in fact?"

"Precisely. If I live past twelve to night I may consider myself safe for a year, who knows, perhaps for life, for the emissary of death will only strike on the fatal date," replied Langdale gloomily. "You might do me a favour, old man, and stay the evening with me."

"Certainly. Buck up, old man, and be like me, not believing odd coincidences. You're nervous; pay the waiter, and let's go."

A few minutes later the two men found themselves on the pavement of Oxford Street. A drizzle had just commenced to fall, causing a dank feeling in the atmosphere. Woodleigh shivered as he glanced at the dripping pavement and the moisture-soaked mackintosh of the policeman, who stood beside one of the restaurant's electric lamp-posts.

"Cab!" cried Charlie peremptorily; and in obedience to the command the porter hailed a hansom from the neighbouring cab rank.

"Where to, sir?" queried the man.

"Gaiety!" replied Langdale.

A few moments later they were bowling rapidly towards the theatre.

"Beastly night!" muttered Woodleigh, lighting a cigarette and offering his companion one. "Somewhat rough having to wind up one's affairs at twenty-eight, but there's one consolation, the night is a fitting one in which to make my exit from the world."

"Nonsense!" murmured Langdale softly, endeavouring to light his cigarette and failing. "If you are going to be so pessimistical, I shall regret having come with you. Give me a light off yours. Thanks, awfully!"

The rest of the drive was passed in silence, broken once only by a smothered curse from Woodleigh, as the horse slipped on the greasy pavement in the Charing Cross Road.

The "Circus Girl" had commenced when they arrived as the Gaiety, a fact which did not trouble Charlie in the slightest. He was not comic operatically inclined that evening, his mind continually wandering to a certain Buddist temple in the environs of Simla.

He saw the piece from beginning to end with unseeing eyes, and at its close glanced at his watch. It was a quarter-past eleven.

"Three-quarters of an hour will decide my fate."

"Judge! Come to the bar and have a sherry cobler to steady your nerves before going home," replied Langton, gaily.

Woodleigh assented, and together they adjourned next door for the required refreshment.

At a quarter to twelve Langton suggested a move.

"All right, I'm game!" replied Woodleigh, with a ghost of a smile. "I'm somewhat peckish. I think I shall drop in at 'Jimmy's' for a snack. Will you come?"

"Certainly!" answered Herbert, flinging down a coin, then linking his arm through Woodleigh's he left the building, and hailed a passing hansom.

"Ten minutes more to safety!" exclaimed Woodleigh, leaning back in the cab. "By Jove, I am beginning to breathe again."

The rain was commencing to fall fairly fast, dropping with angry splashes against the roof and windows of the cab.

Suddenly the cab halted, and Langdale poked his stick up through the trap to enquire the cause.

"There's a horse down," replied the cabby. "One of Pickford's and the cart has bursted its axle. We shan't be a moment, sir, before we get on."

He civilly raised the glass in front to show his passengers the cause of the stoppage.

Langdale leaned out to get a clearer view, when suddenly he felt his arm gripped by Woodleigh.

"For God's sake, man, look at the off-side window!"

Langdale did as he was bid, and beheld the face of a Hindoo flattened against the window pane. The side lamp illumined its sinister features, the eyes danced with triumphant hate, its lips being drawn over its fang-like, betel-stained teeth in a kind of wolfish grin. It was an evil face, of a truly diabolical cast.

Involuntarily Langdale cowered back; the same instant a lank arm darted into the cab, to be instantly withdrawn, a smothered groan following the action.

"Done, by Jove!" gasped Woodleigh, sinking back into the cab. "Love——"

A shuddering gasp, and all was over. Horror-struck Langdale swung open the doors, and, indicating the Hindoo who was wriggling through the crowd, dashed into the road, shouting:

"Stop him!"

But like an eel he evaded all his would-be captors, and darted like a shot down Wellington Street.

"What is the matter, sir?" queried a constable, pushing his way toward the infuriated Langdale "Has he robbed you?"

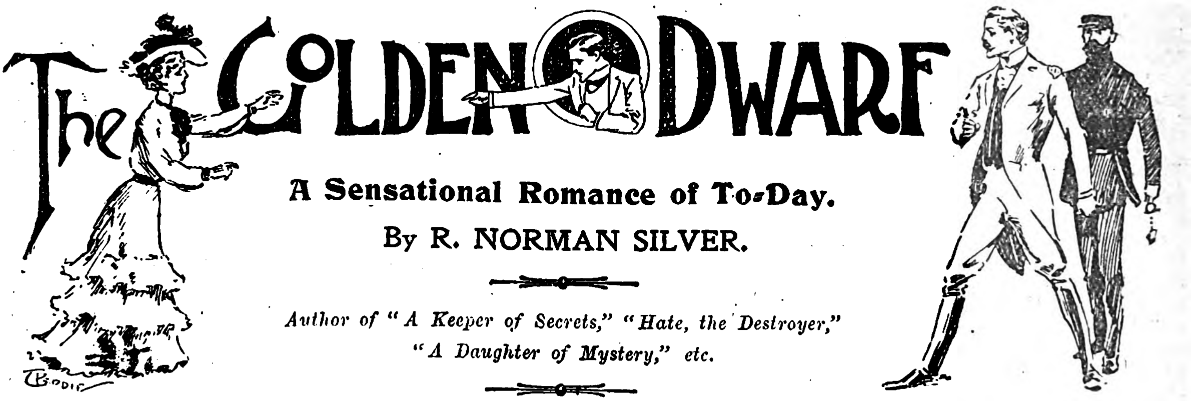
"Robbed? No, worse than that; he has murdered my friend!"

A few constables by chance were luckily at hand to keep back the surging crowd, while the first policeman entered the hansom.

Langdale was right. The tiny hilt of a small dagger stuck out from Woodleigh's shirt front, whilst tied to its handle was a tiny scroll, on which ran the legend in Hindoo characters:

"*Buddah the outraged needs him.*"

"Adventures of an Actress" still going strong.



The GOLDEN DWARF

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"It is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Felix in vain protests his innocence.

But the cloud of suspicion gathers around him. Meantime, the child Brian has been kidnapped, and Felix is suspected of this too. He discovers a riding whip with some peculiar marks upon it.

One day an old sailor named Foley is attacked by Otto Hare's dogs.

Kraft is summoned to dress the wound, and gives Foley a draught, which results in his death.

Judith Garland resumes her threats against Dering, who replies by saying he knows the guilty parties.

Geddes discovers from analysis that Kraft poisoned Foley, but is trapped and captured by unknown gaolers.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE LIGHT IN THE CRIMSON GLOBE.

ARCHIBALD GEDDES, launched into sudden darkness, and clutched, neck and elbows, by two pairs of powerful hands, remained passive, awaiting events. The great dogs on the further side of the small strong portal howled and bellowed alternately. His captors paid no heed to them, but exchanged a few rapid sentences in an alien tongue, which, from its guttural tones and half-familiar syllables, Geddes took to be German.

A moment elapsed while this council was being held, the chemist's assistant lying meantime, practically strangled, against a couple of tall bodies, one soft and bulky, the other hard and lean. Then a soft bandage was slipped across his eyes and Geddes felt himself thrust forward.

A few seconds later he experienced a curious sensation, as if he were being half hauled, half pushed, down some well-like aperture. This achieved, with the sound of disengaging locks and bars, he was thrust forward again.

As he went he contrived to swing an arm, as if accidentally—his fingers encountered an upright surface—it was rough, irregular, and cold to the touch. The Scotchman knew it for hewn rock.

Presently his guides halted and Geddes heard the click of a latch. Again he was urged on and sent staggering by a vigorous push, just as the noise of the latch came once more. He lurched, and fell on to some smooth, slightly warm, level. With a quick movement he dragged off the wrapping which blindfolded him—it seemed to be a silk handkerchief.

Archibald Geddes stared about him—he was in a black gloom, profound and apparently impenetrable, through which there yet stole, from a distant quarter, the dim throbbing he had heard on the exterior of the tower. In it was mingled an odd sound, resembling the hiss of an angry serpent, combined with the spitting of a fretful cat.

As he gazed into vacuity, the nothingness about him was flooded with light and he saw that he was in a narrow, yet high apartment, evidently a species of dungeon, rock-hewn, concreted, windowless, but heated by some invisible agency, and lighted by a single electric lamp in the centre of the high ceiling.

This lamp was not an incandescent—the variety usually employed in illuminating rooms of moderate size—but an arc, of rather diminutive proportions, yet considerable intensity. Its occasional sigh and splutter was the snake-like murmur he had noticed. But the globe that enclosed it was neither transparent nor opaline—as are generally the glass containers of electric lamps, it was clouded, and red, blood red. Archibald Geddes found himself in an atmosphere of crimson.

On either side of the lamp, which was quite out of reach, opened a couple of apertures, doubtless those of ventilators. The room was unfurnished, save for a shallow metal box, filled with soiled cotton-wool.

From this the Scotchman shrank instinctively—feeling as if it might contain some noxious animal or venomous serpent, to gratify whose deadly appetite he had been flung into that strange cell. But the peculiar receptacle was motionless and Geddes satisfied himself, by a rapid inspection, of its emptiness.

He was occupied by his investigations when the whine of a hinge brought him to the right-about. An elephantine figure had entered the place, a figure with small yellow eyes and spectacles which glittered in the crimson flare. Archibald Geddes' visitor was the foreign physician, Dr. Joseph Kraft.

The German surveyed his captive, pursing his thin lips and folding his arms. Almost concealed by his pink palms, Geddes caught the ominous glint of a revolver. Joseph Kraft was on his guard.

You won't forget to get a new reader, will you?

"So, my friend," he observed, "you are cursed with an instinct for prowling, and you come to me to be cured. Your confidence flatters my professional ability."

Geddes twisted his moustache. "They laugh best that laugh last," he retorted drily; "but allow me, as I am here, to compliment you on the skill and address with which you—ahem!—cured Foley, of his inquisitiveness."

Kraft grinned a satanic grin. "I did not guess you had probed me that deeply," he retorted; "you are an antagonist worthy of my steel."

"Of your bullet, you mean," corrected Geddes; "as for your poison—the one which finished Foley—I showed its effects to Inspector Brasher. A little white precipitate—a dead mouse; he was most interested. You see I sampled the poisoned mixture before it was too late."

The German's saffron pupils flashed. "You try my patience, Mr. Geddes," he said, "but I will do you the justice to make my proposition formally. It can be put into five words—a truce or a grave. Choose, my friend, the blue sky is a pretty thing and the little Fräulein at the High Street has lips like a freshly-blown rose. You are young, and death is for the old. Will you swear, in terms I shall dictate, to persecute me no more, and to pluck up any seeds of suspicion you have sown in the bull-mind of Brasher, or will you meet a fate which I promise you shall be no easy one?"

His teeth bared themselves to the gums as he spoke, and the red shimmer on his glasses lent his orbs the dilated fury of a wild beast's.

Archibald Geddes retreated to the wall. "I will not swear any such thing," he declared; "you are a dangerous villain, Dr. Kraft, and, to my knowledge, a callous murderer. Keep your distance from me, I, too, am armed!" And the Scotchman thrust a hand into his jacket-pocket.

Alarmed by the gesture, Joseph Kraft recoiled. Darting to the door, he drew it ajar and slid through it with surprising agility. The chemist's assistant laughed—in spite of himself.

The next second the smile faded from his face—the light in the crimson globe was dying away.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"YOU SHALL SEE THE CHILD."

"You might send my horse to the Duchester Arms, Mr. Tarporley; tell them I am called to London, and ask them to keep him for a day or two. I must catch this train."

The station-master at the somnolent Duchester depôt looked inquiringly at Felix Dering's boots and spurs, and at the riding-whip he held.

"With pleasure, sir," was his answer; "have you a bag?—she'll be away in a minute."

"No, thanks," said Felix, "I'm taking an unexpected run up—on business." He spoke inattentively, his gaze—as he stood within the shelter of the tiny booking-hall—was fixed upon a couple conversing at some distance. One of the figures was tall and stout, the other spare and of medium height. They were Kraft and Neal Garland.

Mr. Tarporley, a trifle puzzled by Felix Dering's abstraction, returned to his professional duties, and shouted a word of stimulus to the porters at the luggage vans. The guard hurried to and fro, bustling the passengers into their compartments. Neal Garland entered a third, Joseph Kraft hovering about him with vigilant politeness.

"Hadn't you better step aboard, sir?" suggested the station-master, deferentially; "she's as good as off."

Felix nodded—he noticed that at the moment the clumsy frame of the German presented to him a view of its rear elevation. He pulled his hat over his brows, strode across the platform, and waving a farewell to the curious Mr. Tarporley, leapt into a carriage.

A discordant shriek rent the air, the guard was signalling to the driver of the engine. Felix drew the curtain a few inches and leant into the corner. The motion was scarcely completed when the train bore him—thus screened—past the bland and meditative visage of Joseph Kraft; it was wrinkled by a satisfied smile.

The express cleared the platform and traversed a bend; Felix Dering could see the front of the drowsy depôt, where his chestnut fidgeted in charge of a porter. Then the growing velocity of the train whisked him out of the line of sight, and the express, swerving to the south, the little town of Duchester disappeared.

At Derby Felix got out and stole along the crowded platform to the neighbourhood of the compartment tenanted by Neal Garland. Not till the train, with a volley of coughs, began to move, did Felix Dering stride to the door, near which he was lounging, and gain the compartment at a bound. Save for Neal it was empty, and that gentleman, feet up and hat off, lolled full-length on a seat.

Felix deposited himself unconcernedly on the opposite cushions; the express was settling to its monotonous clank and roar. For a second Neal did not abandon his newspaper. When he did it was to stare, astounded, at the vision before him.

"Mr. Neal Garland," said Felix; "I am, as you may or may not know, Felix Dering. I have tracked you from Wyresdale, which you left about three o'clock this afternoon, for the purpose of obtaining some sort of interview. As it happens, we find ourselves alone, and need not defer our talk until we reach London."

"You—you are in error," was the sullen retort; "I am not the person you name. You are misled by some fancied resemblance."

"Am I?" said Felix, "you shall be the judge. You were at Dering House several hours ago, and had a private consultation with Miss Judith Garland. From Dering House you proceeded to Wyresdale Park. Thence you were driven, by Mr. Otto Hare, to the Rosery, Mrs. Carew's residence. Dr. Kraft accompanied you. From the Rosery Dr. Kraft and you came on to Duchester in Mr. Hare's dog-cart, driven by his groom. *En route* you paid a visit to the Wheatsheaf Hotel. Twenty minutes back you bade adieu to Dr. Kraft at Duchester station."

"Spy!" hissed Neal Garland, and swinging round, darted his lean fingers towards his right boot. An instant more and Felix beheld a dark-blue, pointed rod of steel, the thickness of a stout straw, and having a slender wooden haft. It was a true stiletto, and Neal grasped it in practised fashion—the top of the haft in his palm, the cruel spike inclined upward and forward. A prick from it in liver or heart, and the recipient, though he may live for hours, is a dead man.

Felix lashed out with his riding-whip. All the force of a trained athlete went to the blow, and it fell upon Neal Garland's wrist. The stiletto tinkled to the floor of the compartment, and Felix planted a foot on it.

"Curse you, curse you, curse you!" yelped Neal, under his breath, and a flood of blasphemy poured form his lips as he clutched his injured arm. Felix kicked the stiletto under the bench and towered over his vanquished enemy.

"Sit down," he ordered, "and hear what I have to say to you. Rebel by speech or action and I will pull the communication-cord, show the guard your dastardly weapon, and give you in charge at St. Pancras."

Neal gnashed his teeth, but obeyed, his black orbs blazing, and his face livid. Felix mounted guard—a watchful sentinel, for much in addition to his own safety was at stake.

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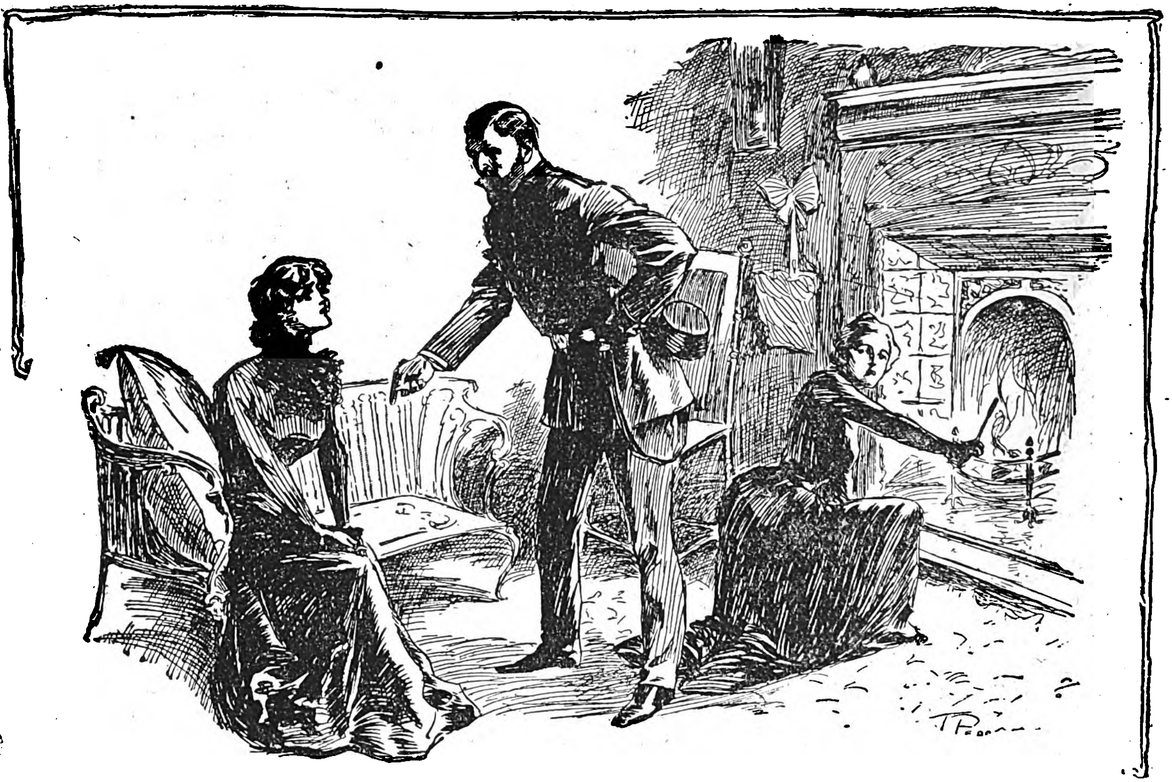


"I—I have a slight clue to report to your ladyship," he said, "not a great deal, but hopeful so far as it goes. It may ultimately get us on the track of poor little Sir Brian."

"What have you done with the child Brian?" he demanded, abruptly.

His prisoner sneered. "So you *were* eavesdropping, you low hound!" he commented.

"Chance brought me to the library," said Felix; "a happy chance, as it proved. Answer my question, if you do not wish to inspect an English gaol. What did you do with Sir Brian Dering after you took him from your sister?"

Neal smote his right fist angrily into his left hand. "A thousand furies tear her," he muttered; "so she has split! But I'll pay her, ay, and you, too, Dering—murderer as you are. I saw you at the cross-roads that night—my evidence may serve to give *you* a taste of gaol, if not of something worse."

"You saw me," retorted Felix Dering; "because I was there. Nor are you the single witness to the fact, which I have never specifically denied. I was not asked at the inquest if I had returned to Wyresdale that evening. The thought of—of others prevented my volunteering the information. But do not imagine I defend myself to you—you who were there, also, since you claim to have seen me."

"Perhaps," rejoined Neal, with a frightened grin, "perhaps you mean to insinuate that I committed the murder?"

"Not I," declared Felix; "I am aware that you did not—for I know who did. Though my knowledge does not exclude your having been an accessory. That, however, I am willing to waive. My uncle's death and its mysteries apart, will you tell me, or will you not, the whereabouts of the child Brian?"

The meagre features of Neal Garland contracted reflectively. He was in a tight place and he perceived it. "On terms, yes," he said.

Felix frowned. "I am not able to offer you any considerable bribe," was his objection; "yet if you can produce the child without delay, I will raise you by hook or by crook, a couple of hundred."

Neal gesticulated irritably. "I haven't time to wait for the bill-discounters," he replied; "I want nothing from you but an opportunity to sling my hook, to get out of England."

"Once I have the child," said Felix, "you shall be given that opportunity. But either I learn its whereabouts before we leave this carriage or, at the next station, I instruct the guard to wire for police to meet the train at St. Pancras. Your stiletto and that bruise made by my whip will be evidence enough to justify an arrest for inquiries. You should be best able to decide if those inquiries will be satisfactory, or the reverse."

A grimmer scowl than ever distorted Neal's countenance. "I can't tell you where the kid is," Felix was informed, "but when we reach London I'll take you to a party that can. And if that isn't sufficient you'll have to go without the brat till the stroke of doom. For you won't ever spot it on your own."

Felix weighed the proposition. He might be risking his life in accepting the ultimatum stated by Neal. He did not like the ring of the phrase "I'll take you." But

"Adventures of an Actress" still going strong.

there seemed no alternative—he fathomed the depth of the void which had swallowed up Brian. It might well be that neither professional nor amateur detective would trace the child unaided. Also it was worth venturing much to solve the enigma of his baby cousin's abduction—the abduction that slung so blightingly a shadow over his own honour. He sprang to a resolution.

"Convince me I am at least on the track of the child," said Felix; "and that you have told me all you can and I will allow you twenty-four hours' grace before calling in the aid of the police."

Neal threw himself back at his ease. "Good!" he exclaimed; "so we're agreed." And he commenced to roll and light a cigarette.

Amazed, Felix contemplated the lolling form of the man who had passed so cooly from attempted violence to cynical indifference. He began to comprehend the singular blend of weakness, cunning, and ferocity that represented Neal Garland's character. Forewarned, he fell to weaving plans which might protect him against the treachery which he felt sure Neal was designing. Yet he determined to run every risk for the sake of the hapless child who—it was only too probable—had been delivered to some heartless or brutal custodian.

Not for an hour did he break the silence, and then it was to put a question. "Why did you take the child away?" he asked.

"Part of the game," snapped Neal; "we wanted to milk you of the Dering shekels, and we knew they wouldn't be yours while the kid was round. So we nipped the brat off to let you slip into the cash. When the cry had died down we should have provided proofs of its death and forced you to go to the courts for your inheritance. Then we'd have squared accounts. It was Judith's idea—pretty, don't you think?"

"Forced me, how?" inquired Felix Dering, with a shudder. He had evidently not been mistaken in his view of the woman who had pursued him so desperately, driven by an affection as fierce as it was unfeminine. She had lied to him throughout, subtly, ingeniously, temptingly. Thank heaven he had never wavered in his allegiance to Esther. Her girlish love and loyalty lent a terrible contrast to Judith's duplicity and passion.

Neal chuckled. "By threatening to accuse you of Sir Christopher's murder," was his reply: "I'd seen you at the cross-roads, and besides, we'd found that bit of your chain—a nasty piece of evidence, Mr. D., in spite of your 'I know who committed the crime.' But you've out-bluffed me, and I don't wish to deny it."

The speaker's mouth quivered, and his nostrils dilated. It was hard to say if his mood were the more humorous or vindictive. He devoted his attention to the rolling of countless cigarettes, and thus, with tobacco and occasional bursts of noiseless laughter, he beguiled the journey to the Metropolis.

At St. Pancras Felix instructed him to descend first and was thereby enabled to pick up the stiletto, which he had secured under his foot in readiness for the move. He slid it unobserved into his sleeve.

Neal evinced no desire to escape, but hailed a four-wheeler, entered it, thrust his hand out to give the driver an address in Pimlico, and sat back for Felix to join him in the vehicle.

When they were opposite one another, and the cab in motion, Neal prepared his twentieth cigarette.

"Excuse my chartering a four-wheel," he said, "but I knew it would be more soothing to you if you could keep me under observation—a hansom, in that respect, is less convenient than a growler."

As he lit the finished cigarette his shoulders shook with the species of suppressed merriment which had agitated him on the way south. Felix studied him, sombrely.

The cab drew up at the lodging-house of Mrs. Schwartz while the quarter after ten o'clock was still chiming from Westminster. The small servant opened to them. Neal paused on the pavement till Felix had paid the fare, then stalked up the steps, pushed the girl aside, and led Felix to the upper floor where Joseph Kraft had parleyed so effectively with Keturah Schwartz and her privileged lodger.

At the top of the flight Neal halted. "I've to talk over rather a shrewd sort of woman," he said, "and you'll have to let me tackle the job alone. This is the only exit to the room, as you can assure yourself by a peep in, and we're on the first storey, so I can't jump out. I suppose you would just as soon do sentry-go here and fix your eye on the mouse-trap."

He threw wide the door, and Felix, glancing in, beheld, dozing in a padded chair near a smoky lamp, an enormously fat woman, whose double chin caressed her ample bosom, and whose red cheeks glowed with perspiration. Neal had evidently been truthful—there were no further doors to the chamber. With a lifted finger, Neal himself tip-toed over the threshold and shut Felix Dering out.

For some while Felix listened to the murmur of voices, Neal's soft and persuasive, a second one fretful yet husky. The house above and beneath the landing where he stood was quiet, and the rattle of an infrequent cab without penetrated dimly to his ear. He clutched the stiletto that was hidden in his sleeve and waited.

At length the door swung inwards, and the fat woman rolled out. Not deigning to cast a glance upon him, she swept by and vanished into a room on the rear of the landing. Neal had followed her to the threshold of the parlour.

"Come in, Mr Dering," he said; "I've won—after a fight. If you'll make yourself comfortable in here for an hour or so, you shall see not only the child but the person in whose charge it is. When we have had a clear two days' grace, the kid shall be formally delivered to you—in Wyresdale; you yourself will leave London to-night. Those are the lowest terms Keturah will agree to, and I can't blame her caution."

Felix walked into the apartment, looking keenly about him for possible dangers, and noting casually the shabby comfort and close odour of the room. He chose his seat in a corner that commanded the whole chamber, and settled himself to watch every movement of his companion.

"As for me," went on Neal, "I've a letter or two to write. I shall skip as soon as you're satisfied. No more England for me. Hark!"

He raised his hand; the sound of a heavy and descending tread shook the stairs near to.

"Yes," he added; "that is Keturah—she's off to fetch Sir Brian Dering and his—his temporary guardian. There is a late *Star*, I see, and it may beguile your leisure while I work."

Neal's tone was polite, his bearing oddly sarcastic. He peered from the window as the shrill call of a cab-whistle sounded in the street.

"Keturah is taking a hansom," he announced; "now we shan't be long, and I must get to my correspondence."

He brought pen, ink, and paper and sat down to write busily. From time to time his shoulders were shaken by the species of restrained merriment that had so perplexed Felix in the train.

Felix Dering, ignoring the offer of an evening journal, maintained upon Neal Garland the determined scrutiny of a hawk. A finger and a thumb, thrust into his sleeve, kept the stiletto at hand. So the moments crept by.

Mr. H. T. Johnson writes our next serial. See Editor's Page.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"Of Course, the Scent is Cold."

"Will you step this way, please; her ladyship will see you in a moment."

Inspector Brasher removed his stiff peaked cap and crossed the hall towards the flight of carved oak stairs which led to the smaller rooms of Dering House. Keeping at the footman's heels, he reached a dainty boudoir, upholstered in blue and white, and looking on the quaint old terrace with its stone bulustrades. A bright fire cooed on the wide hearth, and a Persian kitten dozed in its basket at the end of the brass kerb. The prospect outside was brown and desolate—the autumn had set in still and raw.

Michael Brasher glanced about him, appreciating with characteristic deliberation, the elegance of his unwonted surroundings. As he gazed a pair of folding-doors at the further extremity of the apartment were opened, and Judith Garland appeared, supporting the unsteady figure and slow steps of Lady Dering.

Clad in black, deeply bordered with crape, Stella Dering seemed to have attained, in the last few months, a premature middle-age. She wore the widow's cap and bands, but even without them she would have been stamped by the impress of her crushing sorrow. Her cheeks were thin and her eyes dilated, while the dark hair on her temples was sown with silver threads that answered to the lines on her brow.

Mr. Brasher saluted respectfully. Judith aided her charge to a sofa near the hearth, and then passed, as though to fetch a cushion, before the stalwart inspector.

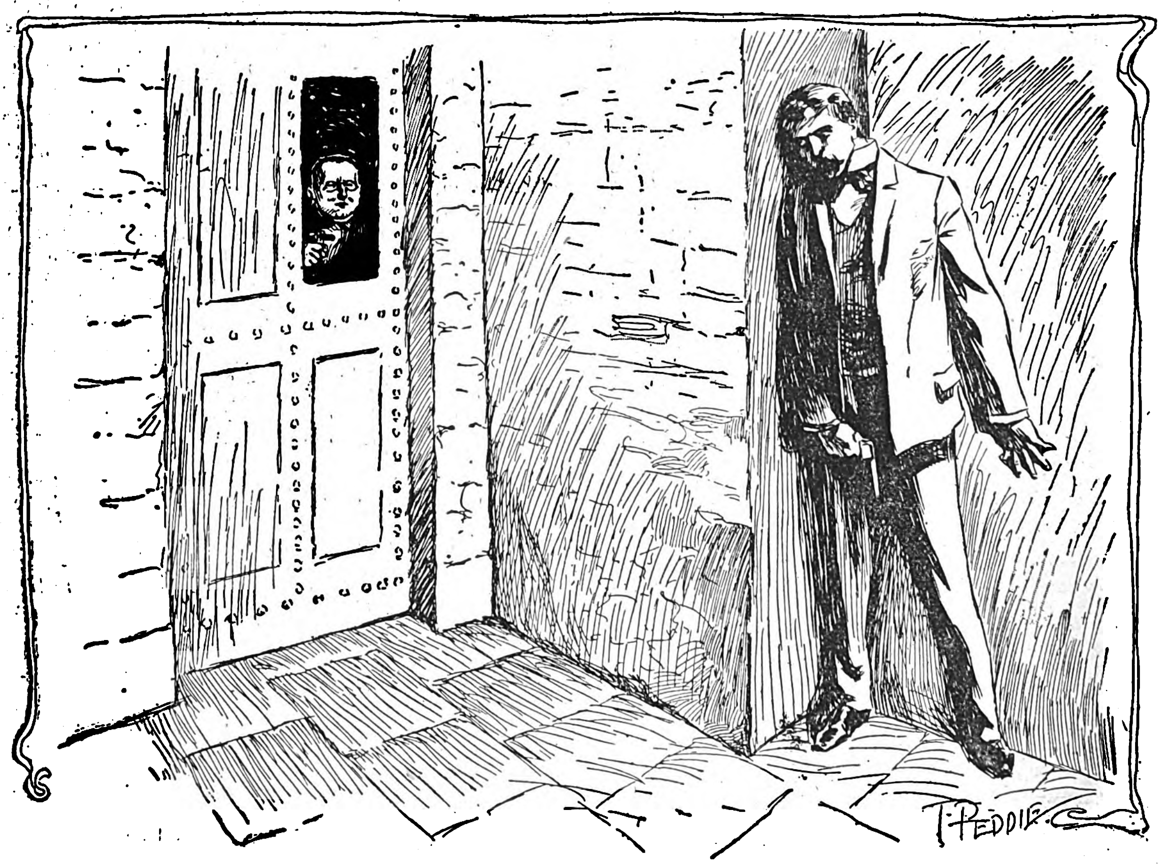
"Lady Dering is very hysterical," she murmured; "you will endeavour not to excite her?"

Michael Brasher's black pupils rested for a second upon Judith Garland, as if to take an inventory of her personal qualities. But he accepted silently her tacit hint, and drew close to Lady Dering's couch with a gentle stride and much gravity.

"I—I have a slight clue to report to your ladyship," he said; "not a great deal, but hopeful, so far as it goes. It may ultimately get us on the track of poor little Sir Brian."

Judith had stooped as though to poke the fire; she started almost imperceptibly and turned to hear the better. The Inspector had pulled out his fat note-book and referred to a page.

"You know, my lady," he pursued, "that for long enough, in adition to your own private detectives from London, we had a Scotland Yarder on the job. It's a remarkable thing, but no sooner does their hue and cry die down, than there develops a clue that would have been worth hundreds had we only stumbled upon it two months back."



At last there was a click at the door, and Geddes guessed that the panel had been opened. (*See next week's instalment.*)

You won't forget to get a new reader, will you?

Stella Dering sat up to listen, her fingers lacing themselves feverishly. "Yes, yes," she gasped, "what is it—what have you ascertained? Be quick, oh, be quick; you said it was hopeful."

Mr. Brasher assented. "So far as it carries us," he allowed, "but no more. This is it: Early on the morning of the day that Sir Brien was missed, a teamster from a distant farm, going to Derby with a load of turnips, noticed a man sitting in a hedgerow and feeding a child from a bag of biscuits. The child was pretty and genteel, its hair was fair, and its eyes, the teamster thought, blue. He distinctly heard it say, 'I do want to go home to mother.'"

Judith rose. "Upon my word, Inspector," she observed, "I cannot compliment you on your clue. Nor should I advise Lady Dering to build upon it."

Michael Brasher regarded her coolly and proceeded with his relation. "The teamster," he continued, "had a stone in his boot and had stopped to get it out. While thus engaged he also heard the child ask for a drink, and then add, 'Waters always brings me my milk when I wake.'"

Stella Dering fell on her knees at the feet of the Inspector. "It is my boy," he cried: "Waters was his nursery-maid. Take me to him, oh, take me to him! He asked for me, my little loving child. He may be hungry and thirsty now; let me go to him; it is killing me to think of it."

Brasher coughed and loosened his collar about his burly throat. Judith had hurried to soothe the distracted Lady Dering—her own face was blanched and her heart beating wildly.

"I can't tell you the rest, my lady," protested the Inspector, with rough kindness, "if you fluster yourself so. Not that there is much to tell. It's needed all this time for that idiot of a teamster to mention his experience to someone who was sufficiently smart to see that it might have a bearing on the disappearance of Sir Brian. Of course, the scent's cold, but I've circulated the description of the man—who was a thin, dark, shabby fellow, according to my teamster. The child was badly dressed in patched garments, but that was only to be expected, after our finding Sir Brian's nightgown in the Black Pool. It showed that his abductor was on the watch against any simple forms of identification."

Mr. Brasher closed his note-book and put it away. "The most irritating part of the business is that the ass of a teamster thinks he saw the same man in Wyresdale a day or two ago, but can't be certain. You must not be too sanguine, encouraging as it is to happen on a clue of any sort."

Stella Dering covered her face. "I can't bear the suspense," she moaned; "it's horrible, horrible!" She began to laugh. "How ridiculous," she cried; "I'm his mother and can't go to him. I will go to him; he wants me—do you understand?" Her laughter became a shrill scream, and she commenced to tremble. Judith rang the bell.

"You must leave us, Mr. Brasher," she said coldly; "Lady Dering is subject to these attacks."

Brasher bowed and went to the door. A maid met him, responding to the bell; Judith gave a rapid order, and the Inspector was piloted downstairs, through the hall, and ushered out into the grey September morning.

With a stolid official gait, Michael Brasher bent his course to the police depôt off the High Street. At Caleb Forester's shop he paused and walked in. Connie was behind the counter—a melancholy sentinel.

"Father is having his breakfast," she told her visitor; "he got up late. Do you want to see him?"

(*To be continued.*)

An Australian Marvel.

A discovery which was made a few years ago in Australia by an eminent scientist, Mr. Charles Forde, is now gradually revolutionising the old methods of dealing with liver and kidney ailments and disorders of the digestive system. After overcoming apparently insurmountable difficulties, he succeeded in obtaining a purely vegetable substance which has the peculiar property of acting on the human system in exactly the same way as nature's animal substance, bile. After much careful study he combined this substance with some eight other vegetable ingredients, and then concentrated the product so obtained until a suitable dose could be compressed into the space offered by a small bean. This medicine, made up in the form of a "bean for the bile," soon became widely known as "Bile Beans." Its effect on long-standing cases of indigestion, loss of appetite, weakness, nervous debility, palpitation, headache, constipation, piles, and female ailments and irregularities, is so wonderfully satisfactory that in Australia at the present time Charles Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness is not only a household term, but is synonymous with the best home medicine known. For some time now, laboratories have been open in England, and already the power of this medicine has been so well proved that the public confidence in it is daily increasing. No less than 250,000 doses are taken daily in the provinces alone—a fact which of itself is adequate proof of the excellence of this medicine as a household remedy. Charles Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness are not only a certain cure for the disorders mentioned above, but will be found invaluable in all cases of dizziness, bad breath, rheumatism, the weakening effects of influenza, and the numerous ailments which always attend a bad condition of the blood and digestive organs. For female ailments and irregularities they are a perfect boon. They are sold by all chemists at thirteenpence halfpenny and two shillings and ninepence per box. Should you be in ill-health and in doubt whether or not Bile Beans are suitable to your case, you may write, giving full particulars of your condition, to the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 London Wall, London, E.C., and you will be honestly answered, free of charge, whether or not Bile Beans have ever cured a case similar to your own. In order to allow all to test Bile Beans without being put to any expense, the proprietors will forward to all who write for same a free sample. The only conditions are that a penny stamp shall be enclosed to pay postage, and the name of this paper mentioned.

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We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, September 23rd. Post-cards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to S. Chorlton, 227 Spa Road, Bolton, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

JOBSON: "I have a claim against the Government. What lawyer would you advise me to retain?" Friend: "It doesn't matter whom you select, as long as he's young."

STUDENT under examination in physics. "What planets were known to the ancients?" "Well, sir, there were Venus and Jupiter, and"—after a pause—"I think the earth, but I'm not quite certain."

HE: "Get you a real sealskin? Really, my dear, you are asking too much." She: "Yes, that is so. This makes the third time I have asked you, when once ought to have been enough."

TYRO: "Well, now that you have heard my voice what do you think of it?" Teacher: "Wait, my dear sir, till I have had you bound over to keep the peace, and I shall be pleased to tell you."

AT a harvest home in Berkshire a dinner was given to the labourers on the farm. Opposite to one of the guests was a dish of green peas, which he took possession of, and with his knife, "shot" the entire contents on to his plate. One of his neighbours, who had watched the appropriation of the vegetables very carefully, picked up the pepper-box, screwed off the top, and emptied the whole of the pepper on to the peas, saying, "There, Bill, them what has the peas has the pepper."

IN a certain regiment at Aldershot, whilst falling in for commanding officer's parade, the colour-sergeant, who was an Irishman, proceeded to call the roll of his company prior to the officer inspecting it. Having done so, Pat, casting his eyes up and down the ranks, noticed a blank space in the supernumerary rank. Marching up to the officer and saluting, Pat exclaimed: "One N.C.O. absent, sorr." "Who is it?" inquired the officer. Pat then called the roll of N.C.O.'s and, having found them all present except himself, turned to the officer and smiling, said, "Shure, it's meshelf that is abshent, sorr."

* AN African millionaire recently invited to his Scotch shooting a party of friends whose familiarity with the gun was not excessive. He met his guests after they had been out for an hour or two, and asked them what sport they had had. "Oh, we have shot twenty brace," was the reply. "Twenty brace is not much," he said, "considering that I was assured that this was the best shooting in Scotland." "Well," was the answer, "we didn't exactly shoot anything, but Larkins, the game-keeper, did." He met his friends again an hour or two later, and asked them how they had got on. "Oh, we have shot nothing further," he was told. "How is that? Didn't Larkins shoot anything?" "No, but one of our party shot Larkins," was the response.

GRIMSBY: "So you are going to make a pianist of your son? Has he an ear for music?" Flimsby: "I don't know anything about his ear, but see what a head of hair he's got."

"WHY don't you go to our old restaurant any more?" "I left my overcoat there." "Well is that any reason why you should keep away?" "Ah, but I took a better one with me."

"ISABEL, I told you particularly not to tell Blanche that secret. and you went right off and told her." "Well, it's all your own fault, Eleanor; you put it into my head by telling me not to tell her."

"DOES your wife do much fancy work?" "Fancy work? She won't even let a porous plaster come into the house without crotcheting a border round it, and running a yellow ribbon through the holes."

"WHO'S this man who has grown so suddenly rich in your neighbourhood?" "Oh, that's Skayte, an ignorant sort of a fellow." "And the man who's bankrupt?" "That's Mazzles, the eminent authority on finance."

"TOMMY, how did you get all the back of your neck sunburnt?" "Pulling weeds in the garden." "But your hair is all wet, my son." "That's perspiration." "Your vest is wrong side out, too." "Put it on that way a-purpose." "And how does it happen, Tommy, dear, that you have got Jacky Howard's trousers on?" Tommy (after a long pause): "Mother, I cannot tell a lie! I've been a-swimming!"

A FATHER and mother, with six children, paid a visit to Margate recently. Wishing to spend a few days there they set about looking for lodgings. At length they came to a "Furnished room to let" notice. "Oh, yes," said the landlady, in answer to the father's inquiry, "it's here the room is to let, but there is only one bed in it." "Oh, that's all right," replied the father, "we are used to roughing it, the wife and children can sleep on the floor."

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES enjoyed nothing so much as a clever retort, even if it happened to be at his own expense. One day, at an entertainment, he was seated near the refreshment table, and observed a little girl looking with longing eyes at the good things. With his invariable fondness for children he said, kindly: "Are you hungry, little girl?" "Yes, sir," was the reply: "Then why don't you take a sandwich?" "Because I haven't any fork." "Fingers were made before forks," said the doctor smilingly. The little girl looked up at him and replied to his delight: "Not my fingers."

A GOOD story comes from South Africa by the last mail, says a correspondent. It is related that after a recent engagement an Irish sergeant and a squad of men were told off to bury the dead, amongst whom were some of the enemy. As they were about to lift the body of a Boer the supposed corpse raised its head and assured the burial party that it was not dead. "Not dead, is it?" said the sergeant. "Well, I've got me orders to bury yez, and, be lad, it's buried yez shall be. Put him in, bhoys." Just at that moment the Colonel rode up, and, seeing what was going on, said: "Sergeant, what the devil do you mean by burying that man? He's not dead." "So he says," replied the sergeant, "but, colonel, ye knows that these Boers is sich blaggar-rdly liars that, be my sowl, yez can't belave a wor-rd they says."

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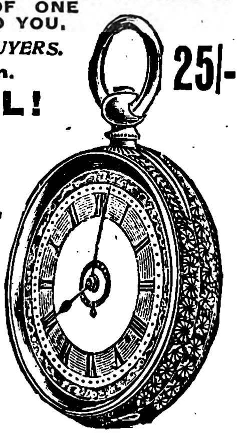

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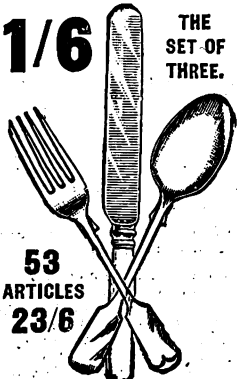

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

I HAVE another pleasant surprise in store for you. By the greatest of good luck I have managed to secure a splendid serial story by Mr. Henry T. Johnson—perhaps the most enthralling that that extremely popular writer has ever written. You are doubtless all familiar with Mr. Johnson's work. He has written some of the best sensational novels of the past decade. Among the many stories that he has written are "The Pride of the Ring," "Found Guilty," and "Cruce Vincit."

Popular as these stories have been, I venture to think that

"DEAD TO THE WORLD,"

which is the novel he has written for *Short Stories*, will eclipse them all in fascinating interest. The story will begin in a few weeks, and before it starts I shall have an opportunity of telling you more about it.

* * *

WEEK by week the adventures of Hazel Harlow increase in interest. This week the famous actress is in Belfast. Next week, Dublin will be the scene of her adventures.

* * *

ADVICE ON LOVE AND OTHER MATTERS.

(*Replies to Correspondents.*)

"PHYLLIS" has a young man that she does not love, but says if she parts with him she is bound to flirt about, as flirting is a weak point with her, and asks me to give her advice on the matter? Shame on you, "Phyllis"! It is girls like you who do more harm in the world than enough. The only advice I can give you is to stop flirting. As to its being a weak point with you, that is mere nonsense. How can girls expect men to respect and look up to them if they behave in so senseless a manner? Try and control yourself; be as happy and bright as you like, but know where to draw the line between flirting and fun.

"THELMA" says that she never manages to keep a friend for long, on account of her curt manner, which she feels sure arises mainly from the fear of being thought bold or forward. She knows a man, and both he and she are lonely, and yet they do not seem to get any further in their friendship. What can she do to make herself agreeable, and would it be forward on her part if she stopped and spoke to him when they were alone? Try and cultivate a pleasant manner, "Thelma." People always are apt to take offence at an abrupt way of speaking. I see no reason why you should not stop and speak to him; perhaps he feels awkward and, too, is reserved. Men like girls to take an interest in their pursuits, so try and find out what his are, and you will find it very easy to get on with him.

"ALINE" is nervous, and blushes painfully when addressed by a gentleman. There is one young fellow whom she really cares for, but when he speaks to her she behaves in a manner which she knows to be foolish. What is she to do? You are not often enough in the company of the other sex, "Aline." If you were to go out more your nervousness would soon wear off. Make a determined effort to keep up a conversation with him, and do not refuse to dance with him again.

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"EVA" asks whether a girl sixteen years of age is too young to keep company with a young man two years older, and are four nights a week too often to go out with him? Sixteen is not very old, "Eva," but if you know your own mind and are old for your age I should not say it is too young. As to going out four nights a week, it would depend on what your circumstances are. If you are independent and live at home, and your duties do not interfere, I do not think *seven* times a week too often; but if you are in service you may think yourself lucky if you are allowed out twice a week. I am glad you like *Short Stories.*

* * *

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I AM open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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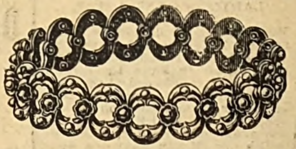

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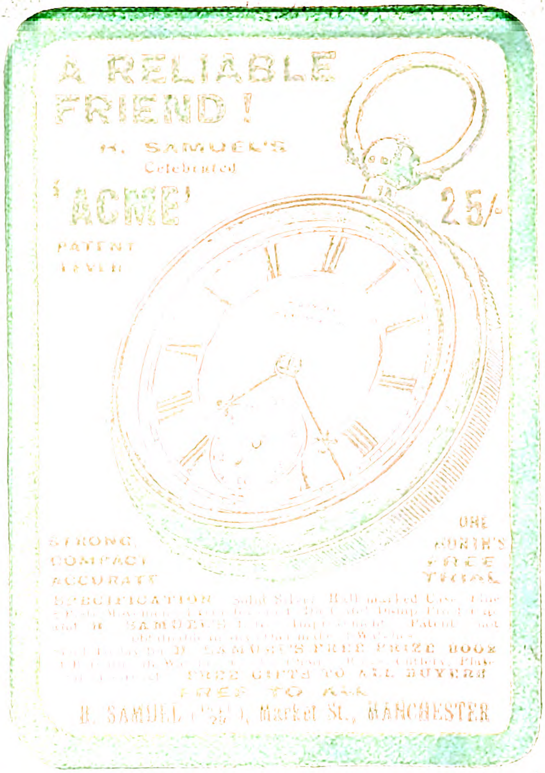

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SHORT STORIES

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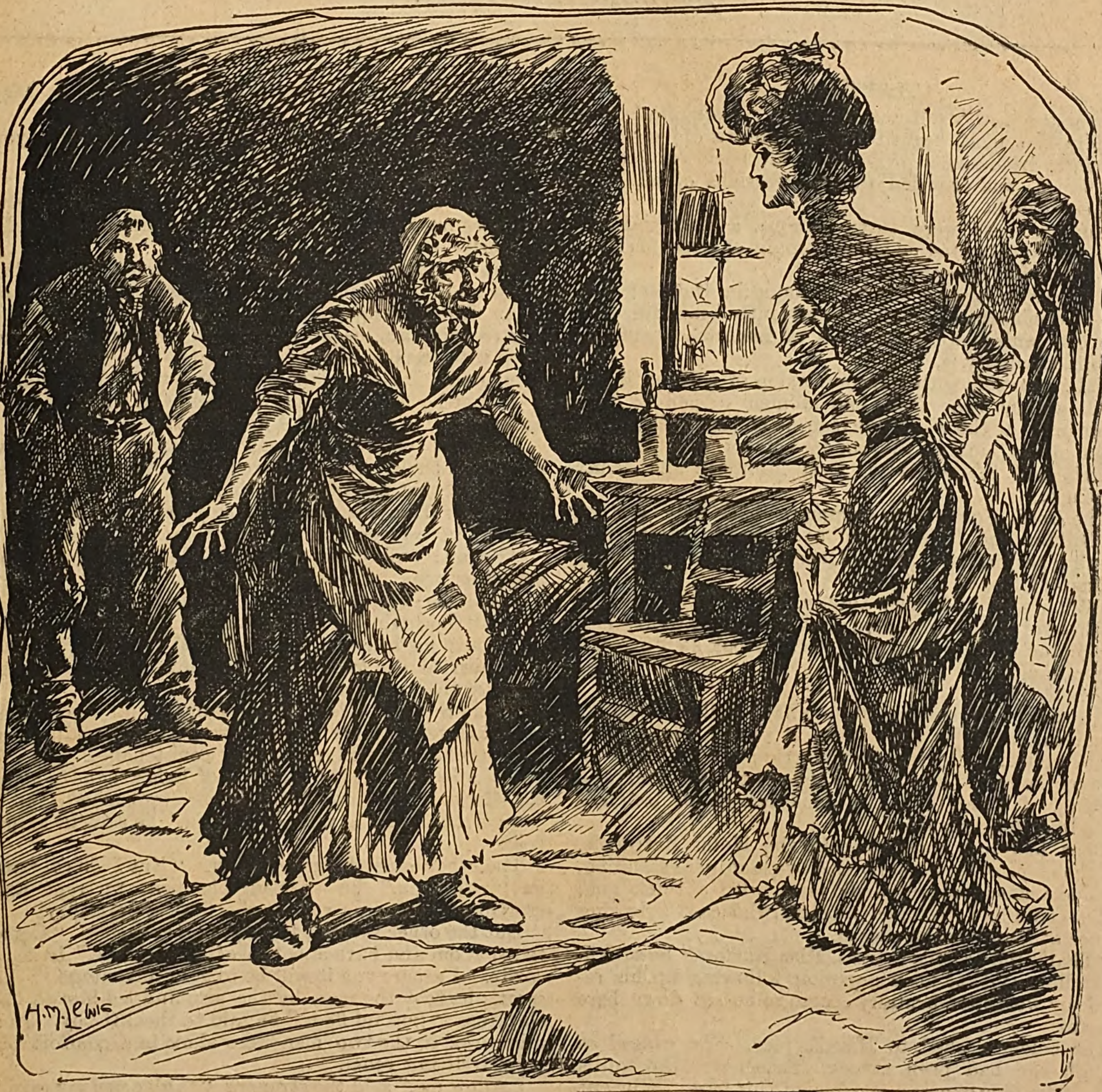
The Adventures of an Actress.



"Do ye mane to say," came the shrill retort, "that ye have not heard of Moll Malone, the Queen of the Beggars?"

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

VIII.—The Queen of the Beggars.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

It was a lovely autumn morning. Sackville Street, Dublin, the most beautiful thoroughfare of—as every patriotic Irishman avows—the most beautiful city in the world, was crowded with pedestrians of all sorts and conditions.

Among these were three persons, a man and two ladies, who attracted no small amount of attention from the other foot-passengers.

The reason for this was to be found in the fact that one of them was a woman pre-eminently beautiful, even in a city renowned for its types of feminine beauty as Dublin assuredly is.

Tall, graceful, with the complexion of a Hebe, it was small wonder that men and women turned to look admiringly at the wondrous charms of Hazel Harlow.

On either side of the young actress were her two friends and fellow-actors, Eric Monteith and Jenny Lovelace.

The *Good Samaritan* Company had duly arrived in Dublin and Belfast, and had already given their opening performance at the Queen's Theatre in Great Brunswick Street.

"What a beautiful city Dublin is," Hazel was saying. "I thought it always rained in Ireland, but to-day it is lovely, and the sky so blue it doesn't look as if it could ever rain again."

Eric laughed.

"I remember staying at a village called Malahide some years ago," he said, "and it rained twelve days out of sixteen. It was a pretty little place not far from here on the coast, and I had gone there for golf and boating. I think I had a good sample of Ireland's reputation for moisture."

They had just come opposite the Hotel Metropole. On the steps of the hotel portico two men were standing, the one a short, rather portly man, with a thick gold watch-chain and beringed fingers, who cast a leering glance at Hazel as she passed.

"That's the famous actress, Miss Harlow," he said in an audible aside to his companion, following up his remark by words too brutally coarse to be set down here in print.

The colour rushed to Hazel's face. She winced as though she had been struck. Eric heard the words too. A terrible expression came into his face. Without a moment's hesitation he wheeled round and walking up to the fellow said in tones that he endeavoured to keep calm:

"Apologise instantly for what you have said, you hound, or I'll thrash you here in the public street."

The man laughed.

"Who the dickens are you?" he said sneeringly, "I'll see myself in Jericho first. Actresses are public property——"

But he got no further. Monteith seized him by the collar and swung him on to the pavement with a grip of iron. The next moment he had raised a light cane he was carrying and began to belabour the ruffian's broad back with terrible blows. In vain the man writhed and struggled. He was in the grasp of a trained athlete.

At last he bellowed out in accents of mingled rage and pain. "I apologise! I apologise!"

Eric let go of the man's collar and the fellow staggered back. Then the young man turned and faced the crowd that had gathered round.

"That ruffian insulted this lady most grossly," he said, "I have given him the punishment he deserved."

"Bedad! and that's thrue," said a man who was standing near. "I heard what he said, the spalpeen got what he deserved, bad cess to him."

But "the spalpeen," had slunk off into the hotel like a dog into his kennel. The crowd slowly dispersed and Eric hurried his two fair companions away from the scene of the unpleasant episode.

Inside the vestibule of the Metropole—an observer of what had taken place outside—was a tall dark man of a somewhat saturnine cast of countenance. As the fellow who had felt the strength of Eric's hand sought the shelter of the hotel the stranger approached him.

"I should like a word with you," he said in a low voice.

The other rapped out an oath. "But I don't want one with you," he snarled, his pent up rage and mortification finding vent at the first opportunity.

But the other was not to be put off so easily. "Come to my room and have a bottle of champagne," he said easily, "I assure you it will be to your advantage." So saying he took the man by the arm and led him to the elevator. "Second floor," he said to the lift-boy. In a minute or so the two men were alone in a comfortable private sitting room.

"Allow me," said the stranger, "to give you my card." He handed a slip of pasteboard to his still surly comrade upon which was written, "Mr. Horace Caldecott."

"Good morning, Mr. Caldecott" he said gruffly. "Joshua Randell is my name, of Mark Lane, City. Perhaps you'll be so good as to tell me why you dragged me up here."

"Certainly," answered the other with a smile, "Because we are both in the same boat."

"Both in the same boat? What do you mean?"

"Why that we both of us have a pretty good-sized grudge against Mr. Eric Monteith, the gentleman who objected to your saying what you did about Miss Hazel Harlow."

Randell broke out into a torrent of abuse. His back was still smarting sorely from the effect of his chastisement.

"I'll get even with the young blackguard somehow," he said vindictively.

"Yes, but how?" put in the other. "It strikes me from what I have just seen Mr. Monteith is perfectly well able to look after himself."

Randell took a long draught at the champagne glass that had been set before him, then he sat down somewhat heavily and looked long and earnestly into Caldecott's face.

"See, here," he said, "if you've got an idea, out with it. I'm your man through thick and thin."

Caldecott hesitated for a moment.

"Well," he said suddenly, "there's one way by which you can get at Mr. Monteith, and that's through Hazel Harlow. He's dead gone on her"—a look of horrid vindictiveness came into the speaker's face—"and he'd do anything to look after her interests. Once get Hazel Harlow into your power, and you can use her as the candle-flame that lures the moth Monteith to his undoing."

"Yes, that's all very well," broke in the other, "but we're in the twentieth century, now, and you can't go about kidnapping young girls as you used to in the old days. How do you propose to get hold of Miss Harlow?"

"Well, I know Dublin pretty well," answered the other, "and there are some places at the back of the Rotunda where men and women live who would do anything; aye, even to murder, for a few shillings. Now, I'll be frank with you. I want Miss Harlow for my own. I also owe Mr. Eric Monteith a grudge, which is no less insistent than your own, though he never tried to horsewhip me in the public streets, and if I work ou the details, will you stand by me when it comes to business?"

"There's my hand on it," answered Randell.

"Then let's get to business," said Caldecott, "there is a lot to be done."

CHAPTER II.

Hazel and Jenny had taken quiet apartments in Wicklow Street. They had just finished their lunch on the same day that had seen the discomfiture of Mr. Joshua Randell.

"Isn't it horrible," Hazel was saying, "that the fact of a girl electing to take up the theatrical profession should lay her open to be a fair target for anyone to throw mud at?" She shuddered as the reminiscence of that scene opposite the Hotel Metropole came across her brain.

"You are quite right, dear," answered Jenny in a low voice, "and yet, Hazel, it is a sad fact that so many of the female members of our profession are much too lax in their behaviour in private life. In one travelling company that I was in, one day in Bournemouth, the company hired a waggonette and drove through the streets of the town, each one armed with a penny tin trumpet or some child's musical instrument, which they blew vigorously all the way. The ladies, too, had pea-shooters with which they peppered the passers-by. Small wonder that actresses in travelling companies lay themselves open to such insults as you received this morning."

Hazel sighed. "How women can unsex themselves so," she said, "is past all human comprehension." Then she rose. "I think you said you had a letter to write, Jenny. That being the case, I'll just go out and buy some hairpins. I shan't be long, and then we'll go out and get some tea later on at that nice confectioner's in Sackville Street."

Hazel left the house and walked quickly down Wicklow Street into Grafton Street. Where the two streets met, a miserable woman was standing on the kerb upon whose face was a look of such unutterable misery, that the actress paused involuntarily, her gentle heart touched by the sight of so much wretchedness.

"Give me a copper or so, miss," whined the woman, "I've three starving little ones at home crying out for bread."

Hazel paused. The story was a hackneyed one, yet she had not in her hitherto quiet life come into contact with all the misery and vice that flaunts itself in the streets of our great cities. The picture of the little starving children crying feebly for food in some miserable garret rose up before her eyes. Supposing if the woman's tale were true, surely the least that she could do would be to try and alleviate in some small way the sufferings of those who are unable to fight for themselves.

"If your story is true," she said, "I will willingly help you, but how am I to know that such is the case?"

"By coming with me to see for yourself," broke in the woman, eagerly. "Then you'll know that what I tell you is true."

Hazel hesitated. "Is it far from here?" she asked.

"Ten minutes' walk," answered the other.

"Then I'll come," said Hazel. Without another word the woman turned and shuffled off with the beautiful young actress at her side. The strangely assorted couple kept on until at last the beggar woman entered a narrow street the houses in which were of the poorest. She suddenly turned down a court of still meaner aspect. The woman paused before a door. Taking a rusty key from the pocket of her dress she inserted it in the lock. The door opened into an evil smelling passage way from which a flight of dirty wooden stairs led away to the upper part of the tenement. But the woman did not mount the stairs; she shuffled on down the passage way that led to the back regions of the house.

"In here, miss," she said in a low voice, throwing open a door.

Hazel entered to find herself in a long low room in which an old woman was seated. The sound of the door swinging back behind her caused her to wheel round in some surprise. From the far corner of the room another figure suddenly emerged, that of a squat, repulsive-looking man, but of children there was no sign.

"What is the meaning of this?" cried Hazel, turning round upon the woman who had brought her to this foul den. "Why have you brought me here?"

"To see Moll Malone," came the unexpected answer from an old hag whom Hazel had noticed on first entering the room.

A more repulsive-looking personage than this woman it would have been almost impossible to conceive. She must at one time have been tall, but age had bowed her figure. The skin of her face was yellow as parchment and seamed with innumerable wrinkles. Two beady black eyes of amazing brilliancy for one of her age peered forth from sunken eye-sockets. Her head was covered with short grey hair which protruded elfishly from a mobcap that had once been white. Her arms were long and skinny; her hands were veritable claws.

Hazel gazed at this repulsive apparition with horror.

"Who are you?" she said, "what do you want with me?"

"Do ye mane to say," came the shrill retort, "that ye have not heard of Moll Malone the Queen of the Beggars? Shure and yours is the purtiest face that's been inside Moll's house this many a long day."

"But what do you want with me?" cried Hazel again.

"What is it I'm wanting, darlin'," came the answer, "why that's soon told. Money is what I'm wanting and money I must have before you lave this house."

"Then the story that I heard about three little starving children is all a lie," cried Hazel hotly. "I've been trapped here to be blackmailed."

"Trapped," answered the hag, "did ye not come of yer own accord? Now don't be unreasonable. It's only a little money that Moll's asking of ye, just that and ye shall go free."

Hazel saw resistance would be useless. A wild desire came over her to escape from her loathsome surroundings at all hazards.

"How much do you want?" she asked.

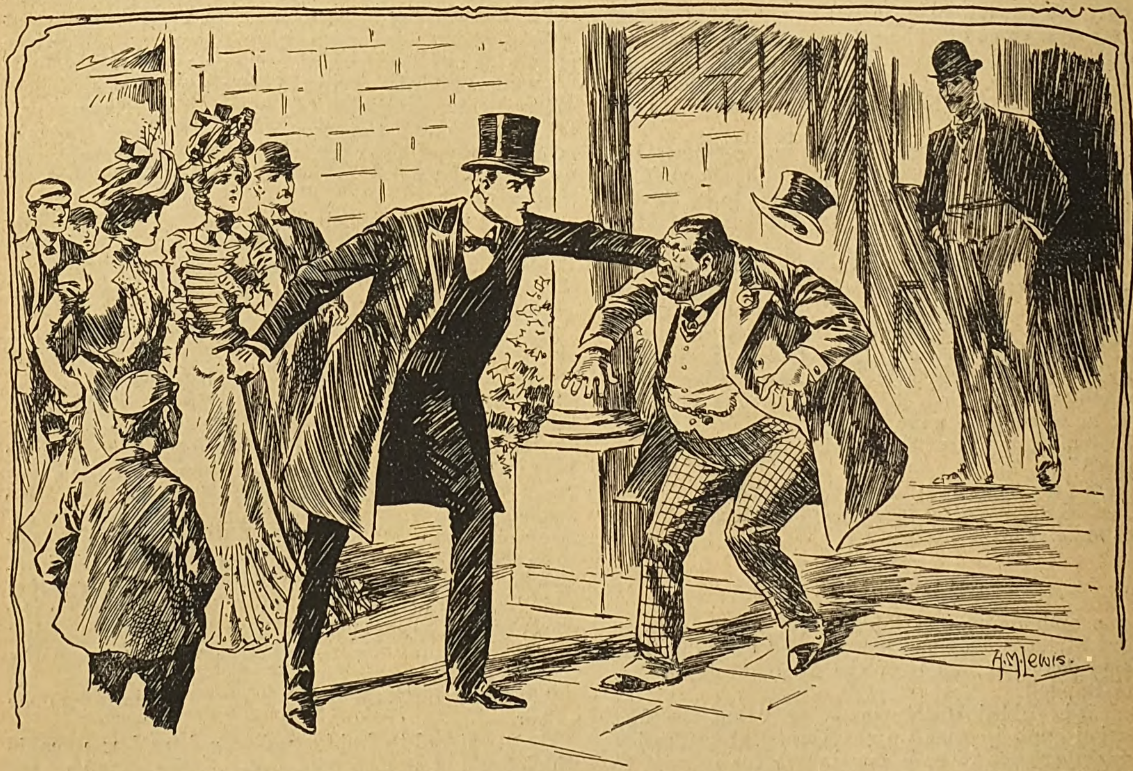
"All that ye have," was the answer.

"That is not very much," said Hazel, stoutly. "Only a little silver in my purse, and no jewellery," as you can see for yourself. You have lured a very poor prize into your trap."

"May be," said the hag, coolly; "but if ye haven't money about ye, there'll be those ready to pay for your ransom."

"Yes, and the moment you communicate with my friends, they'll take steps to have you punished for your wickedness."

"Is it a foole you'll be taken be for entirely," croaked Moll, a horrid smile coming into her withered countenance. "Do you think that Moll Malone has not more ways than one of gaining her ends? No, no, acushla, it is here you'll stay until you'll give me your



Monteith seized him by the collar, and swung him on to the pavement with a grip of iron.

Is your photo on page 400?

sacred word that if ye go free there's no word said of how Moll gave ye lodging."

"And if I refuse?" cried Hazel, with eyes ablaze.

"Ye'll not do that, mavourneen," answered the hag impassively.

Hazel cast a swift glance around her. Was there no means of escaping from her odious surroundings? Moll noted her action.

"It's not escaping ye'd be after trying?" she said, mockingly. "Ye're with Moll Malone, and Moll knows her business."

"How much ransom money do you want?" repeated Hazel, realising the futility of resistance.

At that moment there came a peculiar knock at the door by means of which Hazel had just entered. In a moment the expression on Moll's face changed. She made a sign to the man behind Hazel. Like a panther he sprang forward and flung open a door that led out of the apartment into what was apparently another room beyond.

"Step in here for a minute, miss," he said hoarsely. "No harm shall happen to ye—I swear it—if ye do as yer told. It'll only be for a few minutes. Mother Moll has visitors—visitors that ye mightn't like to see."

The last few words were uttered in a voice fraught with terrible significance, the meaning of which Hazel was at a loss to understand. Her blood ran cold. Into what haunt of devilry had she been enticed?

She hesitated. Should she scream aloud for help? The man beside her seemed to divine her intention instantaneously.

"If ye cry out," he said, "nothing can save ye. Quick! It's yer last chance!"

A thunderous knock came at the door. Hazel, at her wits' end to know what course to pursue, darted inside the room indicated by her captor. She found herself in a small chamber, little better than a cupboard, lit by a skylight from the roof. The door was shut behind her, and she heard a bolt shoot back into its socket.

Moll Malone threw open the door upon which the knocking had been so insistent, to admit two men, who were so closely muffled up that their features were unrecognisable.

"Hullo, Moll," said one of them. "So here you are just the same as ever. Why the dickens didn't you open when I knocked first?"

"The Squire," muttered Moll. "What may you be after wanting?"

Caldecott, for he it was, laughed.

"I'm not the first man," he said, "who's come to Dublin to get Mother Malone's help. I want a piece of business done, I and this gentleman here," indicating Randell, his companion, "and we don't want——"

"To dirty yer own hands," broke in Moll.

"Quite so," answered Caldecott. "As we understand one another so well there will not be the slightest reason to beat longer about the bush. You must know then," he continued, "that the *Good Samaritan* Travelling Company has come to Dublin. Among them are two people in whom this gentleman and myself are interested. The one is a man, named Mr. Eric Monteith, the other a lady, known as Miss Hazel Harlow. Now this gentleman here is willing to pay you the sum of one hundred pounds should Mr. Eric Monteith be so injured as to make his departure from Dublin exceedingly unlikely at least for a time. Now don't misunderstand me. We don't want him murdered. We merely want him to have good reason to remember his visit to Dublin. Both this gentleman and myself have a private grudge against him, and should like to interview him for ourselves. As for this Miss Harlow, I want to devise some scheme whereby I can have her for my own."

Caldecott spoke in a tone of quiet villainy with as much nonchalance as though he had been carying on an everyday conversation instead of planning the downfall of two people whose only crime had been their individual integrity.

The hag heard him without a sound. When he had finished she said: "And this Miss Harlow, what's she like?"

"The most beautiful woman that ever lived," cried Caldecott.

The hag gave vent to a hoarse chuckle. "So that's how the wind blows," she said, "is it?"

"Yes," broke in Caldecott angrily, "but that's neither here nor there; the question is, how are we going to waylay Mr. Eric Monteith?"

"Oh, that's easy enough," came the answer. "I'll guarantee to get him here to-night if you like. As for the girl, well, that's not such an easy matter."

"Not even if it's a question of money," said Caldecott eagerly. "Surely the Queen of the Beggars is never at a loss to know what to do when she's well paid."

"But you pay my price," said the hag, "and what's more, you pay it without fuss. Ye know me by this time, Squire. You know that Moll means what she says, and if I'm going to do anything for you there must be no half measures. Five hundred pounds is my price for Hazel Harlow."

"Done," cried Caldecott.

"And you'll swear to me to pay the five hundred pounds within a week after the day on which I deliver up Hazel Harlow to you?"

"Yes, yes," cried Caldecott hoarsely.

"What do ye intend doin' to the girl?" croaked the old woman after a moment's pause.

Caldecott uttered a mirthless laugh. "What business is that of yours, Moll?" he asked.

"I always like to know my client's business," answered the harridan.

"Then if you must know, I am going to make her my wife."

Moll made no comment to this statement. Her lips tightened for a moment. Then she went on: "And the hundred pounds for the other job?" she croaked.

"That's my affair," broke in Randell. "Money ain't tight with me, and you'll find the hundred quid easily earned, I should say."

Moll turned once more to Caldecott. "Your word on that, squire?" she said.

Caldecott nodded. "But how are you going to get Miss Harlow for me?" he said in a low voice.

The hag rose to her feet and went to the door into which Hazel had been shown some fifteen minutes before. She turned back the rusty bolt, and threw open the portal.

"Here's Miss Harlow for ye" she cried.

With a cry Caldecott sprang forward and bounded into the room. His eyes sought every corner of the chamber and then went back to the ghastly face of the old hag beside him.

"What do you mean, woman?" he roared. "This is no time for jesting."

For the room was empty. Of Hazel Harlow there was not the vestige of a sign.

The situation was eminently dramatic. At the open door that communicated with the inner chamber stood the hag Moll Malone; in the centre of the inner room itself stood Caldecott, livid with baffled fury; behind the old woman were grouped the beggar woman who had lured Hazel to this den of infamy, Joshua Randell and the man who seemed to be the old woman's tool. For a moment or so Moll stood motionless peering into the innermost recesses of the little chamber, with eyes full of fear, then she crossed herself in superstitious awe.

"Holy Mother!" she ejaculated, "the spirits must have taken the sweet colleen away, she was too beautiful for the Powers not have guarded their own."

Then she wheeled round and called out in a piercing voice; "Kathleen! Terence! Is it not with your own eyes that ye saw the lady walk in here?" And in fear-stricken voices the man and woman answered in the affirmative with one accord.

Horace Caldecott was a man in whose composition there was not a grain of superstition; "Have I lost my senses?" he muttered, "Or is everyone conspiring to send me out of my mind? Enough of this mystery, woman," he went on roughly, "for goodness sake explain what you mean. Am I to understand that you locked up Miss Hazel Harlow in this very room scarce half an hour ago?"

"If so be that Hazel Harlow is the most beautiful colleen that ever Moll Malone cast eyes on, then it's truth you're speaking. It was in that very room and there's ne'er a trap-door nor hiding place in it as you can see for yourself. As for the skylight above ye can see for yourselves that she could not have reached that. Ye can make what ye like out of what I've told ye."

"The woman's mad," broke in Randell coarsely. "They are all mad here in this God-forsaken country. And how does this get me any nearer my paying off old scores against this Monteith? I thought that was the business we had come here about."

"Mad, am I?" almost screamed Moll. "Then ye go elsewhere than to a madwoman to get yer dirty jobs done. I'll not move hand or foot for ye, ye omadhaun; not if ye were to pay me all the money there is in that cursed country of yours called England." And the hag spat upon the floor to emphasise her virulence.

"You see what your interference has done," said Caldecott, turning savagely to his confederate. "You've upset the whole apple-cart now, and we are both of us further than ever from getting what we want."

"It's the truth yer speaking," went on the incensed beldame. "I'll do no more for ye. Go and find Hazel Harlow for yerselves. Begone! Leave my house or I'll call the bhoys about yer ears! Molly Malone is in her own kingdom here. She's only to say the word and ther's hundreds who would be ready to prove whether they think her a madwoman or no!"

Caldecott saw that the hag was in earnest. He had during his career (one, it may be noted, that had led him into the innumerable byepaths of crime and vice) had great opportunity of rubbing shoulders with all the scum and riff-raff of most of the great cities of Europe, and he knew that Moll Malone, the queen of the Dublin beggars, did not speak idly. He knew what Randell's impatient pig-headedness had done for them, and the achievement of their ends by the means that he had anticipated.

"We'd better clear out of this," he muttered to his comrade, "before the place gets too hot to hold us."

Turning to the beldame, he pressed a sovereign into her hand.

"There Moll," he began, conciliatingly, but he got no further. The old woman, all her hot Irish blood seething with rage, flung the coin in his face.

"I'll have no money of yours," she screamed. "Get ye gone!"

An oath fell from Caldecott's lips. The coin had struck him on the forehead and had broken the skin. Randell seized him by the arm. "For Heaven's sake let's get out," he said in an access of terror. And thus the two men were forced to sink ingloriously away from the place from which Caldecott had hoped so much, and instead of being nearer to the achievement of their fell ends, they now seemed farther away than ever, for Caldecott felt in his heart that in some mysterious way Hazel had indeed been lured to Moll Malone's—for what object he was, of course, ignorant—and that she had somehow, equally mysteriously, disappeared. Perhaps the beggar queen knew more than she would ever say. Whatever the mystery was it would seem that Caldecott was to have no hand in the elucidation of it, yet the mad passion that he had conceived for Hazel Harlow that had been his spur in so many desperate ventures still served as a goad to urge him on. He was ready to sacrifice everything to become possessed of the woman for whom he felt so unholy a love.

But Caldecott and Randell were not to be allowed to escape scot-free from Moll's "bhoys." The old woman was roused to a tempest of fury by Randell's ill-timed remark. On the departure of the two confederates, she made a sign to her myrmidon, the man who had ushered Hazel into the adjoining chamber.

The fellow rushed to the door and gave vent to a piercing whistle, emitted four times. The cry was answered at once.

As Randell and Caldecott emerged from Moll's house into the squalid court into which it opened, four or five ruffians sprang upon them. They were knocked senseless, and borne away to be despoiled.

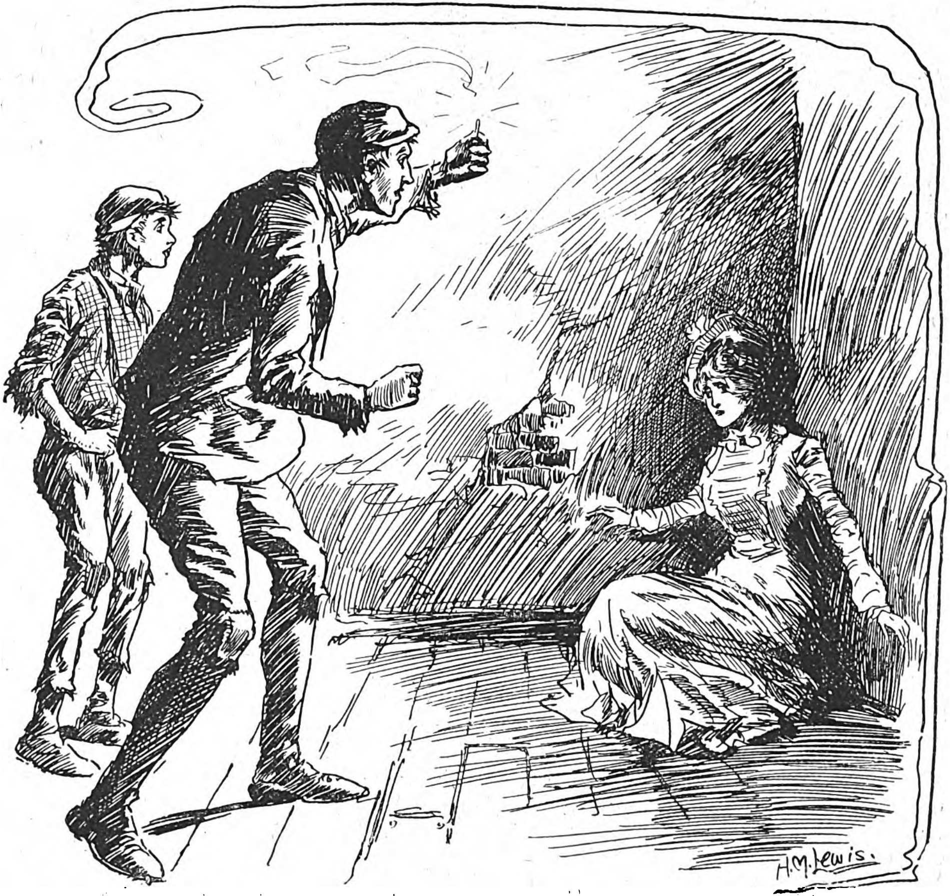
A week later, two wretched men, kept in durance vile by the orders of the despotic Queen of the Slums, whose sway was paramount in those regions, crept out into the streets of Dublin, to find what consolation they could in the resumption of their lives amongst their fellow men—sore, weak from their confinement, robbed of every penny they had had in their pockets, despoiled of every article of jewellery and value upon their persons.

As for Caldecott, he slunk away to his steam yacht, the *Mermaid*, lying in Dublin harbour, and gave orders to his amazed crew to leave the, for him, inhospitable city.

CHAPTER III.

Eric Monteith and Raymond Venables, the manager of the *Good Samaritan* Company, were strolling side by side down Sackville Street. The two men, although they had but little in common, had nevertheless become more or less intimate friends as they had learnt to know one another better, and besides they had one bond in common that had gone a great way to counteract the discrepancy in their respective natures, each of them was genuinely and sincerely in love with Hazel Harlow. As was natural, perhaps, under the circumstances both men were at that moment—it was early in the afternoon—talking about Hazel herself.

"It seems to me, Monteith," Venables was saying, "as though there was some terrible conspiracy afoot to ruin Miss Harlow's chances both off the stage and on. It seems incredible that a girl so beautiful, so noble-minded, so spotless, should have any enemies. And yet it must be so. At every town we have been to, Newcastle, Scarborough, Rugby, Sheffield, to say nothing of the episode on the Belfast boat, Miss Harlow's life has been in danger. Now she has not taken me into her confidence. I was foolish enough to try and flirt with her until I knew her better, but can't you put me in possession of the facts of the whole business?"



Eric sprang forward. "Hazel!" he cried, "Hazel!"

Eric hesitated. Although his friendship for Venables had passed the point of any restraint in conversation he nevertheless felt somewhat chary in divulging the whole story of how Hazel's life had come to be overshadowed by so much tribulation.

"Look here, Venables," he said at last, "I'd much rather you got Miss Harlow to tell you the whole story herself. You know perfectly well what my feelings for her are; that I'd marry her to-morrow and take her away from the stage at once if she'd have me. We're both in the same boat there."

"Except that I wouldn't take her off the stage," broke in Venables with an attempt at levity, "I'd make her and my fortune first. But that's away from the point. It's a fair field and no favour for us both, old man, and perhaps you are right in not betraying confidences. I'll ask Miss Harlow to make me her confidant if she thinks I'm worthy of it. It's a funny thing," he went on somewhat irrelevantly, "but I seem to be quite a changed man ever since I fell in love with Miss Harlow. The other ladies in the crowd seem so frightfully vulgar beside her. I don't seem to care a bit for the larks I used to have, for you know my boy how powerful the manager of a Company can be and how willing most of the ladies are to sacrifice a good deal to get into his good books. I could tell you tales that would set your respectable British hair on end like a porcupine's bristles."

"Spare me, my dear lady-killer," broke in the other with a laugh, "but, joking apart, to return to our subject. I wish I could get Miss Harlow to leave the stage. At every new town where we arrive I experience a sinking feeling at the heart that some terrible and unexpected accident is going to happen to our Star, and yet you can't be always watching her. With all her nobility of character she's as headstrong as a child over some things. Hullo! Isn't that the fair Jenny Lovelace?"

Jenny Lovelace it was, and on her face was a look of trouble. Eric was quick to notice the expression.

"What's up?" he asked quickly. "Hazel——"

"Is gone—disappeared," broke in Jenny. "I had some letters to write, and she went out to buy some hairpins. I waited half an hour, and as there was no sign of her I went to look for her. I went to the shop

£5 notes waiting to be claimed. See page 400

in Grafton Street where I knew she would get them, and they said that nobody had been in there to buy hairpins at all that afternoon. I hurried back to our lodgings thinking that I should perhaps find her there, but she had not returned. I went out again an hour or so after Hazel had gone, and at the corner of Wicklow Street I met a ragged boy, who asked me if I was looking for a tall, beautiful lady. I said yes, and he said he had seen her go off with a poor-looking woman some time back. He knew who she was, because it appears she had given him a bunch of flowers she had been wearing at the stage-door of the theatre last night. There's all I know."

The two men heard her out in breathless interest.

"Now what on earth," said Eric, "can have possessed Hazel to make her go off with a poor woman in Dublin? What on earth can be the meaning of it?"

Jenny shook her head.

"I don't know, I don't know," she said with tears in her eyes, "but what's to be done? Supposing——" she broke off and looked up piteously, almost fearfully, in Monteith's face. He read what it was she would have said. Supposing Hazel had fallen into the hands of the villain Caldecott again. Eric ground his teeth together in impotent fury.

"Where's the boy?" he said, "who told you that story?"

"He only told me and ran away after he had finished his speech," said Jenny despondently. "I don't believe I should even know him if I saw him again. He was an ordinary street urchin, rather taller than the average, and seemed pretty thick-set."

"Let us go back to the lodgings," said Eric, "perhaps Hazel has turned up after all. She may have gone off on some errand of mercy. The woman who called her away may have asked her help, and Hazel, who is always too ready to give an attentive ear to anyone who may seem to be in want, may have complied with her request. Perhaps we are making a mountain out of a mole-hill."

But in Wicklow Street there was no sign of the missing girl. It was now nearly five o'clock, and three hours had gone by since Hazel had disappeared.

"And we were going to have tea together in Sackville Street," said Jenny.

"We had better communicate with the police," cried Venables. "Things are getting serious."

"What good will that do?" asked Eric. "They've got no more to go upon than we have. If only we could find that urchin. He didn't say in which direction she went off with the woman, Miss Lovelace, did he?"

"He only said what I have told you," replied the girl.

The case was beginning to look hopeless. The three were at their wits' ends to know what to do. It really seemed as if Venables' suggestion was the only feasible one, to put the matter in the hands of the police. Accordingly a move was made towards the Police Head Quarters. The Superintendent of Police was put into full possession of the facts as far as they were known, which were meagre enough in all conscience. He could promise but little help as yet. There were hundreds of street-arabs in Dublin that might have answered to the description given by Jenny of the *gamin* who had supplied her with the information concerning Hazel's disappearance with the unknown woman.

"Unfortunately," he went on, "we have a great many slums in Dublin and there are not lacking people, as is the case in every great city, who are on the look-out for young and beautiful women for purposes of blackmail and extortion. All I can do is to supply a detective with all the details that we know and to get him to work through the low quarters of the city to see if anything has been heard of the young lady. You may be quite sure that if any police officers hear anything about the missing young lady, they will at once communicate with head-quarters. I shall at once communicate with you at the theatre."

The time passed slowly away. Six o'clock came and went, and the time for the performance of *The Good Samaritan* drew ever nearer and nearer. Of Hazel there was still no sign. Venables was at his wits' ends. In the first place, every seat in the theatre was sold in anticipation of seeing the famous Miss Harlow appear in the chief part of the play; secondly, the sickening fear that something terrible had happened to Hazel awoke terrible forebodings in the manager's mind. As for Eric, his feelings can be well imagined. Yet all his efforts had proved unavailing. He could find no trace of Hazel. It seemed as though the earth must have opened and swallowed up the beautiful young actress, together with the woman who had lured her away. It wanted half an hour before the commencement of the play. Eric was standing moodily at the stage-door of the theatre, a prey to the most horrible misgivings.

"I'd give a hundred pounds," he muttered, half aloud, "to anyone who would take me to Hazel Harlow."

A hand touched him on the arm. He turned sharply round, to be confronted with the tattered figure of a Dublin street arab. "Did ye say a hundred pounds, yer honour," the lad said.

"What do you mean?" Eric's hand gripped hold of the lad's arm like a vice. "Did you hear what I said."

"Faix, yer honour," answered the urchin with cool impudence, "I heard ye say that ye'ed be willing to give a hundred pounds to anyone who would take ye to Hazel Harlow, and it's meself would like to have the earning of such a swate little sum."

"Look here, boy," went on Monteith in a terrible voice. "If you're joking I'll wring the life out of you. If you're speaking the truth and can lead me to Hazel Harlow at this moment I'll give you one hundred pounds any time you like."

The boy's eyes glistened.

"A hundred pounds," he echoed faintly, "Mother of Moses, then I could go to Ameriky and join Mike. I'll do it." Then he went on in a low voice. "It's a dirty place I'll be after taking ye to, sir. Ye cannot come as ye are. There's niver a fine gentlman been where I'm going to take you. Have ye got any ould clothes?"

Hope renewed sprang up in Eric's breast. There was of course the chance that he was being made the victim of a hoax; on the other hand the lad might be speaking the truth.

"Wait here for me five minutes," he said, and turning, he dashed inside the theatre bellowing for the property man.

In a wonderfully short space of time he had found a new make-up. He had discarded his elegant Bond Street apparel for the dress of a fifth-rate Irish hobo. Coming down the stairs that led to the stage-door from the dressing-rooms he ran full tilt into Venables.

"Delay the piece as long as you can," he cried to the astonished manager. "Try the audience with a curtain-raiser. I've news of Hazel. I'm off on what may be a wild goose chase, or even worse. And even if I do find her she probably won't be able to act to-night. But anyhow we shall have something to show the audience and we can get through the piece with Cora Bond, her understudy."

Without more ado, before almost Venables could recover from the surprise occasioned by this tatterdemalion presentment of Eric Monteith the immaculate, the pseudo tramp had dashed out into the street. The arab was waiting for him.

"Be jabbers!" was the urchin's remark, "it's changed ye are entirely. I think even Mother Malone will be afther believing ye to be one of her bhoys. And about that hundred pounds, yer honour," he went on, "how am I to know I shall get that, supposing I take ye to find Miss Harlow?"

"Find Miss Harlow," answered Eric impressively, "and I swear by the Holy Saints above that you shall have the money."

"I believe ye, sir," said the urchin soberly, and together the strangely-assorted couple set off along the now darkened thoroughfares.

Eric did not know Dublin. He trusted himself implicitly to his youthful guide who led him through a maze of narrow slums and reeking alleys and noisome courts, where men and women reeled past in drunken frenzy. Eric shuddered to think that it was in haunts like this Hazel Harlow had been incarcerated.

Suddenly the boy drew near to his companion's side. "Say nothing," he muttered, "and follow me." And he suddenly dived down through a narrow pathway that led into the blackness beyond.

Monteith kept close behind his guide. The next moment he heard the sound as of a key being thrust into a door-lock. Together the two entered what Eric felt must be a deserted tenement house. He blundered on behind the boy up a flight of rickety wooden stairs. At the top the lad paused.

"Have ye a match?" he whispered.

Monteith produced a lucifer, and, from some recess in his tattered garments, the other drew a small piece of tallow candle. This he lit, and Monteith found that they were standing on a narrow landing, facing yet another door, that was apparently locked. Again the lad produced a key. He shot back the bolts, and ushered the other inside a squalid apartment, in one corner of which was a huddled-up figure. Eric sprang forward.

"Hazel!" he cried; "Hazel!"

The girl—for she it really was—sprang from her crouching position with a cry of almost apprehensive joy.

"Eric, is it you? Thank God!"

But the youth interposed. "There's no time to lose," he said. "We've got to look out for Mother Malone's spies, but the lady can't go out as she is in those clothes," for Hazel still wore the stylish walking dress that she had had on when leaving Wicklow Street.

"What's to be done?" said Eric in despair.

The boy laid a finger upon the side of his nose in a knowing manner. Then he went to a corner of the room and pulled up a plank which was evidently the lid of some recess in the boarding. Thrusting his hand into the black void he pulled forth a bundle consisting of a coarse piece of sacking knotted at the top. With quick fingers he untied the knot and disclosed a heterogenous mass of clothes among which could be seen one or two pairs of boots, some faded silks and satins and a lot of worthless pieces of garments.

"This is my collection," he said with a grin. "We'll find ye something here to cover yer dress."

The clothes were indescribably dirty and had evidently been stolen by the lad at various times. But with so much at stake Hazel did not hesitate. She discarded her fashionable hat and covered her glorious red-gold hair with a poke bonnet that must have done service for some old Irish beggar woman. Over her dress-skirt she slipped a dirty faded red petticoat, disguising her bodice with an old cloak.

"And will ye make yer face dirty?" said the boy.

This was easily done; there was no lack of dust and filth in the squalid chamber. The final touches having been given to this somewhat unusual toilette the lad surveyed Hazel approvingly.

"Faix, and I'm sure Mother Malone won't know yer again," he muttered exultingly, "and now follow close behind me and we'll have ye out of this before ye know ye've been here, and if it's drunk ye can both of ye pretend to be so much the better. It's a way wid the gintry here and it'll not make ye so conspicuous as if ye were sober entirely."

To an actor and actress, for Eric could now fairly lay claim to be called such, while Hazel had indisputably proved her right to stand among the ranks of the ladies of her profession, such an injunction was sure to be obeyed. Moreover the knowledge of all there was at stake acted as a goad both to Monteith and to Hazel notwithstanding all that the latter had but recently gone through. And so the oddly assorted trio started on their journey towards Brunswick Street.

CHAPTER IV.

It can be well imagined that Raymond Venables' state of mind after the apparition of Eric Monteith as a seedy tramp was more chaotic than it had been before. And now, not only had he lost his leading lady but another member of his company had dashed off upon an unknown quest leaving him with the onus of providing a curtain-raiser to keep his audience quiet, under the faint hope that perhaps Miss Harlow might be restored within an hour. In despair, Venables sought out Jenny Lovelace and asked her advice.

Jenny's sunny nature was at once imbued with the re-accession of hope.

"Mr. Monteith is not the sort of man to go off like that unless he had some reason for it," she said, "you must do exactly what he told you."

Venables looked at his watch.

"The curtain should be up in a quarter of an hour," he said, "and I can make the orchestra give an extra turn. That'll be a saving of five or six minutes; then I'll go on and make a little speech and explain that an accident has happened to Miss Harlow, but that I hope she will be well enough to get through her part later on. Then you and I can give them Theyre Smith's *A Pair of Lunatics*, and then—well, if Monteith and Miss Harlow don't turn up by that time the fat will be in the fire. You know what a Dublin audience is? They'll think we're having them, and as likely as not there'll be a rumpus."

The orchestra gave the extra turn as decided, and a selection of Irish airs wound the audience up to a fine pitch of enthusiasm. As the last notes of "The Wearing of the Green" died away, Raymond Venables stepped out before the curtain. His face was rather pale, yet he spoke with perfect distinctness and decision.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I have to convey to you a piece of news that will, I know, cause you profound and heartfelt sorrow. Miss Hazel Harlow, who is cast for the part of Ruth in The *Good Samaritan*, is unfortunately rather seriously indisposed, but with wonderful fortitude she has consented to try and appear a little later on in the evening. As I know that you are all desirous of seeing an actress who, although young to the stage, has won a prominent place for herself in her profession, I have decided to present to you a small curtain-raiser as a commencement of our bill-of-fare. The piece we have chosen is called *A Pair of Lunatics* and will be, I hope, adequately presented by Miss Jenny Lovelace and myself."

The speech was received with good humour and much applause.

"The audience is in a good temper now," muttered Venables, as he retired to his dressing-room, "I only hope to goodness Monteith and Miss Harlow will turn up in time."

A Pair of Lunatics was received with acclamation. The curtain was rung down and Venables rushed off the stage into the wing to find that a sudden commotion had sprung up occasioned by the arrival of three disreputable beings whom my readers will not have much difficulty in recognising as Hazel, Eric, and the larrikin.

When it became known among the members of the Company that the dramatic entry had been effected by Eric and Hazel their surprise can be better imagined than described. As for Venables he was jubilant, and not without cause, for by a miracle his beautiful lead had been restored to him safe and sound and, notwithstanding the fact of all she had gone through, expressed her firm determination to sustain her *rôle* as soon as she could remove the traces of her recent adventure.

With jubilation apparent on every line of his countenance Raymond Venables once more stepped out before the drop-scene and faced the expectant audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, in a ringing voice, "You will all rejoice to hear that Miss Harlow has consented to appear to-night. In a few minutes she will appear on the stage in person to ask for an endorsement of her talent."

A perfect storm of applause rent the auditorium. At the eleventh hour the situation had been saved. When the curtain went up and Hazel was discovered seated alone in the room where the enactment of the drama first started another outburst of cheering proved how great was the hold the beautiful young actress had upon her audience. It was some moments before she was enabled to speak the opening words of her part and then not until she had bowed again and again to an audience worked up to concert pitch by the diplomatic speeches of Raymond Venables. How she got through her part that night no one but Hazel ever knew. Once or twice it was only by a tremendous effort that she prevented herself from breaking down entirely.

CHAPTER V.

After the performance, Raymond Venables insisted on carrying off Hazel, Eric, and Jenny to supper at the Metropole, where Hazel had promised to relate her adventures of that most thrilling day.

The street-arab who had been responsible for the rescue had been bidden by Eric to come round to his rooms near Stephen's Green early the next morning to receive the promised reward.

After the supper had been done full justice to, Hazel began her narrative. She told them how she had been struck by the miserable appearance of the woman in Wicklow Street, how she had been lured to Molly Malone's by the plausible creature who was subsidised by the queen of the beggars.

There is no need to recapitulate the story in full here as my readers are already fully acquainted with the facts up to the incarceration of Hazel in the inner chamber.

"I had scarcely been in the room two minutes," she said, "before a sound above me attracted my attention. The glass skylight suddenly opened and I heard a voice say: 'Look out, lady, there's a ladder coming down.'

"To my intense amazement, a rope ladder fell noiselessly almost on to my head. 'Quick,' said the voice, 'Can you do it?'

"Now, you must remember, that ever since a child, I have been used to all sorts of agile pursuits. About a farm there is always plenty of work to bring one's muscles into full play. Many a time as a girl have I swung myself up into lofts or on to the top of a hayrick by means of such a ladder. I did not pause to think who the owner of the voice was or where I might find myself should I succeed in making good my escape. I only knew that a few feet away from me was a terrible harpy of a woman and a man whom I have more occasion to hate and fear than anyone else in all the world, for at the moment of setting my foot upon the lower rung of the ladder I had heard the voice of him who I knew would give all he had to get me in his clutches. Up the swaying ladder I went without a sound. When I reached the roof above it was to find myself on the leads of a house beside the very boy who was the means afterwards of bringing you, Eric, to my ultimate rescue. Noiselessly he shut down the skylight and together we crept across the roof, through an attic window into a deserted house. I was then conveyed to a squalid chamber and locked in there until the night. You can imagine how terrible that lonely waiting was, yet somehow I felt that the lad who had so strangely befriended me would not deliver me up into the hands of my enemies. I had given him a bunch of flowers at the theatre last night and he apparently had dogged my footsteps ever since."

That was the end of Hazel's narrative and the end, so far as she was concerned, of further adventures in Dublin.

At the appointed hour the next morning the street arab made his appearance at Eric's lodgings.

The boy spoke well, and street-arab as he was, brought up in the midst of criminality and vice, Eric saw that he had in him the making of perhaps a fine man, and instinctively felt that in handing him this sum of money it would not be misplaced.

"And when you get to America, Tim," he said, "you must write and let me know how you're getting on."

"Shure and I will," said Tim, "though I can't write yet I'll be after making someone write for me."

Mother Malone and her gang was split up and the old beldame imprisoned for her misdeeds though the punishment came somewhat tardily. As for Horace Caldecott the base means he had endeavoured to use in order to accomplish his fell ends had, as we have seen, proved his undoing.

Ely's Automatic Housemaid.

J. Brewster Fisher

In order for a man to have faith in such an invention, he would have to know Harrison Ely. For Harrison Ely was a genius. I had known him in college, a man amazingly dull in Latin and Greek and even in English, but with ideas of his own that could not be expressed in language. His bent was purely mechanical, and found expression in innumerable ingenious contrivances to facilitate the study to which he had no inclination. His self-acting lexicon holder was a matter of admiring wonder to his classmates, but it did not serve to increase the tenacity of his mental grasp upon the contents of the volume, and so did little to recommend him to the faculty. And his self-feeding student lamp admirably illuminated everything for him save the true and only path to an honourable degree.

It had been years since I had seen him or thought of him, but the memory is tenacious of small things, and the big yellow envelope which I found one morning awaiting me upon my breakfast table brought his eccentric personality back to me with a rush. It was addressed to me in the Archimedean script always so characteristic of him, combining, as it seemed to do, the principles of the screw and the inclined plane, and in its superscription Harrison Ely stood unmistakably revealed.

It was the first morning of a new cook, the latest potentate of a dynasty of ten who had briefly ruled in turn our kitchen and ourselves during the preceding three months, and successively abdicated in favour of one another under the compelling influences of popular clamour, and in the face of such a political crisis my classmates' letter failed to receive immediate attention. Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, the latest occupant of our culinary throne began her reign with no conspicuous reforms, and we received in gloomy silence her preliminary enactments in the way of greasy omelette and turbid and flavourless coffee, the yellow screed of Harrison Ely looking on the while with bilious sympathy as it leaned unopened against the water-bottle beside me.

As I drained the last medical drop of coffee my eye fell upon it, and needing a vicarious outlet for my feelings toward the cook, I seized it and tore it viciously open. It contained a letter from my classmate and half a dozen printed circulars. I spread open the former, and my eye fastened at once upon the sympathetic exordium:

"Doubtless, my dear friend, you have known what discomfort it is to be at the mercy of incompetent domestics——" But my attention was distracted at this point by one of the circulars, which displayed an array of startling, cheering, alluring words, followed by plentiful exclamation points, that, like a bunch of keys, opened to my enraptured vision the gates of a terrestrial paradise where Bridgets should be no more and where ill-cooked meals should become a mechanical impossibility. The boon we had been sighing for now presented itself for my acceptance, an accomplished fact. Harrison Ely had invented "An Automatic Household Beneficent Genius. A Practical Realisation of the Fables Familiar of the Middle Ages." So the circular set forth.

Returning to the letter, I read that Harrison Ely, having exhausted his means in working out his invention, was unable to manufacture his "machine" in quantity as yet; but that he had just two on hand which he would sell in order to raise some ready money. He hoped that I would buy one of his automatons and aid him to sell the other.

Never did a request come at a more propitious moment. I had always entertained a kindness for Harrison Ely, and now such was my disgust at the incompetence of Bridget and Juliana and their predecessors that I was eager to stake the price of a "Household Beneficent Genius," on the success of my friend's invention.

So, having grasped the purport of the circulars and letter, I broke forth to my wife:

"My dear, you've heard me speak of Harrison Ely——"

"That man who is always so near doing something great, and never has done anything?" said she.

"He has done it at last," I declared. "Harrison Ely is one of the greatest geniuses the world has ever seen. He has invented an 'Automatic Electric Machine Servant.'"

My wife said: "Oh!"

£5 notes waiting to be claimed. See page 400.

There was not an atom of enthusiasm in that "Oh!" but I was not to be daunted.

"I am ready," I resumed, "to invest my bottom dollar in two of Harrison Ely's machine servants."

Her eyes were fixed upon me as if they would read my very soul. "What do they cost?" she mildly asked.

"In comparison with the benefits to be derived, little enough. Listen!" I seized a circular at random, and began to read:

"The Automatic Household Genius, a veritable Domestic Fairy, swift, silent, sure; a Permanent, Inalienable, First-class Servant warranted to give satisfaction."

"Ah!" said my wife; and the enthusiasm that was lacking in the "Oh!" made itself eloquent in that "Ah!" "What is the price?" she asked again.

"The price is all right, and we are going to try the experiment."

"Are we though?" said she, between doubt and desire.

"Most assuredly; it will be a saving in the end. I shall write to Harrison Ely this very night."

The return mail brought me a reply stating that two Electric-Automatic Household Beneficent Geniuses had been shipped me by express. The letter inclosed a pamphlet that gave a more particular account of the E. A. H. B. G. than the circulars contained. My friend's invention was shaped in the likeness of the human figure, with a body, head, arms, legs, hands, and feet. It was clad in waterproof cloth, with a hood of the same to protect the head, and was shod with felt. The trunk contained the wheels and springs, and in the head was fixed the electric battery.

The face of bisque was described as possessing "a very natural and pleasing expression."

Just at dusk an oblong box arrived by express, and was duly delivered in our hall, but at my wife's urgent entreaty I consented not to unpack the machines until the next morning.

"If we should not get the knack of managing them they might give us trouble," said this wise wife of mine.

I agreed to this, and having sent away Bridget with a week's wages, to the satisfaction of all parties, we went to bed in high hopes.

Early next morning we were astir.

"My dear," I said, "do not give yourself the least concern about breakfast; I am determined that Harrison's invention shall have fair play."

"Very well," my wife assented; but she prudently administered bread and butter to her offspring.

I opened the oblong box, where lay the automatons side by side, their hands placidly folded upon their waterproof breasts, and their eyes looking placidly expectant from under their waterproof hoods.

I confess the sight gave me a shock. Anna Mira turned pale, and the children hid their faces in her skirts.

"Once out of the box," I said to myself, "and the horror will be over."

The machines stood on their feet admirably, but the horror was not materially lessened by this change of position. However, I assumed a bold front and said jocosely:

"Now which is Bridget and which is Juliana—which the cook and which the housemaid."

This distinction was made clear by dial-plates and indicators set conspicuously between the shoulders, an opening being cut in the waterproof for that purpose. The housemaid's dial-plate was stamped around the circumference with the words: Bed, Broom, Duster, Doorbell, Dining-room Service, Parlour Service, etc. In a like manner the cook's dial-plate bore the words that pertained to her department. I gave myself first to "setting" the housemaid, as being the simpler of the two.

"Now, my dear," said I confidently, "we shall see how this Juliana can make the beds."

I proceeded according to the pamphlet's directions, to point the indicator to the word "bed." Next, as there were three beds to be made, I pushed in three of the five little red points surrounding the word. Then I set the clock connected with the indicator for a thirty minutes' job, thinking it might take about ten minutes to a bed. I did not consult my wife, for women do not understand machinery, and any suggestion of hesitancy on my part would have demoralised her.

The last thing to be done was to connect the indicator with the battery, a simple enough performance in itself, but the pamphlet of directions gave a repeated and red-lettered "Caution" never to interfere with the machine while it was at work. I therefore issued the command, "Non-combatants to the rear!" and was promptly obeyed.

What happened next I do not pretend to account for. By what subtle and mysterious action of electricity, by what unerring affinity working through a marvellous mechanism, that Electric-Automatic Household Beneficent Genius, whom—or which—for short we called Juliana, sought its appropriate task, is the inventors' secret. I don't undertake to explain, I merely narrate. With a "Click!" the connection was made, and the new Juliana went upstairs at a brisk and business-like pace.

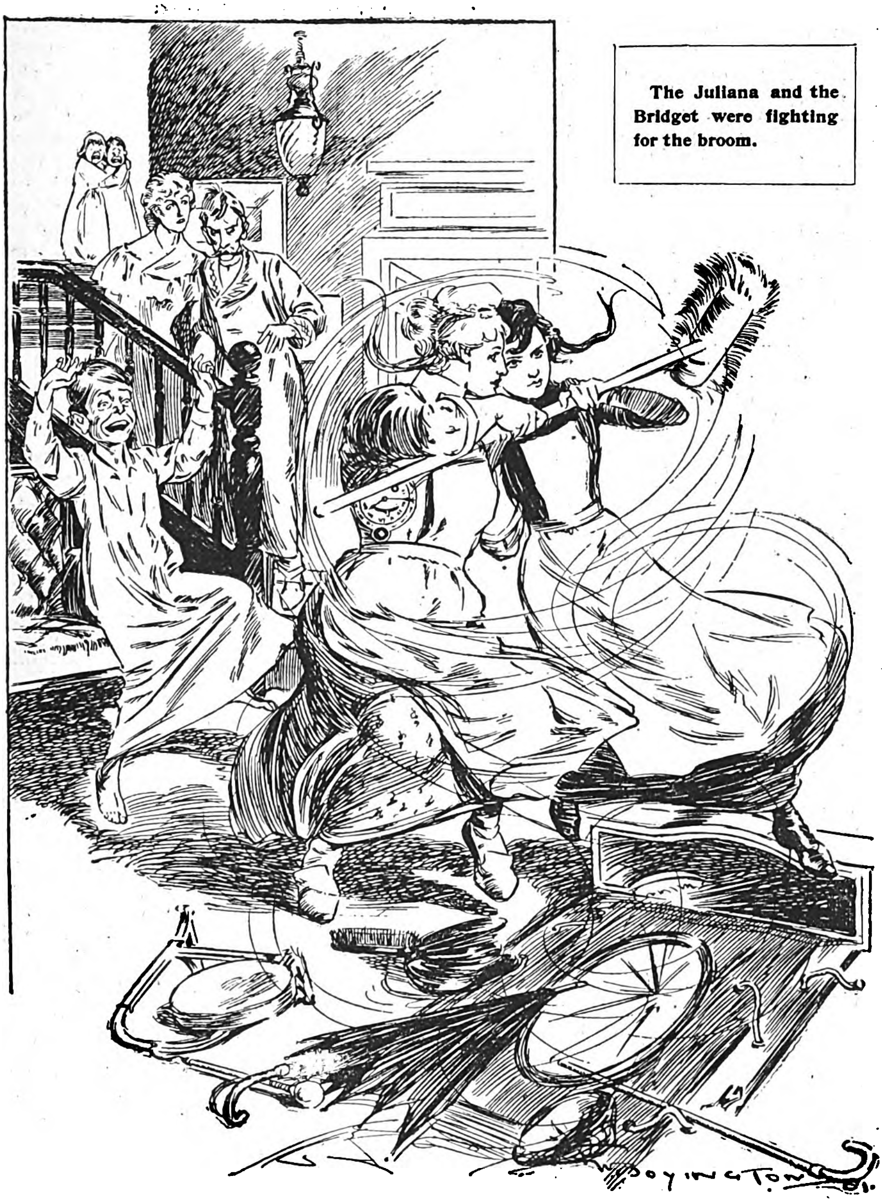
We followed in breathless amazement. In less than five minutes bed number one was made, and in a twinkling the second was taken in hand, and number three also was fairly accomplished long before the allotted thirty minutes had expired. By this time familiarity had somewhat dulled that awe and wonder with which we had gaped upon the first performance, and I beheld a smile of hopeful satisfaction on my wife's anxious countenance.

Our youngest, a boy aged three, was quick to feel the genial influence of this smile, and encouraged thereby he bounced into the middle of the first bed. Hardly had he alighted there when our automaton, having finished making the third bed, returned to her first job, and, before we could imagine mischief, the mattresses were jerked about and the child was tumbled headforemost on to the floor.

Had the flesh-and-blood Juliana been guilty of such an act she should have been dismissed on the spot; but as it was no one of us ventured so much as a remonstrance. My wife lifted the screaming child, and the imperturbable machine went on to readjust the bed with mechanical exactitude!

At this point a wild shout of mingled exaltation, amazement and terror arose from below, and we hastened downstairs to find our son John hugging his elbows and capering frantically in front of the kitchen door, where the electric cook was stirring empty nothing in a pan with a zeal worthy a dozen eggs.

My eldest hopeful, impelled by that spirit of enterprise and audacity characteristic of nine-year-old boys, had ventured to experiment with the kitchen automaton, and by sheer accident had effected a working connection between the battery and the indicator, and the machine



The Juliana and the Bridget were fighting for the broom.

in going off had given the boy a blow that made him feel, as he expressed, "like a funny bone all over."

"And served you right!" cried I. The thing was set for an hour's work and a half, according to the showing of the dial-plate, and no chance to stop it before I must leave for my office. Had the materials been supplied we might have had breakfast; but remembering the red-lettered "Caution," we dared not supply materials while that indefatigable spoon was grating in the empty pan. For my distraction Kitty, my eldest daughter of seven years, now called to me from upstairs.

"Papa, you had better come quick! It's tearing up these beds."

"My dear," I sighed, "there's no way to stop it. We'll have to wait for the works to run down. I must call Harrison's attention to this defect. He ought to provide some sort of brake."

We went upstairs again. The B. G. Juliana stood beside the bed which she had just torn up for the sixth time, when suddenly she became, so to speak, paralysed; her arms in the act of spreading the sheets, dropped by her sides, her back stiffened, and she stood absolutely motionless, leaving her job unfinished—the B. G. would move no more until we again wound her up.

I now discovered that I was hungry. "If that fiend in the kitchen were only at work on something substantial instead of whipping the air into imaginary omelettes," I groaned.

"Never mind," said my wife, "I've got a pot of coffee on the kerosene stove."

Bless her! She was worth a thousand beneficent geniuses, and so I told her.

I did not return until late that evening, but I was in good spirits, and I greeted my wife gaily:

"Well, how do they work?"

"Like fiends," my usually placid helpmeet replied, so vehemently, that I was alarmed. "They flagged at first," she proceeded excitedly, "and I oiled them, which I am not going to do ever again. According to directions I poured the oil down their throats. It was horrible. They seemed to me to drink it greedily."

"Nonsense! That's your imagination."

"Very well," said Anna Maria. "You can do the oiling in the future. They took a good deal this morning, it wasn't easy to stop pouring it down. And they worked obstreperously. That fiend in the kitchen has cooked all the provisions I am going to supply this day, but still she goes on, and it's no use to say a word."

"Don't be absurd," I remonstrated. "The thing is only a machine."

"I'm not so sure about that," she retorted. "As for the other one—I set it sweeping, and it is sweeping still!"

We ate the dinner prepared by the kitchen fiend, and really I was tempted to compliment the cook in a set speech, but I recollected myself in time to spare Anna Maria the triumph of saying, "I told you so."

Now that John of mine, still in pursuit of knowledge, had spent the day studying Harrison Ely's pamphlet, and he learned that the machines could be set like an alarm clock for any given hour. Therefore, as soon as the Juliana had collapsed over a pile of dust in the middle of the hall, John, unknown to us, set her indicator to the broom-handle for seven o'clock the following morning. When the fiend in the kitchen ran down, leaving everything in confusion, my much-tried wife persuaded me to give my exclusive attention to that machine, and the Juliana was put safely in the corner. Thus it happened that John's interference escaped detection. I set Bridget's indicator for kitchen cleaning at seven-thirty the next morning.

"When we understand them better," I said to my wife, "we will set their morning tasks for an earlier hour, but we won't put it too early just now, since we must first learn their ways."

"That's the trouble with all new servants," said Anna Maria.

The next morning, at seven-thirty precisely, we were awakened by a commotion in the kitchen.

"By George Washington!," I exclaimed. "The thing's on to time."

I needed no urging to make me forsake my pillow, but Anna Maria was ahead of me.

"Now, my dear, don't get excited," I exhorted in vain.

"Don't you hear?" she whispered in terror. "The other one—swe-eep-ing!" And she darted from the room.

The next sound I heard was like the dragging of a rug along the floor. I recognised this peculiar sound as the footsteps of the B. G. Then came a dull thud, mingled with a shout from Johnnie, a scream from my wife, and the terrified cries of the two youngest children. I rushed out just in time to see John in his night-clothes with his hair on end tear downstairs like a sheet of lightning.

The Juliana and the Bridget were fighting for the broom!

I comprehended the situation intuitively. The kitchen cleaning, for which the fiend had been set, had reached a point that demanded the broom, and that subtle attractive affinity which my friend's genius had known how to produce, but had not learned to regulate, impelled the unerring automaton towards the only broom in the house, which was now in the hands of its fellow-automaton, and a struggle was inevitable.

However, this was no time for investigating the exact cause of the terrific row now going on in the front hall. The Beneficent Geniuses had each a firm grip of the broom-handle, and they might have performed the sweeping very amicably together could they but have agreed as to the field of labour; but their conflicting tendencies on this point brought about a rotary motion that sent them spinning around the hall, and kept them alternately cracking each other's heads with a violence that ought to have drawn blood. Considering their life-likeness we should hardly have thought it strange if blood had flowed, and it would have been a relief had the combatants but called each other names, so much did their dumbness intensify the horror of the struggle, in the midst of which the waterproof hoods fell off, revealing their startling human countenances not distorted by angry passions, but resolute, inexorable, calm, as though each sustained in the contest by a lofty sense of duty.

"They're alive! Kill 'em! Kill 'em," shrieked my wife, as the gyrating couple moved towards the staircase."

"Let 'em alone," said Johnnie—his sporting blood, which he inherits from his father, thoroughly aroused—dancing about the automatic pugilists in delight, and alternately encouraging the one or the other to increased efforts.

Thus the fight went on with appalling energy and reckless courage on both sides, my wife wringing her hands upon the staircase, our infants wailing in terror upon the landing above, and I wavering between an honest desire to see fair play and an apprehensive dread of the consequences, which were not unjustified.

In one of their frantic gyrations the figures struck the hat-rack, and promptly converted it into a mass of splinters. In a minute more they became involved with a rubber plant, the pride of my wife's heart, and distributed it impartially all over the premises. From this they cannoned against the front door, wrecking both its stained-glass panes, and then down the length of the hall they both sped again, fighting fiercely and dealing one another's imperturbable countenances ringing blows with the disputed broom.

We became aware through Johnnie's excited comment that Juliana had lost an ear in the fray, and presently it was discernible that a fractured nose had somewhat modified the set geniality of expression that had disguised Bridget's face in its prime.

How this fierce and equal combat would have culminated if further prolonged no one but Harrison Ely can conjecture, but it came to an abrupt termination as the parlour clock chimed eight, the hour when the two automatons should have completed their appointed tasks.

Though quite late at my office that morning I wired Ely before attending to business. Long-haired, gaunt and haggard, but cheerful as ever, he arrived next day on fire with enthusiasm. He could hardly be persuaded to refresh himself with a cup of coffee before he took his two recalcitrant Geniuses in hand. It was curious to see him examine each machine, much as a physician would examine a patient. Finally his brow cleared, he gave way a little puff of satisfaction, and exclaimed:

"Why, man alive, there's nothing the matter—not a thing! What you consider a defect is really a merit—merely a surplus of mental energy. They've had too big a dose of oil. Few house-keepers have any idea about proper lubrication," and he emitted another little snort, at which my wife coloured guiltily.

"I see just what's wanted," he resumed. "The will-power generated, and not immediately expended, becomes cumulative and gets beyond control. I'll introduce a little compensator to take up the excess and regulate the flow. Then a child can operate them."

It was now Johnnie's turn to blush.

"Ship 'em right back to the factory, and we'll have em' all right in a few days. I see where the mechanism can be greatly improved, and when you get 'em again I know you'll never consent to part with 'em!"

That was four months ago. The "Domestic Raries" have not yet been returned from Harrison's laboratory, but I am confidently looking for the familiar oblong packing case, and expect any day to see in the papers the prospectus of the syndicate which Ely informs me is being promoted to manufacture his automatic housemaid.

Is your photo on page 400?

Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a *P.W.* penknife to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, September 30th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Mr. James Perkins, 95 Green Lane, Stoneycroft, Liverpool, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

SHE: "Have you heard the three-year-old infant violin prodigy?" He: "Yaas! Heard him eight years ago in Vienna."

SHE: "You cannot kiss me with my consent." He: "Not once?" She: "No; but can't you see that I have left my consent at home?"

"YES," said Mr. Henpeq, "I, too, have my favourite flowers." "And what may they be, pray?" sneered his wife. "They are the ones that 'shut up' at night," he bravely managed to articulate.

CHARLIE SPARKES: "I should be sorry to marry a clever woman like that. Why, the other night, when he sent a telegram to say he'd be kept late in the city, she sent a message to his club saying she'd sit up for him till three."

SCENE: Mission room. Woman with little boy applying for soup ticket. Vicar's Wife: "Your little boy has a very bad cough, has he? Well, he looks well enough." Applicant: "Oh, indeed, lady, 'e 'as a 'orrible' cough. Coughs awful." (To little boy): "Cough for the lady, Billy."

BASHFUL MIKE (after a long pause): "I'm a-thinkin' I shall 'list an' go an' fight the Boers, Widdy McGay." "Faith, thin, it's a poor sojer you'll make!" "Phwat de yez mean?" "Oh, nothin'. Only a man who kapes on callin' on a widdy for a couple o' years without pluck enough to spake his moind hasn't the makin' of a sojer in him."

A SCOTCH settler in Victoria was arrested for stealing a set of bagpipes from a musically-minded Chinaman. When the case came on for hearing the defence was ready and fluent. "I'm no saying," said the Scot, "that I didna' tak' the pipes, but I hold I was pairfitly justifyit in rescuin' the national instrument o' my ain country frae the hands o' a yellow-skinned chow like yon, wha kames his wee pickle hair like the tail o' an auld soo. I'm willin' enouch to pay the fine, ye ken, but I'm dashed if I'll gi'e back the pipes to siccan a jaundiced-faced birkie to desecrate any mair."

* OWNER of property (sternly, to tramp reclining on a mossy bank): "Don't you see that notice—'Trespassers will be prosecuted?'" Tramp (calmly): "No, I don't see it, fer I can't read." Owner of property. "Well, you know what it is now, so go!" Tramp: "Hexcuse me, mister, but I don't know what it is. I've only got your bare word fer it, and you're a puffect stranger to me. Fer wot I know to the contrary, the notice may be 'New milk sold 'ere,' or 'Cherries tuppence a pound,' or 'Welkim, weary wanderer.' Don't you lay your 'ands on me, mister, or I shall 'ave to see whether my stick is really a good old oak, or only a sugar stick!"

"MARY JANE, have you given the goldfish fresh water?" "No, mem." "And why not?" "They haven't drunk up what's in there yet."

AN Irish magistrate asked a prisoner if he was married. "No," replied the man. "Then," said his worship, "it's a very good thing for your poor wife."

"THERE are many things in this world to which we must shut our eyes," said the paternal Gibson. "Yes, pa, and soap is one of them," chimed in the pride of the family.

"WASN'T that young Mr. Tiff who left the house as I came in?" "Yes, papa." "Did I not issue an injunction against his coming here any more?" "Yes, papa, but he appealed to a higher court, and mamma said yes."

"Now, children," said the school teacher, "can you tell me of a greater power than a king?" "Yes, ma'am," cried a little boy, eagerly. "What, Willie?" asked the teacher (expecting the answer, "An emperor") benignly. "An ace," was the unexpected reply.

GREAT JURIST'S WIFE: "What makes you so tired to-night?" Judge: "I had to charge the jury with an important case this afternoon." Great Jurist's Wife: "Oh! I suppose it is a great strain to recall the details of the case." Judge: "It's not that. It's being obliged to talk to the jury thirty long minutes without meaning anything."

OFFICER (just landed on island, to shipwrecked mariner): "You have been here six months without anything to eat? My poor fellow, whatever did you live on?" Shipwrecked Mariner: "Well, you see, sir, I found that whenever I thought of my wife and family at home, a big lump came in my throat, so I swallowed the lump!"

A NEWLY-MARRIED Birmingham man had never been satisfied with his meals since his marriage, so he told his wife to get a cookery-book and consult it every time she was going to cook. Next day the dinner was just the same, and the wife, seeing the sad look on her husband's face, said: "Don't you care for the pie, John, dear?" "It's awfully hard and tough," he replied. "Well, dear, I did as you told me. I made it out of 'Livewell's Cookery Book,'" she lovingly answered. "I thought so," replied John; "but you might have taken the leather backs off; then I could have my teeth through it."

THE proprietor of a Birmingham restaurant advertised for a cook the other day. The first to apply for the berth appeared to be in every way suitable. But before engaging him the restaurant-keeper inquired if he could give him a tip for the 2.30 race. The cook's eyes brightened. He whispered a "dead cert.," and mentioned that he had five shillings on the horse himself. That was enough. The proprietor gave him a lecture on the evils of betting, and showed him the door. As he went out he saw another man about to enter. "Are you going to apply for the job?" he asked. "Well, if you are asked if you know anything about racing, say you can't tell a Derby winner from a coster's donkey." The man took the advice, was engaged, and commenced his duties. Presently the proprietor rushed to the speaking-tube and yelled to the new cook: "Calf's head one." Instantly the reply came: "Did he, by George? What was second and third?"

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PORTRAIT DEPARTMENT, "SHORT STORIES,"
Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Although the persons whose portraits will appear in this competition are quite unknown to us personally, we have their names and addresses in our possession, and, therefore, a claim can be settled at once, without risk of fraud.

We may say that our agents are still at work all over the country. It is, therefore, possible that your portrait may appear without your knowing it at any moment. So you should watch SHORT STORIES.

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Is your portrait here? If so, drop us a post-card, and get £5. Five more portraits will appear next week.

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> *The Portrait No.......... (here put number of portrait) in the current number of SHORT STORIES is mine. Please forward a £5 note.*
>
> *(Name and full address.)*

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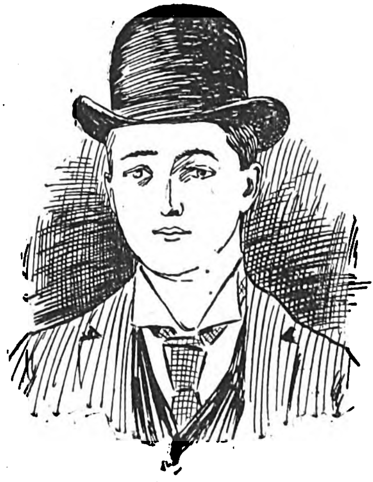
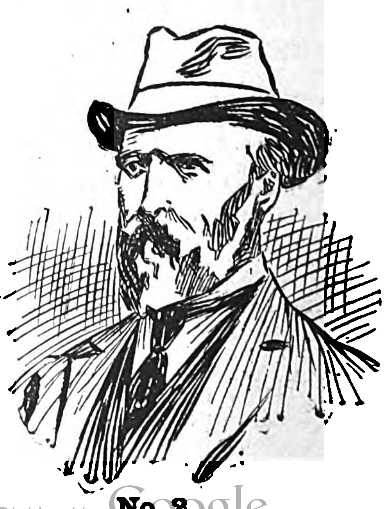


No. 1.



No. 2.

A Pair of Blue Eyes.

Howard put both arms around her, held her close for an instant, and then released her. It was in broad daylight on a crowded street crossing; they were not related to each other, and he did not even know her name. It must be said in his defence that it would have been a great unkindness on his part to have done otherwise.

She was hurrying to catch the tram from which he had just descended.

The street was wet and muddy; she slipped and would have fallen had he not caught her just in time. She blushed "celestial rosy red" and raised a pair of startled blue eyes to his face.

"Oh, thank you," she stammered.

She was gone before he could speak.

All day the blue eyes haunted him. They came between him and his writing and danced on the pages of the *Lancet.*

Had he been less devoted, heart and soul, to his profession, it is to be feared that even his patients might have found him absent-minded, for he failed to see two of his best friends on the street, and at dinner that evening was so preoccupied that his mother worried lest he was working too hard.

Weeks passed and the memory of the eyes was fading into a regret.

Dr. Carston's telephone bell rang suddenly one night, in the small hours. He had just fallen asleep after a nineteen hour day, but he could not ignore the ring. The summons was imperative. A stranger had called the nearest physician.

"Pray come," she implored, "for I am afraid my father will die."

The sweet, girlish tones were eloquent of distress.

Howard dressed himself hastily and went downstairs. He could scarcely open the hall door, so strong was the wind.

"A doctor leads a dog's life," he muttered to himself as he went out into the storm.

The address given him was that of a boarding house a few streets away—one to which this was by no means his first visit. He found Mrs. Madison, the boarding house keeper, awaiting him in the hall.

"I am so glad you've come," she said. "Mr. Wharton is awfully sick, and the poor young lady, his daughter, is 'most scared to death."

The patient was so ill as to occupy the doctor's entire attention. The battle was for life. Hours passed before it was won, and the tired but glad physician was free to go.

"Now your father needs nothing but rest. Let him sleep as much as possible, and see that he has a cup of Mrs. Madison's beef tea when he wakes. I will call this afternoon," he said, looking at Mrs. Madison, although he spoke to Miss Wharton.

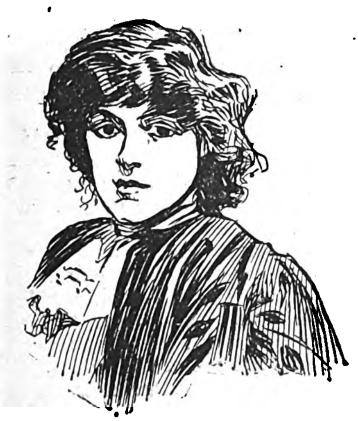
Howard went home to refresh himself with an hour's nap, a bath, and a cup of coffee before his office hours. At three o'clock he visited his new patient and found him doing well.

"You have saved his life," said Miss Wharton in a voice tremulous with gratitude, and she raised her eyes to Dr. Carston's.

Howard's head swam. He saw again a crowded street crossing, a waiting car, and held a slender, girlish form in his arms.

Miss Wharton's eyes were the violets of his dreams.

When Violet Wharton left for her country home she wore a new ring holding twin sapphires.



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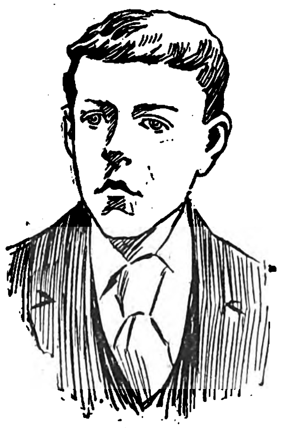

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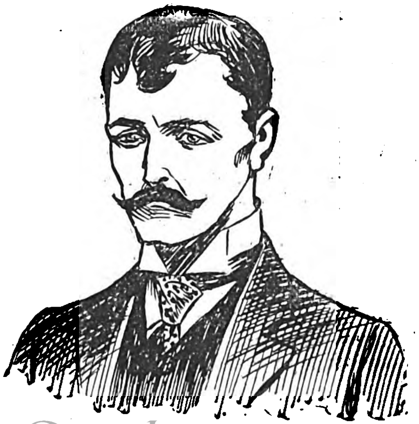

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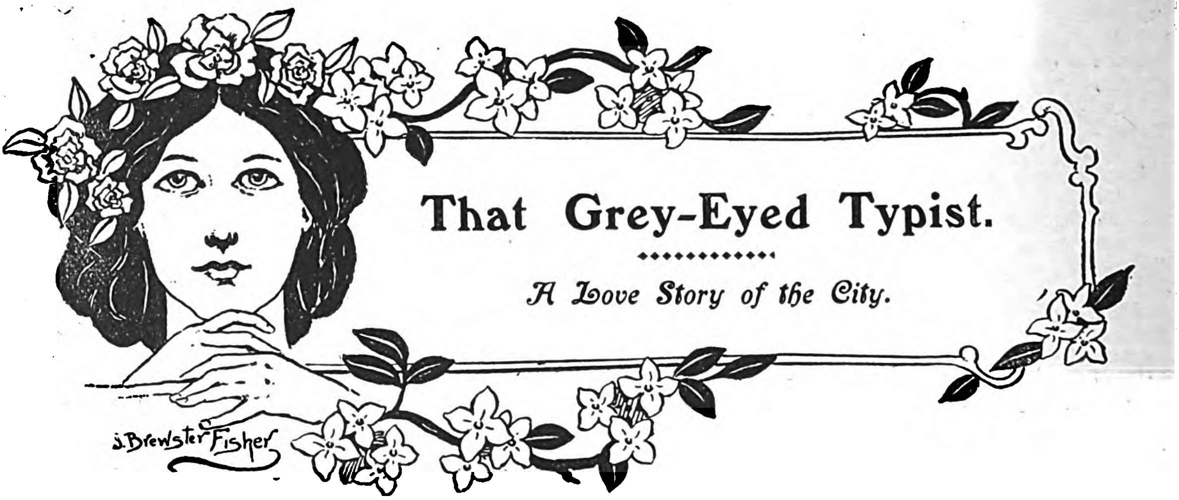

That Grey-Eyed Typist.

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A Love Story of the City.

CHAPTER I.

In Which a Young Lady is Late.

"Hullo, Miss Merriman, have you been running after someone or running away from them? I saw you in Cheapside, but you actually outstripped my 'bus."

Doris Merriman—young, shy, simply dressed—coloured as she paused on the threshold of a small lobby that opened from one of the narrow streets off Cornhill and whose further extremity gave access to a flight of broad wooden stairs. The building through which it penetrated was dingy, plain, and single-storied. On a wall of the passage was a painted inscription—"Peter Adinsell & Company, Paper Merchants." Hard by this announcement stood Peter Adinsell in person, a tall, precise, yet not unattractive figure, in frock coat and silk hat.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he was told confusedly, "but I am a little late, so I was hurrying."

Peter Adinsell consulted his gold watch with great gravity. "It is just five-sixths of a minute past nine o'clock," he said. "Miss Merriman, you deserve a lecture."

Doris cast down her eyes—they were grey, and clear as a mountain pool. "It—it shan't occur again sir," she faltered; "it was my bull-finch, he was very old, and he took a fit this morning and died as I was getting ready to come out. I had had him for years." And the last words of the sentence were muffled by a passionate regret.

The paper merchant coughed. "You foolish, sensitive child," he said. "I didn't mean a lecture for the odd fraction of a moment, but for tearing along at such a pace, exhausting and overheating yourself. Even commercial rules are entitled only to a reasonable observance."

He hesitated, looking at the sorrowful face of Doris Merriman, at her blush-rose complexion, her quick, intelligent glance, limpid with feeling, her slight, yet graceful frame and delicate gloved hands. The sunshine of the September morning gleamed on her trim braids of chestnut and tinged them with tawny gold.

"In any case," he pursued, "I have had it on my mind for some time to express to you my entire satisfaction with your work. Yesterday I instructed Pimm to pay you, in future, a certain addition to your present salary. There, no thanks. Run upstairs and get your notebook ready; I am going out of town for best part of the day, and must polish off my letters as rapidly as possible."

Peter Adinsell had relapsed into his habitual dry demeanour and air of command. Although he was a practical trader, the employer of Miss Doris Merriman was no mere business man. At forty the head of an ancient and prosperous firm—whose vast connections were out of all proportion to their modest methods—Mr. Adinsell was a wealthy bachelor with a few magnificent hobbies.

The very newspaper which he held contained his name in large capitals—he had been entertained the preceding night at a public dinner that celebrated the devotion of some third of his fortune to national purposes. His integrity and frugal customs were a proverb in the City, as his father's had been before him. He seldom used his own horses—the London Bridge omnibus that had brought him from his West-End home was even now on the way to its destination.

Doris—more than half consoled for the death of her favourite by the praise and tacit sympathy of the great Peter Adinsell—had darted up the gloomy flight which led to the scene of her labours. With characteristic consideration, the paper merchant lingered, for his typist to make her entry unaccompanied. Soon he was striding in at the swing-doors on the upper landing—the whole of the second floor was occupied by the offices of his firm.

Miss Merriman had seated herself at her typing-table near the entrance to his own private apartment, and was cleaning her machine. The bell tinkled musically as she drew the carriage of the typewriter to and fro. A melancholy form, gaunt, deferential, slightly bald, was stooping over her, laying out at her elbow a batch of papers with deliberate gestures of instruction.

"Morning, Pimm," remarked Peter Adinsell, crisply, putting his umbrella in the rack. The other turned to bow. He was a privileged servant; twenty years of life had Thomas Pimm sold to the house of Adinsell; his junior clerkship dated back to the termination of his schooldays, and he had climbed by degrees to the full control of the staff.

"Good morning to you, sir," said the cashier. "There is a heavy mail in. Are you going down to the mill this afternoon, sir?"

"Probably," was the answer, "if I can slip off early enough. Will you take your book into my room, Miss Merriman?"

Doris obeyed, and Peter Adinsell put a low query to the cashier. "Has Goulder condescended to arrive, yet?" he asked.

Pimm flung an optical query across the office. A stool at the high desk in the middle of the floor was empty; the others were tilted at various angles and occupied by busy writers, all the busier for their master's presence.

"No, sir," said the cashier, rubbing his hands deprecatingly.

The paper merchant wrinkled his brows. "Bad, bad!" he muttered. "The fellow gets worse. Lucky he is my nephew and not my son, Pimm."

"Indeed yes, sir," agreed Pimm. "The prospect of the firm ever being 'Adinsell and Son' seems—begging your pardon, sir—to be growing fainter and fainter." And the cashier tittered at his own retort.

"Heigho!" sighed Peter Adinsell; "I don't suppose I shall marry, Pimm. I must contrive to occupy my spare time with building libraries. My poor sister's fate ought to be a warning to me. If I had a child like Cecil Goulder I would——"

"*Sssh*, sir!" interrupted the cashier; "here he is."

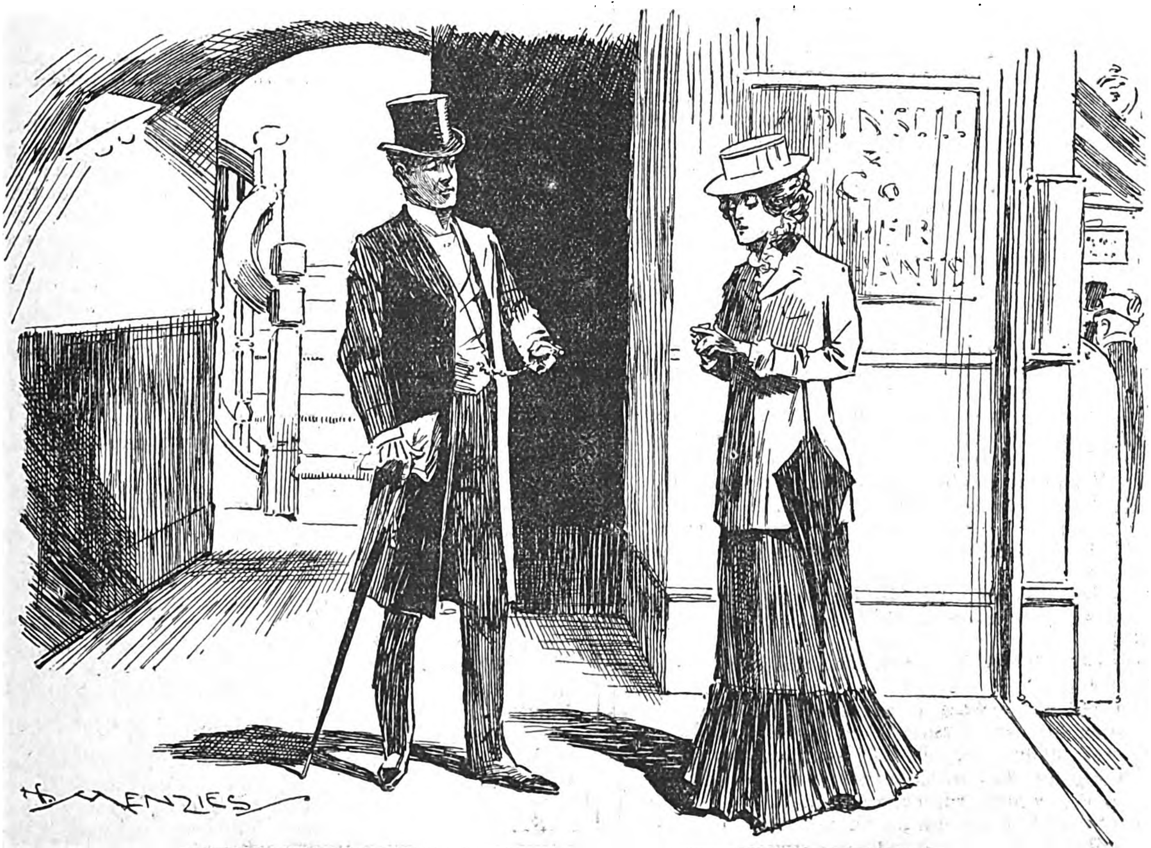
The merchant spun about. The door of the principal office had been thrust ajar and a slouching personage slid in—a personage limp and leaden of gait, with blood-shot eyes, purple lips, and a yellow skin. The clerks peeped covertly over their shoulders and nudged one another. Peter Adinsell walked to the newcomer.

"This is not a fit condition in which to approach the tasks of the day," he said. "Dissipation is stamped upon you, unhappy boy! Will nothing rouse you to your folly?—I believe you spend at the bar or at billiards three in four of your leisure hours."

His nephew scowled, but modified the insolence of his bearing by a miserable whine.

"Who's been lying to you about me?" he grumbled. "Don't you see I'm ill? I can't sleep of nights—that's what's the matter, uncle."

The merchant frowned and walked away from his young relative towards the apartment where Doris Merriman sat with pencil and note-book.



Peter Adinsell consulted his gold watch with great gravity.

"Have those bonds come in from the brokers, Pimm?" he asked, halting on its threshold.

"The ones for the Adinsell Trust, sir," said the cashier. "No. Shall I ring up?"

"Do," replied Peter Adinsell, and passed on into his private room. With a growl of sulky ill-temper, Cecil Goulder clambered on to the vacant stool, picked out a pen, opened a big ledger, and began to work.

As the paper merchant shut the door, he caught a glimpse of his nephew and sighed again. Then he dropped into the swivel-chair at his massive desk and smiled—his gaze had encountered the pretty, thoughtful, face of his little typist. Within the last few moments he had awakened to two unsuspected facts—the possible tragedy of a bird's death and the subtle charm of Doris Merriman's features.

"Forgive my keeping you waiting, Miss Merriman," he observed, and reached to his letter-basket. For a quarter of an hour he raced through correspondence and composed replies while Doris's pencil flew over the ruled pages. She wrote a neat, almost microscopic, shorthand, nervous but fast—it attracted her employer's attention and he paused.

"Do you know," he inquired contemplatively, "I have never noticed till now what a beautiful thing a sheet of your shorthand is? It is as dainty as you are—and you are very dainty."

The scarlet flamed up in Doris's cheeks at his compliment. He was delivering her the missive to which he had dictated the response. Their fingers touched. Peter Adinsell's were white and strong, Doris's slender and tremulous. Something of her excitement seemed to communicate itself to the merchant—his almost haughty countenance became flushed and irresolute.

A tap sounded at the door, and Peter Adinsell looked up as Pimm entered the apartment.

"I am going to the bank, sir," the cashier announced. "Have you anything for your private account? I have heard from the broker's, sir; they are sending the bonds across."

"Thank you, Pimm," said the paper merchant. "No; there is nothing you can do for me."

His tone was sharp and decisive. He had regained in a flash the demeanour of a man of business. When they were alone again he concentrated himself upon his correspondence, and with a stern brevity, finished the dictation of the replies. Doris secretly admired her masterful employer; but after his bewitching lapse into friendliness, his return to the previous and more familiar mood abashed and chilled her.

As she rose to leave, something in her expression won Peter Adinsell from his absorption, and his features relaxed.

"Tell me," he desired, "have you no other friends—animal or human—to balance the loss of your bullfinch?"

Doris shook her head frankly. "I have the people I live with," she allowed. "They are relations—my father and mother are dead. But I don't quite think my aunt and uncle are friends—not exactly. Poor Bully was a darling. He had such quaint ways that only I understood—he would perch on my thumb, and hop up on my arm, and even kiss me."

She stopped, blushing, and commenced to twist the knob of the door. Peter Adinsell smiled.

"After all," he said, "Bully's virtue had its reward." And he studied her mischievously. Doris wondered how she could have imagined him old; the gaiety of youth had leapt into his face with that smile. But she was not lacking in self-respect, and her employer's observation was certainly a trifle daring. So she grew grave abruptly.

"Will you be able to sign your letters if you are going out of town, sir?" she asked, changing the subject with feminine skill.

The merchant bit his lips amused at her tact. But he did not choose to apologise for his audacity. "I shall come back later," he said, "on my way West from the station. You can leave them, with the envelopes, in here, and I will post what are urgent."

Doris gathered up her papers to depart, vaguely conscious that she had made the acquaintance of a hitherto unsuspected side of Mr. Adinsell's character. As she opened the door, one of the clerks appeared in the entrance.

"A messenger from Grimwood's, the brokers, sir," he announced. The merchant nodded.

"Let him step through," ordered Peter Adinsell, and Doris slipped out, while the smart Stock Exchange emissary, with his chained portfolio in his hand, passed into the room. The door shut, closed by its spring.

The typist settled herself at her machine, found the first page of the morning's dictation and started to tap out the translation. The clerks scrutinised her, from a distance, in their usual free fashion. Between the cashier's corner, which she shared, and the main section of the office was, however, a stout, waist-high railing.

Nearest her, in virtue of this arrangement, there lolled upon a mahogany slope of the ledger desk the person reproved so recently by Mr. Adinsell for his tardy arrival and dissolute appearance. From time to time he cast at her a leer of vulgar admiration. The broker's messenger treated her to a scarcely less appreciative review as he hastened out, swinging a portfolio much reduced in bulk. Doris proceeded collectedly with her typing. She was used to these masculine peculiarities.

At length a latch clicked and the paper merchant himself strode forth, polishing his hat on the sleeve of his frock-coat. Of fine proportions, military bearing, and fastidiously correct garb, he might have challenged comparison, in a romantic sense, with any—even the youngest—of his clerks.

He paused at the typewriter table and laid something upon it. "Tell Pimm I am off to Barbury," she was instructed; "and give him this key—that of my private safe. He has the keys of the general one, so I have locked up temporarily in my own the bonds which Grimwoods have sent over. He must carry them to my solicitors—he knows the business, it is that of the Adinsell Trust. The key he must retain until morning. You will not forget to place my letters on the desk in my room against my return. Good-day, and do not hurry again as you hurried this morning. I would not like my little secretary to fall ill."

Doris accepted the shining steel thing and hooked it on her office chatelaine. Peter Adinsell watched her action approvingly, repeated his farewell, and walked from the office. As he passed out he looked back at his typist, and his grave mouth softened into an expression that might have been affectionate, that might have only been sympathetic, but which was certainly pleasant.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH SOMETHING IS LOST AND FOUND.

"I SAY, Miss Merriman, old Pimm's a deuce of a time. Suppose he's taking it easy because the governor's off for the day."

It was Cecil Goulder who spoke. He had abandoned his stool, crossed the office, and leaned upon the railing by which Doris sat at her typewriter. She tapped out the close of a paragraph, added a "Faithfully yours," drew the sheet from the machine, and inserted another.

"I shouldn't suppose anything of the sort," said Doris severely. "Mr. Pimm is not that kind of man; he has only gone to the bank." She turned to another page of her note-book, found the corresponding missive, and began to make the typewriter click once more.

Cecil Goulder did not accept the hint. Though he allowed the subject of the cashier's absence to drop, he remained obstinately at her side. "Beastly dull tack, that," he commented; "I couldn't swallow it, I tell you straight. It's as much as I can do to stand double entry, and that's merely owing to the fact that I can refresh myself with an occasional glimpse of you, Miss Merriman."

"Don't be silly," desired Doris; "and please go away—you're hindering my work. These replies must be finished for Mr. Adinsell, and Mr. Pimm has a lot of statements he wishes me to type."

"What's the use of my going away?" grumbled the other. "I'm stuck till old Pimm gets back—honour bright I am. By the bye, you heard the governor jawing me just now—if you didn't you might have done, he shouted it loud enough. Precious considerate he is of my feelings. Oh, hang it, Doris," he broke off, "stop that dashed rattle!" And a shaking palm—mute witness to Mr. Goulder's shattered health—was laid upon her wrist.

Doris Merriman snatched her arm free. "How dare you!" she exclaimed under her breath. "And if you call me by my Christian name again, I'll——"

Cecil grinned. "What will you do, Miss Straightlace?" he demanded. "Complain to my uncle—a pretty matter to complain about. There, don't create a scene before the whole office and I'll be good."

He lounged against the barrier, critically perusing the lines of violet print she was tapping out. His broad shoulders effectually screened her from the view of the interested clerks beyond, and Doris winced as she heard them whisper and laugh. But she understood the character of her persecutor and favoured him with no further response of any description. At last he moved off, growling in a spiteful undertone.

Mr. Goulder had some reason, however, to remark upon the cashier's delay in returning from the bank. A couple of hours had elapsed since Mr. Pimm's departure; the majority of the clerks were preparing to leave for their lunch. Cecil Goulder chose to remain, apparently engrossed in the despised double entry.

Soon there were only left, with the exception of the laborious Cecil, the small errand-boy, eating his package of bread and butter in a corner, and Doris Merriman, still operating her machine and availing herself of chance pauses over her shorthand notes to consume a sandwich.

Finally Cecil glanced up. "Not going out to lunch, Miss M.?" he called. "Bad for your complexion, you know."

"I am too busy," said Doris coldly, and went on with her clash of bars and roll of wheels. Mr. Goulder scowled—perhaps at the manner in which the retort was delivered—and slamming his ledger, reached to his hat and slouched from the apartment.

Glad to be rid of his presence, Doris finished her sandwiches, rinsed her finger-tips, and devoted herself to the completion of her task. The morning's mail was, as Mr. Pimm had announced, exceptionally large, and most of the replies were lengthy.

A summons in the outer vestibule interrupted her. At the wide counter that shut off the entrance of the suite of rooms from the exterior landing a uniform had appeared, and its wearer, seeing no one at the long desk in the main room, had uttered a stentorian "Telegram!" Doris crossed for it. It was addressed rather curiously, to—

Office,
Adinsell & Co.,
40, Chitling Street, E.C.

Doris opened the buff envelope and unfolded the message. It read:—

> "Knocked down cab in Cheapside this morning. taken hospital insensible and sent on home. Only shock—return to-morrow.—Pimm."

The girl gazed at the words. Suddenly there flashed into her mind the remembrance of Peter Adinsell's order—the bonds in the private safe—they were to be delivered by Mr. Pimm to the lawyers. What ought to be done about them? Mechanically her hand drew up her chatelaine to touch the key which had been given her. It was gone!

"Any answer, miss?" asked the bringer of the telegram, staring inquisitively at her white face and drawn lips.

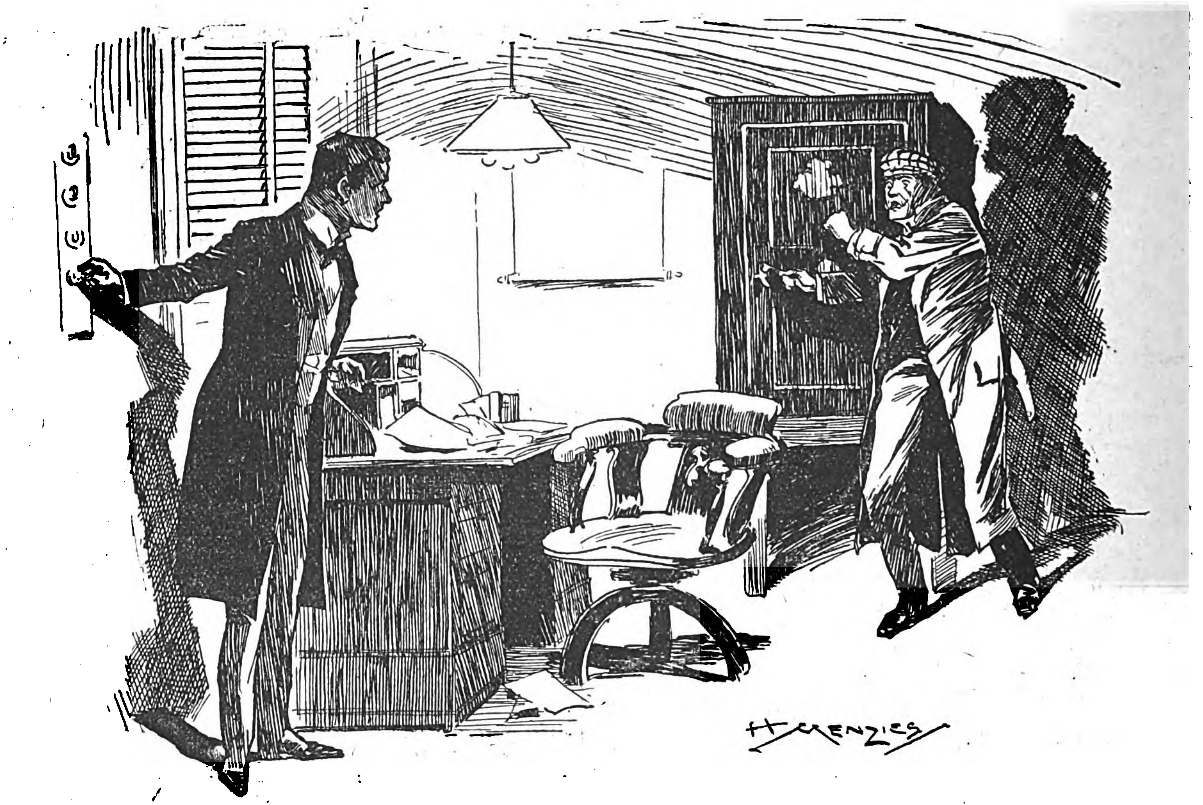
"N-no, no," murmured Doris confusedly, and sprang back to her chair. Eager to terminate her own alarm, she looked about it, beneath it, in the hollows of the typewriter, on the table, under the adjacent hearthrug. Ransack and examine as she would, the key had vanished.

The forehead of the little typist grew damp. In the private safe to which that missing slip of steel possessed the power of entry, were the bonds representing Peter Adinsell's gift to the Adinsell National Library Trust—oil bonds, railway bonds, canal bonds, Government bonds, all first-rate negotiable securities, and worth two hundred thousand pounds. She had placed the key on the strong metal chain that swung from her waist, Peter Adinsell had watched her secure it, and now it was there no longer, and neither her employer nor the kindly Mr. Pimm were near to provide against the dangers of the loss.

Suddenly a thought struck her—a thought that sent the blood rushing to her temples and produced bewildering gleams before her eyes. She was certain that she had threaded the key upon the split-ring of her chatelaine. From that time till she crossed to the counter to receive the wire she had not moved, nor had anyone approached her, save Cecil Goulder.

The recollection was electrical. She suspected the purpose of his forced conversation over the rail, his nearness to her, his dawdling attitude and restless actions. He must have caught the sentences exchanged between herself and Mr. Adinsell, and between that gentleman and the cashier, respecting the bonds from Grimwood's for the Adinsell Trust.

What that trust was everybody knew—the morning journals were full of it. Peter Adinsell had said the previous night at a great West-End hotel during the



Switched on the lights again and revealed to the would-be thief the trap he had fallen into.

course of a remarkable speech, that his brokers had bought him two hundred thousand pounds worth of "gilt-edged" bonds, and that, within a few days, his solicitors would hand them to the trustees.

Doubtless Cecil had heard also Pimm's telephonic inquiry, he had seen Grimwood's clerk visit Mr. Adinsell, he had learned that the bonds were deposited in his uncle's private safe, and—worst of all—he had gathered that the key of the said safe was in her charge. He alone could have pilfered the valuable article entrusted to her.

What should she do? Girl as she was, she realised that no scandal must taint the honoured name of Adinsell. Yet, if anything should happen to those bonds, Peter Adinsell would, she dare be sworn, replace the amount, even if it crippled his splendid resources. Oh, if Mr. Pimm had not been knocked over in Cheapside and sent home by way of the hospital!

She sat down at her typewriting-table to consider. One by one the clerks strolled in and resumed their occupations. But no Cecil Goulder was among them—the very fact was suspicious. A joke or two was cracked by his colleagues over his non-appearance, after which it provoked no further notice. Doris got up to announce the accident which had befallen Mr. Pimm, and returned to her work and her meditation.

So the afternoon wore on, with a trifle more of gossip and laughter than would have been possible in sight of Mr. Pimm or hearing of Mr. Adinsell.

Meanwhile Doris had come to a certain decision, in part execution of which she wrote a short missive, addressed it to her home, and had it posted. The errand-boy who took it was instructed to bring back with him from a convenient pastrycook's the materials for a fairly substantial meal. Doris Merriman had resolved to hold the fort in person.

When six boomed from Bow Church along thronging Cheapside, the staff began to melt away. Doris bade her colleagues good-night gravely; her machine was still clicking, and a small pile of "statements" lay at her elbow.

The last clerk gone, and with him the resentful errand-boy, Doris heaved a sigh of relief and hastened to set the door of the private room ajar. The sight of the black iron safe, solid and intact, comforted her.

This done, she ate her tea hurriedly. By seven o'clock at the latest the resident caretaker of the building would descend to clean out the offices, and her presence there be perceived. Picking up her hat and jacket, and removing the traces of her meal, Doris extinguished the lights and entered the private room of Peter Adinsell, to attack the second stage of her plan.

By the fireplace rose a tall, deeply recessed cupboard, usually kept on the latch, but supplied with a lock and key. In this Doris ensconced herself, and fastened it from the inside. She had arranged an impromptu sofa of paper samples, and sank upon it, panting.

She was only just in time. The jar of bucket and dust-pan grated upon her ear, and through the chink of the door she could tell that the office had been re-illuminated. For twenty minutes the elderly charwoman bumped and banged, then quiet supervened. Doris was alone again. With a cautious sigh she stepped out of her prison and seated herself in the sacred swivel-chair of Peter Adinsell.

Everything was very dark and solemn. By degrees Doris's graceful head drooped upon her arms, her breathing grew regular, and, in spite of her efforts to remain awake, she dozed. Bow bells rang out the hour—eight o'clock, the quarter followed, the half ensued.

The latter chime had scarcely died on the air when a hand was placed upon Doris's shoulder. She started and looked blinkingly at the yellow rays of the electric pendant over Peter Adinsell's desk. In front of her stood the paper merchant, and with him was a feminine figure, silver-haired, but handsome, upright, and a trifle severe. Both Mr. Adinsell and his companion were contemplating amazedly the picture presented by Miss Doris Merriman.

Doris's heart leapt into her mouth, but she rallied her wits determinedly. "Please," she said, "I—I lost the key of the private safe, sir, and—and Mr. Pimm didn't come back, so I—I stopped to take care of it, because of the bonds."

Peter Adinsell wondered if he were dreaming. But Doris, with her lustrous grey eyes, her palpitating colour, her tremulous lips, was no dream. The merchant placed a chair for the elder woman.

"Sit down a moment, Bilhah," he suggested. "This is Miss Merriman, my typist. Miss Merriman," Doris was told courteously, "this is my sister, Miss Bilhah Adinsell."

A pause showed that Doris's employer was pondering the extraordinary situation in which he found her.

"Miss Merriman," he added, "your conscientiousness does you honour, and I am glad for your sake that I returned earlier than I anticipated on account of my sister journeying with me. You say that you have lost the key that I left in your charge. Will you not explain more fully?"

Miss Bilhah Adinsell rose and bent over the girl thus questioned. "Steady your nerves first, my dear," she advised, patting Doris's cheek. "Poor child! to stop here all alone, shut up and locked in. I declare it makes me melancholy to think of it."

"But why not have contented yourself with warning the caretaker?" demanded Peter Adinsell perplexed.

Doris faltered. "I—I fancied I'd better not, sir," she said. "I—I don't believe I lost the key—it—it was stolen. Oh, please don't ask me any more. No one knows I stopped. I wrote home that I was going to a friend of mine at Dalston, and I hid in your big cupboard while the office was being cleaned. And I know the safe hasn't been touched, for I watched it through a crack. Do be satisfied with that and let me go."

The paper merchant leant on the top of his desk and his dark eyes met Doris's reassuringly. "Trust us, Miss Merriman," he urged. "Whom do you suspect of stealing the key?"

Doris was saved the trouble of evasion or reply. A bell pealed below, and footsteps descended to answer it—the caretaker lived on the topmost storey. Instinctively the three persons in Peter Adinsell's room fell to listening. A latch clicked, and a familiar voice was heard dimly through the door and partition.

"Don't trouble to come up, Bateson," it said. "I have matches. I just want a letter I forgot to post and that must catch the mail."

The voice was the voice of Cecil Goulder. When he recognised it, the paper merchant leapt to the switches, snapped out the lights, and drew Doris and his sister into a sheltered angle. The next minute Cecil entered the apartment, a vesta burning in one hand and a key grasped in the fingers of the other. He was dressed in a heavy ulster and travelling cap, and had set down on the mat a distended Gladstone bag.

As he thrust the key towards the aperture of the safe beside the desk, his uncle switched on the lights again and revealed to the would-be thief the trap that he had fallen into.

Cecil Goulder's gaze wandered from Miss Bilhah Adinsell to her brother, and from Peter Adinsell to Doris. A spasm of hate contorted his features.

"Out-schemed, you jade!" he hissed. "But you shan't have the laugh of me, curse you!" He made a quick motion and levelled his arm. The paper merchant threw himself on his nephew, to wrest from him, dangerously, a small six-chambered revolver.

Peter Adinsell was too late. One of the cartridges had cracked ominously. Doris Merriman reeled back into the swivel-chair with Miss Bilhah supporting her.

CHAPTER III.

A Drive from the West.

"Now, my dear, if you are not quite strong again you are not going back to the City this morning. I can't understand what makes my brother so anxious to carry you off. I am sure Cadogan Square is better than Cornhill yet awhile for a young lady who has had a bullet through her shoulder."

Having given vent to this opinion, Miss Bilhah Adinsell rose from her chair at the dainty breakfast-table and went to bend inquiringly over Doris Merriman, who, a little paler and slighter, sat where she could look down into that part of the West End just mentioned by her hostess.

"I wish to go, too, dear Miss Adinsell," said Doris gently. "Indeed, I ought to have gone home that—that terrible night. But Shepherd's Bush was so far off, and Mr. Adinsell so determined. I—I think he got that City doctor who came to frighten me about the danger of travelling, on purpose. But he has been very, very kind."

Miss Adinsell took up her guest's cup and filled it from a silver tea-pot. "My poor child," she answered, "it was our own flesh and blood, worse luck, that had injured you. We were bound to make you comfortable. We would have done as much for the merest stranger."

"I suppose so," she murmured and sipped her tea, glancing about her regretfully. The breakfast-room at Peter Adinsell's house in Cadogan Square was a cheerful apartment, simple, bright, and yet luxurious. She had set in it for a dozen mornings now, and for more than a dozen before that, she had been given her morning meal in a cosy chamber adjacent to Miss Adinsell's boudoir. Hither she had been borne after her startling experience in the City. Peter Adinsell had made himself entirely responsible for her restoration to health.

His sister was keeping an expectant watch upon the door. "Who can Peter have in the library?" she exclaimed. "He did not eat half a breakfast. And there is the carriage at the door. Peter said you must be driven back in state. I insisted you ought to have a holiday, but he only told me, in his masterful fashion—'I cannot do without Miss Merriman any longer.'"

There was a footfall at the entrance of the breakfast-room, and Peter Adinsell made his appearance. He was thoughtful, even gloomy; but his face lighted up as his gaze travelled to Doris.

"Are you ready? Miss Merriman," he asked. "Don't mind my sister's protests. I know she is anxious to keep you in Cadogan Square, but I am adamant."

Doris got up silently, and slipped away to don her familiar costume—the tiny toque and trim jacket in which she had gone down to the offices of Peter Adinsell & Company a whole month ago. The merchant waited in the hall, smoothing his silk hat abstractedly on his sleeve, as was his habit. Miss Adinsell kissed her guest as she passed down the stairs.

"Good-bye, dear," she said, "and thank you a thousand times for letting us hush up Cecil's dreadful deed," she whispered. "After all, he's our sister's only child, and an exposure would have killed her. Come and see me soon, and remember, whatever happens, I am your true friend."

The little typist could not reply—some mysterious emotion seemed to be choking her. She returned Miss Adinsell's kiss and hastened to descend, struggling for self-control. Her employer helped her into the brougham, the horses fretted, plunged, and were off on the road to the City.

Peter Adinsell studied her as she lay back against the leather cushions. "You could not guess, Miss Merriman," he observed, "what I have been doing this morning. But I have been bidding farewell to the unhappy lad whose criminal folly you helped to restrain, and who repaid you—with a bullet! He says he had been drinking that day—he asked me to tell you as much, though he dare not hope for your forgiveness. England, however, will know him no more. He sails for Australia to-morrow."

Doris interlaced her fingers and whispered that she wished him prosperity.

"You wonder at my hastening your return to the office," said the paper merchant after a pause. "I had a reason. While you remained under my roof I did not think it fair to approach a subject that demands your attention—and mine. I desire you to relinquish your situation with Adinsell & Company."

He glanced away from Doris Merriman's young countenance—it had grown white and piteous.

"You were too sensitive, too delicate, in a word too finely touched," he proceeded, "for the life of a business woman. I may say at once that I have found you a different sort of position—a—a more comfortable, and, I trust, a more attractive one."

"I am sorry," gasped Doris, "that you want to send me away."

"I did not say so," retorted the paper merchant. "You would still be, so to speak, with me."

"Would I?" said Doris, suddenly relieved. Peter Adinsell contemplated her tremulous lips and heaving bosom, and was encouraged to take his fate in his hands like a man.

"Yes," he murmured. "I—I cannot do without you. Doris, be my wife?"

Doris gazed at him astounded. But the merchant stole an arm around her and drew her to him. "And Miss Adinsell?" whispered Doris.

"Is at Cadogan Square on tenterhooks of expectation," was the response. "Doris, my darling, she—she said you wouldn't have me."

* * * * *

There was nothing but a call paid at the office that morning, for Peter Adinsell carried off his betrothed for a long drive in the park and a *tête-à-tête* lunch at Prince's. He did find time, however, to send a telegram to Miss Bilhah—a telegram that contained the one phrase, puzzling to all but the recipient: "I am not too old."

Mr. Pimm—long since recovered from *his* accident—saw them off from the doorway in Chitling Street, and as he turned to ascend the staircase, glanced at the inscription on the wall at his side.

"'Peter Adinsell & Co.,'" he muttered. "Ah, well, perhaps we shall alter that one of these days. But who would have expected Mr. Peter to fall in love with that grey-eyed typist?"

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Counsel for the Defence.

BY VAUGHAN DRYDEN.

THE bright June sunshine, pouring down on the grim walls of the Central Criminal Court, lights upon a kind of human fungus which has attached itself by means of one greasy, humped-up shoulder to the door-post, and never ceases from directing its evil red eyes into the hall, the while it sucks absently at a perfectly cold clay pipe of venerable appearance. Another human fungus, if possible more hump-shouldered, greasy, and red-eyed than the first, shuffles up.

"Court full?" it asks.

"Yus."

"Wot's on?"

"Mouf-piece bein' tried."

"Garn! A mouf-piece! Wot for?"

"Outin' a bloke."

The second fungus gives a hideous chuckle.

"Lummy!" it croaks. "A barrister up for murder. Ain't that lovely? That wins it—strite, it does. Lor', I'd like ter see that blooming mouf-piece 'ung. Wotatreat! We'll 'ave ter wet this. Come on, I've got enough for a pint."

The two fungi slunk across the road into a neighbouring public-house, being the sort of excrescences that do nothing except furtively invest even such innocent things as hospitality and conviviality with an air of vague guilt.

Inside the stuffy Court hundreds of eyes are measuring the prisoner's neck for the halter. Two ladies occupy seats on the Bench, their airy summer attire making the sword of justice above the judge's head look grimmer than ever. The case is no ordinary one, for a member of the Bar is being tried for his life.

Dermot McDonnell, the rising young barrister, is charged with wilful murder, and to the ladies on the Bench and the other spectators this is the tit-bit of the list. The fungi outside found a grim relish in the idea of a "mouth-piece" being tried for "outing a bloke." The same idea is naturally expressed differently by fungi and hot-house flowers.

The kind, wise face of the old judge is troubled. Every member of the legal profession, from his lordship to the most junior member of the Junior Bar, keenly feels the stigma which is hovering over their craft. Milton, K.C., who leads for the Crown, has been naturally moderate in his opening address.

"They all—even old Foxe on the Bench—want to get him off," grumbles a spectator with a taste for blood. "Great shame, I call it."

In opening the case Mr. Milton revealed the following facts:

The murdered man, Mr. John Maguire, was a retired merchant. He was a bachelor, of simple tastes and habits, and, though well-off, chose to inhabit a flat in Challis Mansions, Kensington. The prisoner, Dermot McDonnell, was his adopted son, and heir to all the property, which was considerable.

On the afternoon of the murder prisoner had lunched with deceased, with whom he had always seemed on affectionate terms. There was to have been a third at lunch, Mr. Kevin Roche, K.C., a life-long friend of the prisoner's, but that gentleman had an engagement to lunch with some friends at Ascot, it being Gold Cup Day. (Laughter.)

His Lordship: "If there are any more of these unseemly interruptions I will clear the Court."

Resuming, the counsel for the Crown had said that the little party of two were waited on by George Sim, the deceased's own man. After lunch this man left the flat for about half-an-hour, and on returning was horrified to find his master stretched on the floor quite dead, having evidently been murdered.

Deceased had been stabbed to the heart from behind, but in spite of all their exertions the police had not been able to discover the weapon with which the deed was committed. Witnesses would speak to sounds of a violent quarrel proceeding from the flat during the absence of Sim.

Mr. Milton sits down, and during the usual buzz and rustle which ensues the spectator with a taste for blood nudges his neighbour violently.

"What's the row?" asks the latter somewhat crossly.

"Say," mutters the spectator, staring with all his eyes at the knot of counsel below him, "see the man for the defence—him with the black whiskers and the scar on his forehead? Well, that's Roche, what ought to have been at the lunch but went to Ascot instead."

"Never!"

"It is, reely," affirms the bloodthirsty one. "They're pals, you know, and I suppose McDonnell fancied the other'd do for him better'n than a stranger would. Don't he look worried?"

Mr. Kevin Roche, K.C., certainly does look worried. His heavy brows are bent, his square jaw, blue with constant shaving of a strong beard, is set, and with a long, white hand he tugs irritably at the sparse clump of black whiskers which ornaments his cheek. A man of strong passions this, and iron will. The square chin, the mouth shut like a trap, and the fire in the deep-set eyes proclaim it.

McDonnell, the prisoner, is taking things more calmly than his friend and advocate. With one elbow lightly resting on the part of the dock, he has turned his fresh-coloured, healthy, pleasant face towards the impassive occupants of the Press-box.

He is not strictly handsome, just the ordinary, clean-limbed, clean-minded, healthy young Briton which our public schools turn out by the thousands, to the eternal glory of these islands. His frank, blue eyes are idly watching a reporter sharpening a pencil. Decidedly, if appearances go for anything, not the man to do murder.

The cold, clear tones of Milton, K.C., were heard. He is examining his witnesses. The medical and police witnesses are quickly drained and dismissed. Kevin Roche, tugging at his whisker, does not cross-examine.

George Sim, elderly, respectable, and terribly nervous, enters the box. Has been valet to Mr. Maguire for eighteen—beg pardon, gentlemen, nineteen years. Recollects prisoner as a boy. Prisoner had always been treated as deceased's son, and they had always been on the most affectionate terms, far more so than some fathers and sons. There might have been some disagreement about a young woman. Disagreement began about three weeks ago. Mr. Dermot—beg pardon, gentlemen, the prisoner—wanted to marry a girl to whom his adopted father objected. Waited on the two gentlemen at lunch on the day of the tragedy. They were very quiet, and only talked of ordinary subjects—politics, racing, and such-like. After lunch went out for half-an-hour with his friend, Jack Leroy, porter at Challis Mansions. Came back to find deceased murdered, and calls in police.

Mr. Roche rises to cross-examine. How can witness fix the time of his absence after lunch?

Witness looked at his watch as he left the flat and at the clock when he came back. Both kept good time. He went about three-quarters of a mile—as far as the Crown and Sceptre in Holland Road. Had two half pints of beer and came straight back. There was no quarrel between the gentlemen while he was in the flat.

John Leroy, porter at Challis Mansions, supported the last witness's evidence, and is not cross-examined.

Ida Thorne, young, smartly gowned, and extremely self-possessed, is the next witness. She occupies a flat just over the one in which (with a pretty little shudder) the tragedy occurred. The flats were supposed to be sound-proof; but, as a matter of fact, were not. On the afternoon of the murder she distinctly heard loud voices in the deceased's flat. It sounded as if people were quarrelling. She distinctly heard deceased say three times in a high voice "I will not! I will not! I will not!" Then prisoner's voice cried "Take the consequences, then!" After that there was complete quiet for a few moments. Then heard the door of the flat bang and prisoner run downstairs. Immediately after that she went out to rehearsal (being on the stage) and did not return till late.

Cross-examined, had not the slightest doubt that the voice and step she heard were those of prisoner. Knew them well. Prisoner was a constant visitor at the flat. It was about a quarter to three when she heard the door bang. Ten minutes afterwards she had left the Mansions. She had heard no sound of a struggle.

Minor Crown testimony being heard, Mr. Roche intimates that he intends to call no witnesses. There is a buzz and a murmur, "Won't put his man in the box. That's bad!" And the spectator with a taste for blood cranes his neck an extra half inch.

Every syllable in the cold, clear tones of the Crown's leading counsel is another tap of the hammer on the nails in the prisoner's coffin. There never was a clearer case made out against a man in that Court. The eyes of the counsel for the defence are like lamps in his pale face.

The prisoner has lost his easy air, and stands perfectly still, with his eyes fixed on the man whose clear voice is fitting the noose upon his neck. Now and then he gnaws his lip, and a sharp intake of the breath tells that some new, skilful bit of art in the great advocate's speech has come home to him. By the end of the peroration the prisoner's face has taken on a grey look of despair.

Roche rises, and there is a murmur of surprise and curiosity. There is hope and confidence in every gesture of the barrister, in every tone of his deep, rich voice. He faces Court, jury, judge and all, with a superb air. He seems confident of beating down the net that the skill of the Crown counsel has flung round his client, and delivering him from the hangman's hands.

With practised hand he tears to tatters the evidence. And lo! what does it amount to? One Crown witness is a self-confessed beer-bibber, another belongs to a profession never noted for cold accuracy of statement. In Heaven's name, gentlemen, what is such evidence worth?

It is a masterly exposition; the Court is as still as death as the advocate thunders on. The prisoner's face is flushed with hope; he clutches the front of the dock.

Consider now, gentlemen, the weapon with which the deed was done. Such knives, largely used by sailors, are sold in thousands every week——

Good God! what are they all staring at? The judge leans forward, his face like granite.

"Mr. Roche," he says, sternly, "let me remind you that the weapon was never found."

Lost! lost! The advocate's face is livid and wet, his eyes stare horribly, his mouth moves, but no words come. There is a murmur of many voices as Roche, counsel for the defence, sways forward and falls in a fit on the floor of the Court.

* * * * *

Among his papers afterwards they found a full confession. Kevin Roche, the great barrister, was a born gambler, and his affairs were hopelessly involved. His largest creditor was the murdered man. Desperate, his back to the wall, the gambler resolved that he would not stick at homicide if he could so mend his affairs.

The invitation to lunch on Gold Cup Day gave him the opportunity. He declined it on the plea of a previous engagement for Ascot, went there, and was actually seen on the course by a number of acquaintances, and rushed back to London after the first race.

Having watched Dermot McDonnell leave the flat, he went up, and was instantly admitted. While his unsuspecting host turned to the sideboard to procure some refreshment, Roche stabbed him from behind with a sailor's knife, with which he had provided himself. He left the Mansions unperceived and took train to the Temple.

His horror when McDonnell was arrested was intense, and he resolved to make an effort to save him by appearing for the defence. His blunder with regard to the weapon was fatal.

* * * * *

Two human fungi, slouching and red-eyed, blink evilly at their tankard.

"Wot 'appened to the mouf-piece?"

"Got orf."

"Lummy—wot a life, ain't it?"

The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. (*continued*).

"No," admitted Mr. Brasher, in a depressed tone; "I only wished to say that I have no news of Mr. Geddes. I wonder, Miss Connie, whether you'd pay me the compliment of so much regret if I were to disappear."

Connie gulped a sob. "The business is going to rack and ruin," she told him evasively; "father isn't fit to attend to it. He'll be poisoning somebody before long."

The Inspector scratched his head. "Talking about poisons," he remarked, "Geddes was more than a bit gone on poisons. He may have done away with himself in some experimental fit."

Constance Forester gave her favourite stamp. "It's absurd to suggest such a thing," she declared. "Mr. Geddes was too sensible. No; if he's come to any harm, Mr. Brasher, you're to blame."

"Well, I like that!" said Michael Brasher, ruefully.

"Yes, you are," persisted Connie: "he was trying to do your work, I'm sure of it. He was always worrying about Sir Christopher's murder and planning to get at the bottom of it. And a good job it would have been if he had been able to find out who killed the squire and prove that it wasn't Mr. Felix. Poor Miss Carew has just been driven from pillar to post since every old woman in Wyresdale took to scandalising Mr. Dering, and all the fine folks gave him the cold shoulder. Miss Carew's heart is broken, I'll be sworn, and—and—so's mine."

Connie dissolved into tears, and Michael Brasher left hastily—feeling that his position had become an ungraceful one. When he stepped on to the pavement outside the shop it was to see Otto Hare's phaeton flash by him, as he had seen it once before.

But this time the Golden Dwarf was not alone—though the rumble at the rear of the hooded front was empty. On the left hand of Otto Hare, as the swift roan cob sped down the High Street, sat Esther Carew, her delicate features drawn and her eyes fixed in a look of utter despair.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A DUEL AND A DISCOVERY.

SPURT!

It was the scratch of a wax vesta struck cautiously upon a hard surface. The match burst into flame, and the sudden flame illuminated the features of Archibald Geddes. With a profound and foreseeing cautiousness, he had crawled over to that side of his singular cell at which the rock-hewn wall was diversified by the wooden portal.

Kraft had been armed, and the Scotchman was not inclined to risk being killed or disabled by a shot from the small moveable panel which he had observed in the upper part of the stout door. Crouched in the corner by it, he was comparatively safe from espionage or treacherous attack.

Puff! puff! puff! The chemist's assistant had set going a neat briar pipe. Its bowl had been filled—in the dark—for the fifth time. On each occasion Geddes had looked at his watch; he did so now; nine o'clock. More than twelve hours had elapsed since the light in the crimson globe had ceased to glow, and Archibald Geddes had been left to solitude and obscurity.

He weighed his rubber pouch—but a pipeful or two remained, and his match-case was almost empty. An over-powering hunger had seized upon him, the narcotic influence of the tobacco began to dull its pangs. He lay down at length on the harsh concrete and wondered if starvation were the fate to which Joseph Kraft had condemned him.

Hardy by birth and training, there was plenty of life in the Scotchman yet, despite his unconscionable fast. But his head ached with the continuous strain of his long vigil. For those twelve hours he had sat or lounged awkwardly, his hand on the bulb of his odd weapon, the ammonia-pistol; his muscles braced to make the most of its temporary effect on a possible foe.

As he pulled at his pipe, irritated by the absence of taste which the darkness lent the tobacco, but aware that it would sooth his ravenous appetite, he heard a sound—not that which had throbbed constantly about him like the purr of some huge animal, but a faint and wavering sound. It was the same, if he had only known the fact, which had startled Esther Carew when she paid her visit with Otto Hare, to the observatory on the hill.

Archibald Geddes drew his pipe from his mouth and whistled softly. The noise came once more, its nature was unmistakeable. He slipped to the door and lowered his ear to the threshold—an instant only, then he sprang back. A ponderous footstep was approaching without. The chemist's assistant retreated to his strategical angle and waited.

The footstep passed, and Geddes counted the moments. There was a splutter above him and the glow returned to the crimson globe that hung from the ceiling. It dazzled the Scotchman with a transient blindness.

At last there was a click at the door, and Geddes guessed that the panel had been opened. He flattened himself against the wall, so that he was invisible from the coign of vantage occupied by his enemy.

A period of suspense ensued. Finally a lock snapped, a bolt whined, the door swung in, and the lumbering form of Kraft entered. His plump fingers were extended before him and grasped a revolver.

The German had scarcely crossed the threshold when

£5 notes waiting to be claimed. See page 400.

Archibald Geddes leapt at him sideways, and a mimic deluge of ammonia bespattered the eyes of Joseph Kraft. Geddes had recollected that his adversary wore spectacles and directed his aim to defeat this protection. The German dropped his revolver, which exploded in its fall, and clapped his hands to his face.

The chemist's assistant darted behind him, dashed through the door, dragged it to, and bolted it. Seeing that the panel was ajar, he closed and hasped it also. A second after, a shot came crashing through the wood —Joseph Kraft had turned to bay.

Archibald Geddes dodged out of range and paused to review his position. He stood in a narrow passage, dark but warm. Before him and at his back was a vague gloom. From the key-hole of the door he had so precipitately fastened by its slight bolt, streamed a ray of the deep crimson lustre that had illuminated his onslaught upon Kraft.

Opposite this streak of blood-red light another, and paler, ray of the same hue fell athwart the dusk. A pace in advance, a couple of similar beams, doubtless streaming through corresponding key-holes, stabbed the darkness with a shaft of bright pink and one of a still more delicate flush.

Further on, along the narrow corridor, a quartette of blue rays, similarly varying in the depths of their tints, slanted towards the floor, and in the end of the cramped lobby, a brace of white rays pierced the shadows.

Ten rays in all, four red, four azure, and two of a dazzling white: Geddes started at them, as though puzzled by the combination. The slender beams of radiance seemed to tremble under the constant mysterious vibration that shook his surroundings. Archibald Geddes roused himself to seek a means of escape.

He turned, and perceived, a few yards off, a thin crack, as of a door, through which there stole the wan, yet pleasant, shimmer of daylight. Geddes would have hastened to it. But in that very moment there came again the faint, yet arresting, sound he had heard in the cell.

CHAPTER XL.

"YOU SHALL BE MRS. GARLAND."

"THERE, so much for that! Pardon my trespassing on your patience, Mr. Dering, but if you could understand the delicacy of the little matters I have had to arrange, you would forgive the length of my correspondence."

Neal Garland flung down his pen and closed the flap of the envelope he had just addressed. He blotted deliberately the wet ink of the inscription and put the missive in his pocket. The suppressed merriment with which he had vaguely irritated and alarmed Felix Dering still flickered about his features. But the tone of his harsh and usually defiant voice was polite enough.

Mrs. Schwartz's singular lodger had been writing for over an hour—first a scribbled draught, then a clean copy, and, in the end, a duplicate of the latter. The rays of the lamp had served to illuminate the constant humorous twitches of his mouth as his thin lips trifled with cigarette after cigarette.

"I say," he observed, as he opened, for the tenth time, the case containing those articles, "excuse my not offering you one. But you seem so determined to be on your guard I was afraid you might suspect me of attempting to hocus you. Isn't your wrist tired, holding that confounded pig-sticker of mine in such an awkward fashion?"

Felix Dering started. Neal enjoyed for a moment his companion's surprise. "Come," he said; "you are too clever, Dering, to make such a mistake. If I had contemplated doing for you I should have tipped the wink to Keturah, and she would have smuggled me in a pop-gun of some sort. What good is steel against lead? As for the noise, bah! we could have whisked you out of sight, and explained to any inquisitive soul that I had been cleaning the thing and had an accident."

He blew a cloud and waved it clear of his grinning countenance.

"I cannot compliment you on your perspicuity, my dear fellow," he added patronisingly; "if you were smart you would not have been decoyed here, or, had you accepted the risk, you would have carried it through more cold-bloodedly. However, I am not inclined to complicate my position by violence, hence your practical safety. As a rule, when it is worth my while striking a bargain, I perform it. Reassure yourself, therefore."

Neal chuckled over his impudence, and going to the cellaret in the sideboard, got out a decanter, filled himself a glass of port, fetched it to the table, and consumed it between the puffs of his cigarette.

Felix Dering—not to be bluffed into unwariness—maintained both his silence and his grasp of the stiletto. He had forseen all the dangers so insolently sketched by Neal, but he knew that a resolute and athletic man, even slightly armed, may match, with a trifle of luck, the most desperate odds. The next move on the board was Mrs. Schwartz's, and he waited it calmly.

At length there was the rattle of wheels in the thoroughfare below, succeeded by a sharp knock upon the street door as the dismissed cab rolled away. A couple of persons mounted the creeking stairs without, the leader undoubtedly the massive lodging-house keeper herself. She strode heavily into the lamp-lit apartment, clad in a huge mantle and gaudy hat. On her heels followed a tottering creature, shawled and bonneted in a by-gone mode, with hollow, dirt-encrusted cheeks and hands like claws. It was the baby-farmer to whose tender mercies Keturah Schwartz had entrusted Brian Dering. Mrs. Schwartz pushed her convoy into a chair.

Neal sprang up, spat out an oath, and hurled his glass at the grate, on which it shattered into a thousand pieces.

"Where's the kid," he hissed; "Keturah, where's the kid?"

Mrs. Scharwtz pointed a disdainful finger at the hag she had escorted thither. "Ask her!" was the landlady's advice; "she's as tipsy as David's sow, or I wouldn't have got her here, drat her wooden head."

Neal Garland acted upon the recommendation and started forward, to catch the old crone by the back of the neck and snarl in her ear. "Speak up," he cried; "what have you done with the child?"

A cackling laugh was the answer. "He-he!" tittered the drunken baby-farmer; "I had a fine bargain of him and no error. Twenty pounds I had from Kitty there to adopt him and thirty from the party I got rid of him to. What has anyone to grumble about?—Kitty said she never wanted to see the brat again, nor aught concerning him, except it was his burial certificate."

Neal shook the decrepit figure in his anger. "Fool!" he exclaimed; "who did you sell the boy to?—tell me before I strangle you."

Keturah Schwartz thrust her irate partner aside. "That's not the way," she said; "now, Mrs. Dobson, you've got to give us what information you can. It won't harm you: I'll take care of that, and you may trust my word. Who had the child?"

The baby-farmer smiled—a half-shrewd, half-foolish smile. "I—I don't know," was her response: "names are risky in my business and consequently aren't mentioned. A child of four or five was wanted, well-grown and healthy, I was told, to send abroad to a family as wished to adopt one."

Felix watched acutely the faces of the three, who, ignoring his presence, had exchanged these few rapid sentences. Yet he could not but discern that Neal Garland was as disappointed as himself at the result of

Mrs. Schwartz's mission. The features of this gentleman, however, were fast resuming their complacency. A glance passed between him and the fat woman. Neal assumed a more tolerant air and turned to the baby-farmer, the person to whom Keturah Schwartz had referred to as Mrs. Dobson.

"Perhaps you are correct," he admitted; "and we may have nothing to complain of. But as it happens, we desire to regain the child, and we need your help—you said it had been despatched abroad, where was the child to be sent?"

"Dear, dear, I am not sure," quavered the baby-farmer, "howsomdever, I think it was France. Or it may have been Russia—yes, I believe it was Russia. Some English folk out there it was for—the gentleman as bought the boy of me was a doctor and choosing it for them; he was most particular about the child being healthy. He-he, it was the only kid I had as was, so you can guess I hadn't had it long."

And the hag broke again into a shrill and cackling laughter. Neal slipped across the room.

"Mr. Dering," he said in an undertone; "I have done my part, as you see. The child was given to this creature to adopt—as you hear, she has sold it to be adopted elsewhere. Frankly I believe she is lying about the Russian destination of the child. But if she will not speak the truth nothing but the law will make her. That, though, is not my fault, and I claim the fulfilment of our agreement. I have set you on the track of the boy—allow me forty-eight hours, and then lay the police on the trail."

Felix reflected. After all, he was a Dering, and he had pledged his word. Also, he suspected that Neal and Mrs. Scharwtz, unscrupulous though they were—were but the minor villains of the plot which had been woven about him. He recollected the vague threats of Neal and decided against the wisdom of desperate measures.

"I have but a single condition to impose," he declared, "and that is that I learn, to my own satisfaction, the abode of this wretched creature. I propose to do so by accompanying her home, in a cab. Under the circumstances it is but too probable that I should be given a false one if I relied upon a verbal direction. On the condition I have stated, you may have your forty-eight hours' grace. It is now close on eleven o'clock. Upon the morning of the fourth day from now I will call in the aid of the law, as you suggest. After that, look to yourselves—I do not guarantee to shield you."

Neal called to Mrs. Schwartz. "Keturah," he said; "Mr. Dering has kindly offered to see Mrs. Dobson home to Whitechapel. He will thus assure himself of her actual address and prevent her being run over—or run in—on the road. Something would infallibly happen to her if she attempted the journey alone in her present degree of intoxication. Her limbs are as drunk as her tongue is sober."

Keturah Schwartz made an indifferent gesture of assent and went to rouse the tipsy baby-farmer.

"Wake up," she cried; "you're going back; we've finished with you, deuce take you." And she hustled the old crone from her chair and pushed her to the door. Felix followed—his brown right hand still clutching the stiletto in the shelter of his sleeve.

"The stairs are dark," he said; "have the goodness to go before me, Mr. Garland."

The other shrugged his shoulders and stalked down the rickety flight in the rear of Mrs. Schwartz and her charge.

Felix prepared to descend. As he set foot upon the top-most step he felt a touch on his arm, and glancing above him, saw that there leant over the balustrade of an upper flight a slovenly girl with sparkling eyes.

"I've been listening," she whispered: "I'm Louisa, the servant here, and I can tell you summat. Stop the cab at the street end and wait—I'll come after you. Ssss-t!"

And her mysterious message concluded, she vanished

The Day of Miracles not past.

A RETFORD FAMILY'S EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE.

BILE BEANS CURE MOTHER, SON, AND DAUGHTER.

It has come to be a commonly accepted statement that the day of miracles has gone past. This is only partially true, for if many of the things done to-day had been done the day after that upon which Lazarus was raised from the dead, they would no doubt have been chronicled as miracles. For instance, the truly wonderful cure of Mrs. Turner, of Moorgate, Retford, and her son and daughter, by Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness, would, doubtless, have attracted attention from the scribe, so sensational is it in its nature. Says Mrs. Turner, speaking to a *Retford and Gainsborough Times* reporter,—"For a long time I suffered so from weakness and debility that it was with difficulty I moved about. I had a constant feeling of heaviness at the stomach, and do what I would I could not get rid of it. My breathing was laboured and caused great pain. Many a time, when outside, I had actually to stand still in order to get my breath, so bad had I become. One day a neighbour gave me a few of Chas. Forde's Bile Beans, so I purchased more. From the time I began to take them I have gradually improved, until now I am quite well again." Mrs. Turner's daughter said she also had suffered from nervous debility, adding—"My strength left me, I became depressed, and lost all interest in everything. I could hardly move about. My mother gave me some of the Bile Beans, and I determined to give them a fair trial. The result is most satisfactory. Although only a short time has elapsed since I began to take them, my weakness and depression are gone, and my strength has returned. The Beans are certainly a wonderful medicine." Mrs. Turner told of the third cure in her family:—"A short time ago," said she, "my son could not go about his work in consequence of sick headache and dizziness. I gave him some of the Beans, and gradually his ailments ceased to trouble him. The Beans have done him worlds of good, and he is not slow to recommend them to others." Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness are unequalled for nervousness, debility, indigestion, liver and kidney disorders, constipation, piles, headache, pimples and face sores, anæmia, female ailments, rheumatism, sleeplessness, neuralgia, palpitation, and the after-effects of influenza. All chemists stock Bile Beans, or you may obtain them direct from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 London Wall, London, E.C., by sending prices, one and three-half-pence or two and nine.

A **Free Sample** may be obtained by writing for same to above address, enclosing a penny stamp to pay postage and mentioning this paper.

in the gloom. Felix Dering's pulses beat faster and he went vigilantly down into the lobby. Neal was whistling for a cab; Mrs. Schwartz piloted the baby-farmer to the level of the pavement.

"They are anxious for their own safety," he decided mentally; "otherwise I should not be permitted to leave without a struggle."

Having passed which comment on the situation, he entered a four-wheeler, seated himself opposite the baby-farmer, and was borne off. Keturah Schwartz had instructed the driver.

The landlady and her peculiar lodger regained the lobby and climbed to the first-floor parlour.

"To-morrow, Kitty," said Neal, putting an arm about the fat woman, "we shall be on our way to the Continent. You've wanted me any time these two years—well, I will be magnanimous. You shall become Mrs. Garland in Paris. Go and pack; we will leave the house for the tradespeople to quarrel over, you'd have had to skip soon, at any rate—to avoid a committal to Holloway for debt."

"And what about Felix Dering?" queried Mrs. Schwartz, pushing her cynical wooer away: "he will get us extradited before our honeymoon is well begun."

Neal grinned his characteristic grin. "Fate is on our side, Kitty," he responded; "of course, even if Dering had had a glimpse of the child, he would have gone back to Wyresdale without it to fall into a trap of my laying. As it is, he has plunged himself more deeply in the mire and the disappearance of the boy will complicate him beyond extrication. He could not have done a worse thing than to mix himself with that old witch Dobson."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Keturah Schwartz.

Neal Garland held up the letter he had written during her absence and under the very nose of Felix Dering. It was addressed:

The Inspector in Charge,
Police Station,
Wyresdale,
Derbyshire.

"Go and pack!" he cried; "pack, my dear Kitty—we must be out of England when this is opened."

CHAPTER XLI.

"It's a Queer Tale."

"Excuse my coming in beside you, sir, but I want to whisper. Perhaps the old cat isn't as drunk as she looks."

In the light of the gas-standard near which the cab had halted, Felix Dering glanced at the baby-farmer. The unkempt figure was huddled into a corner of the opposite seat, apparently asleep. But he recognised the wisdom of the little servant's caution, and moved to allow her the suggested room.

With a hasty injunction to the driver to "Go easy for 'arf a mo'," Louisa drew the door after her, pulled up the window, and subsided, at a respectable distance from Felix Dering. She had tied a black shawl over her head, and panted, from haste and excitement. Calming herself, she leaned towards him.

"Won't I get in a fine row if Mrs. S. finds I've been out!" she gasped, sardonically; "oh, no, not much. I shall say I've been talking to the bobby on the beat. But about the child you came after—I heard that part of what Mr. Garland said, thanks to squeezing myself half through the key-hole and stopping my breath till I was purple in the face."

"Yes," murmured Felix, soothingly; "you had something to say to me."

"I had," admitted the little servant, "an' it's this—they went and dyed his blessed hair. Which it was all golden, to begin with, but when Mrs. S. took him off in the hansom, it were a sort of carrots."

The listener started. Neal had not mentioned the fact—was he playing false, or was it a lapse of memory? Louisa broke in upon his meditation.

"Do you know a big man, with yellow eyes and specs?" she queried, still in an undertone; "furriner, I'll bet a million. Sizes you up in a kind of smile as makes you feel as though he was a hundred and you just born. Wears a slop coat and has flat feet."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Felix; "yes, I do—his name is Kraft, he's a German."

"Right you are," said Louisa, "well, he first come about the house a couple of years ago, when Captain Schwartz was alive. The Captain was a Dutchman or a German, or one of them sausage-gorgers; went to sea, he did, most of his time. It was just afore his last voyage as ever was that he brought home Dr. Kraft and two whopping boxes, all coopered, like casks, and stuck full of holes, except where it was printed on 'With great care.' I was a bit of a girl then, at three shillings a week, and the doctor used to potter round the kitchen, cooking messes for some wild beasts as he kept in his boxes. Fine and curious was Mrs. S. about them, but not a sight of them had she to my knowledge, for all she prowled about 'em like Mrs. Bluebeard."

"My dear child," interrupted Felix; "what has this to do with the object of my search?"

"Nowt," conceded Louisa, honestly; "but that was when I first seen the doctor. Then he disappeared. Captain Schwartz was drowned at sea soon after, and not till the boy was fetched by Mr. Garland did the doctor turn up again. The very next day he lands in while the boy was knocking about. Some time after he came once more; I wondered if he could be in it anyhow."

A numbing sense of mystery seized on Felix—he groped for a clue to its recesses. Neal must have been gulling him, both Garland and Mrs. Schwartz must stand in a secret relation to Kraft, a relation hostile to the Derings. But for what reasons?—what could be the German's object in aiding or in commencing the intrigue which Felix was so powerless to plumb?

He stirred, to put a hand in his pocket and extract a sovereign.

"You have given me priceless information," he responded; "and I will not forget you, Louisa. However, for the present, accept this trifling acknowledgement." And he pressed the coin into the servant's palm—Louisa repulsed it.

(*To be continued.*)

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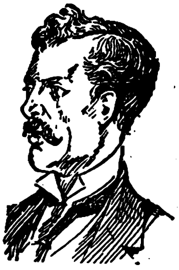
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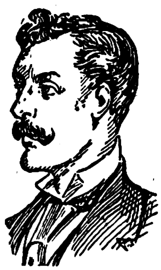
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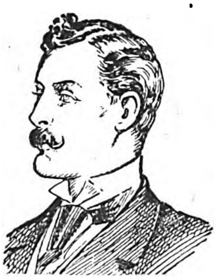
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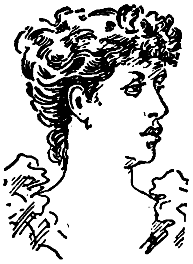
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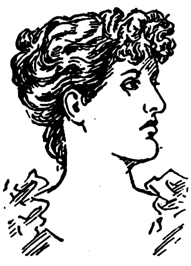
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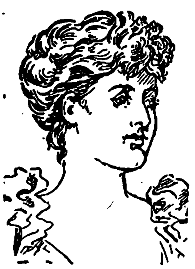
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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

If you are a millionaire the announcement made on page 400 will for you have but a passing interest. But if you are one of that quite considerable number of people who "could do with a five-pound note," the announcement will be worthy of your most careful attention. And one of the chief charms of the affair is that it will give you very little trouble. You merely look at the portraits which we reproduce, and if you find yours among them, drop us a card. If your claim is correct, we send you the five pounds at the earliest possible moment. Simplicity itself, you see. Don't give up hope if your portrait isn't among the first lot. We shall give five different portraits each week, and any time yours may appear. Moreover, even if your own portrait isn't there, a friend's may be, in which case tell him of it and win for yourself one of the additional prizes offered.

⁂

This competition is going to be a very big thing indeed. It will become, in the course of the next few weeks, the talk of everybody. For never before will there have been such a wholesale distribution of five-pound notes. I should like to remind you that this affords an admirable opportunity for mentioning *Short Stories* to your friends. The simple query addressed to an acquaintance: "Seen *Short Stories'* photo scheme?" and the thing is done.

⁂

Sebastian—the office boy—sends me the following, which he says he is open to sing at any London variety theatre if managers will pay him fifty guineas a night:

"Have you won that £5 note?
See if your own photo
Has appeared or no.
I ask all Rads and Tories
To buy *Short Stories*,
And win a £5 note to give to me."

⁂

Advice on Love and other Matters.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

"A Proud Papa" writes a doleful letter. His wife has lately presented him with twins, and he complains that ever since their arrival she has had eyes and ears for no one else. What can he do in the matter? He has spoken to her on the subject, but she seemed very upset and annoyed about it. She is only nineteen, and used to be very fond of him. Have patience, "Proud Papa." Every young mother thinks her baby the most lovely and perfect being in the world, and when she has *two*, of course she would feel more proud than ever. Very soon she will get used to them, and you will have no further cause for jealousy. Don't upbraid her, or she will begin to feel that you do not care for your babies. Nineteen is very young to have such a responsibility, and you must help her all you can.

"Sybil" wonders if I shall take the trouble to answer her letter. She is in great grief at the loss of her lover, and feels now that he is dead, life is not worth living, and she is sure she can never feel resigned as her friends tell her she ought. She is only eighteen, and looks forward to a long life of wretched unhappiness.

My poor child, I am only too ready to do what I can to help you to bear your terrible burden of lonely sorrow. In such a grief as yours I know how worthless and shallow all words of hope and comfort must appear, but, in days to come, when the first sharp edge of grief has begun to wear off, remember that the parting is but for a little while, and in God's good time you will see your loved one again. You are young, and can do much towards cheering and comforting your poorer brothers and sisters, and, believe me, in helping them you will do the best possible thing towards filling up the blank in your own life.

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Starts Soon.

I am afraid the sovereign you put into the church plate, in mistake for a shilling, cannot be recovered, "Poor Widow." You say you are poor, and can ill spare it; perhaps if you went to the clergyman of the parish and told him your trouble he would do something to help you. I am very sorry for you. It is always a mistake to carry money loose in one's pocket.

You tell me, "Anxious One," that you have a lover who is a Jew, and that your friends try to set you against him, and your mother has forbidden you to have anything to do with him, and yet there is nothing to be said against him beyond the fact that he is a Jew. I should tell your mother that you intend to remain true to him, as you love him; for, after all, you have every right to think about your future, haven't you? Being a Jew is nothing to his discredit, and I should take no notice of what people say on the subject. No, I do not think eighteen is too young for a girl to be engaged. Many thanks for your good wishes.

◆

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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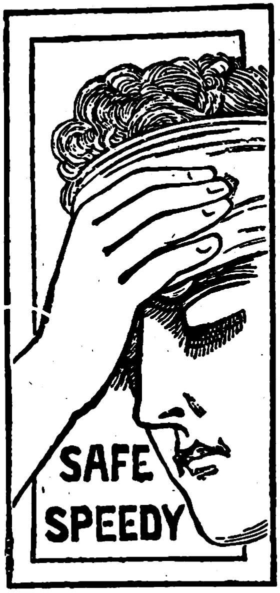

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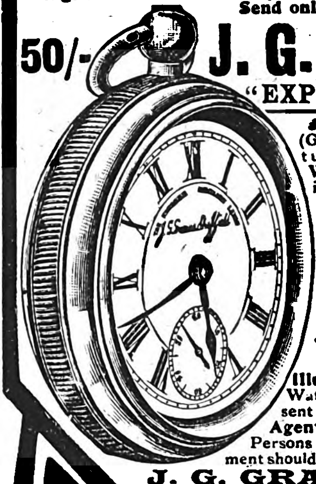

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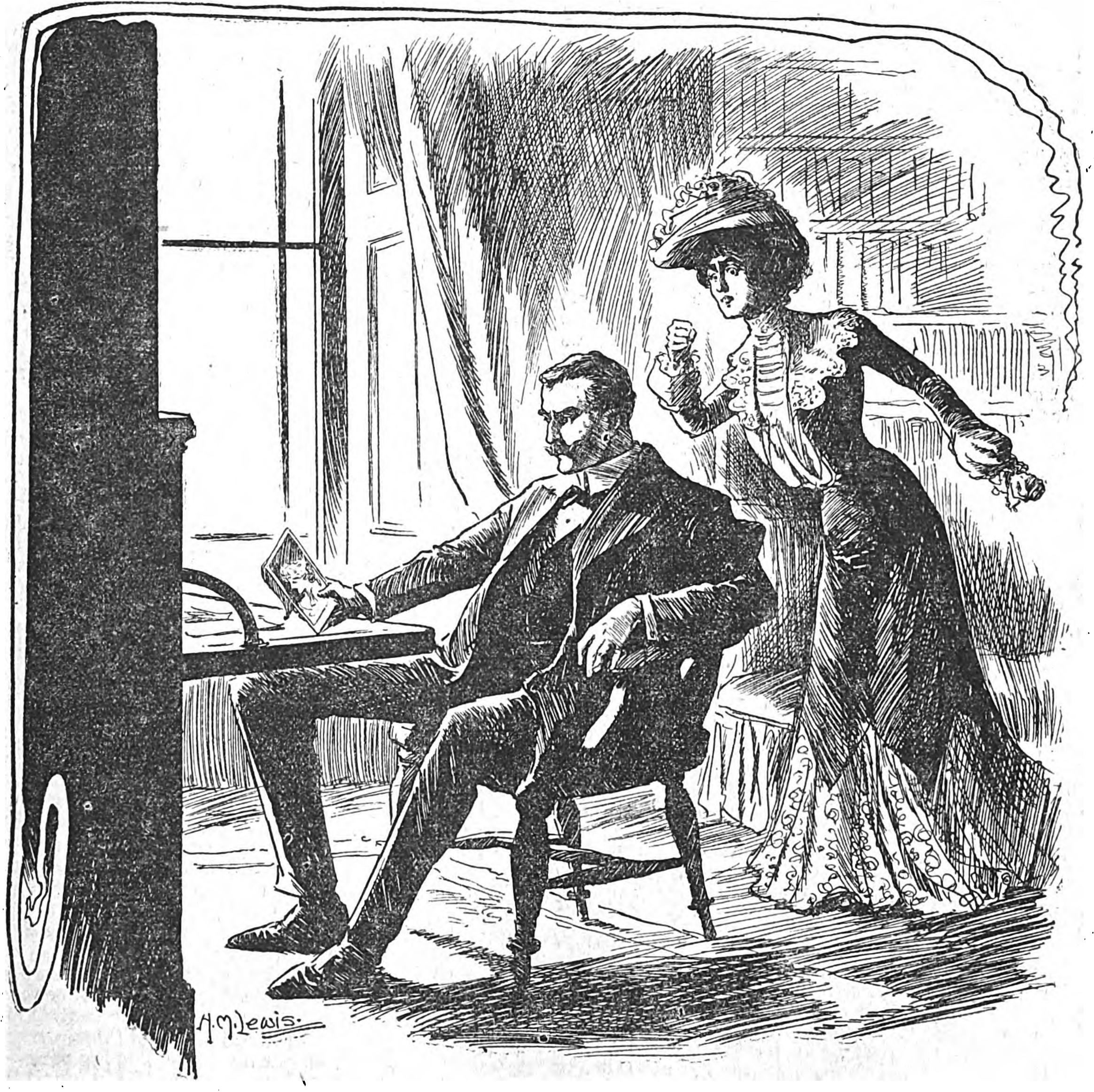
SHORT STORIES

No. 666.] For the Week Ending October 5th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

The Adventures of an Actress.



"Yes, Hazel," he muttered, "you're worth risking the torments of Hades for."

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A THRILLING INSTALMENT.

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

IX.—Diamond Cut Diamond.

By *DONOVAN MART*

CHAPTER I.

HORACE CALDECOTT sat before his open bureau in his well-appointed study, the very room into which he had tricked Hazel Harlow when she had first come to London. Before him was a pile of letters and papers. Presently he leant back in his chair and lighting a cigarette, gave himself up to his thoughts.

"What a piece of luck," he began, "to think that old Jacob Dimsdale should be able to help me in my plans, and there's no fear of his going back on me. He knows I've got him in the hollow of my hand. I'll trot down to Birmingham to-night and once there, I ought to be able at last to bring off the *coup* that has already cost me so much. Yes, Hazel," his dark eyes gleamed vindictively, "my time must come sooner or later. You won't always have Mr. Eric Monteith and the luck of the very dickens to keep you from becoming mine."

He put his hand into a pigeon-hole of the desk and drew out a cabinet photograph. It was the head and shoulders of a girl, a girl with the face of an angel, with a great aureole of hair surmounting her broad forehead and wide open eyes. Caldecott ground his teeth together. "Yes, Hazel," he muttered, "you're worth risking the torments of Hades for."

At that moment a slight rustling sound at his back caused him to wheel round in his revolving chair. So engrossed had he been in his own sinister thoughts, and the contemplation of Hazel Harlow's photograph, that he had not heard the study door open, had not seen the stylishly dressed female figure that crept inside the room, had not observed her steal across to his very side. It was only when he could almost feel her breath upon his head that he discovered her presence.

"Valerie!" Caldecott thrust the photograph he had just been gazing at so intently into its hiding place. Then he rose to his feet, and battling with a sudden rage, tried to face his unwelcome visitor calmly.

"Yes, Horace," answered the woman quietly, though her face was pale and there was a look in her eyes that told of suppressed passions behind them. "You didn't expect to see me, Valerie Bellairs, the woman you have tricked and fooled for so long. You have sworn to me over and over again that Hazel Harlow was nothing to you, yet I find you here gloating over her portrait and muttering like a love-sick swain."

Caldecott flushed. For a moment he hesitated, then with a sharp mirthless laugh he broke into quick speech. "So be it then," he said, "the buttons are off the foils, and we fight with naked blades. If you will have the truth, by Heaven I'll give it you. I am tired of you. Sick to death of your pestering, jealous ways. So it's no good your coming here and sneaking in upon me unawares, and then trying to ride over me roughshod. Go your way, and leave me to go mine."

Valerie staggered back as though she had been struck in the face. For a few moments she remained speechless, while Caldecott confronted her with a sneer on his saturnine countenance.

"So that's how the wind blows, is it?" at last she said in a low voice. "I'm to be cast off like an old glove. It wasn't enough that I gave you all the love there was in me, that I lied and schemed, and did things that were base and mean merely for a caress or a word of endearment from you. I'm to go my own way, am I? Very well. And now hear me. I'll not rest until I have brought you down into the mud, Squire Horace Caldecott. And as for Hazel Harlow, though she proved one too many for me once, I've learnt wisdom since then. I'll strike in the dark, and when she thinks herself most secure. You've had your warning. Beware!"

The actress spoke in a voice fraught with pent-up rage. Resourceful villain as he was Caldecott could not help quailing somewhat before the anger of the woman he had tricked and deluded so long. Her eyes were opened now, and a wild unreasoning passion of love had given place to a dark desire for revenge, the strength of which Caldecott little realised.

"Heroics, my dear Valerie," he said with an attempt at levity, "Why should we desire to cut one another's throats? We, who have been—" he hesitated, and then said meaningly, "such very good friends. I am sure that Valerie Bellairs, with all her talent and all the admirers that she has won for herself upon the stage, will never lack admirers far more worthy of her great reputation than so humble a man as Horace Caldecott. So let us shake hands and at least part as friends."

He held out his hand as he spoke, but the woman drew back. "I don't think you quite understand," she answered, "it's going to be war between us now, war to the knife, for I swear to you that I will not rest until I have dragged you down to cry for pity at my feet. You are powerful, rich, unscrupulous, and I am only a woman, a plaything, to be scorned and thrown aside as soon as I have fulfilled my destiny in becoming your toy."

Look at page 432.

Without another word she turned and left the room.

A low laugh broke from Caldecott as she disappeared; a sigh of apparent heartfelt relief fell from his lips.

"So ends a chapter in my life," he muttered. Yet in his heart of hearts he knew that the chapter had not yet ended—he knew all the fierce passion that lay latent in Valerie's heart. She was a passionate woman scorned, and he knew that from that moment he would have to be on his guard. "Anyhow," his thoughts ran, "she's not sailing under false colours."

"Its open hostilities between us. I wonder what her first move in the game will be. Ah, well, I'm not afraid of her. I don't think her bite will be anything like as bad as her bark. And now I must get to business. I'll catch the 2.10 to Birmingham from Paddington. I've got plenty of time to get everything ready and be off."

At about a quarter to two the front door of Horace Caldecott's house opened and a man issued forth. He was an elderly gentleman, with almost snow-white hair, grey moustache, and trim-pointed beard streaked with white. He was well-dressed, and carried himself alertly, while his bronzed face betokened the traveller, his upright carriage the old soldier. A private hansom was drawn up alongside the kerb.

"Paddington, James," said the old gentleman. The man touched his cockaded top hat and whipped up his steed, a coal black thoroughbred. The vehicle rolled noiselessly away on its pneumatic tyred wheels.

CHAPTER II.

It was mid-day. New Street, Birmingham's chief thoroughfare, was crowded with shoppers and pedestrians. On a hoarding at the Town Hall end of the street was a large placard, a coloured poster with just a girl's face upon it, and underneath the words, "Hazel Harlow, the famous actress, is at the Theatre Royal." Outside the theatre itself was a crowd of people examining the photographs and playbills displayed by *The Good Samaritan* Company, whose headquarters for that week were at Birmingham. The box-office was crowded, and that despite the fact that at the Prince of Wales's Theatre a London company, with all its original cast, was making a bid for the favour of Birmingham playgoers. *The Good Samaritan* Company had already given two performances in the town, and the papers, especially the *Daily Post*, had been enthusiastic in praise of the beautiful Hazel Harlow. The box-office of the theatre was beseiged. Raymond Venables, the manager, was ecstatic. He stood in the entrance to the theatre with the lessee of the house and gazed jubilantly at the crowds that pressed forward to buy seats for that evening's performance.

"I wonder what they are doing at the Prince of Wales's," he muttered to his companion.

"Precious little. That was a stroke of luck for you, Venables, getting Hazel Harlow," added the other enviously.

"You're right, my boy," replied the manager, "and shall I tell you what I'm going to do when this tour is over? I'm going to get hold of a London theatre and run the Harlow for all I'm worth. Why, she's worth a hundred pounds a week to anyone for her face alone, and more than that, she can act."

In the meanwhile Hazel Harlow and Jenny Lovelace were walking together along Corporation Street.

"So this is Birmingham," Hazel was saying, "the best governed city in the world, eh? Well, it's a fine town, and I think we ought to have a jolly week here. Let's go back to our lodgings, have some lunch, and then go out to the Botanical Gardens at Edgbaston. I hear they are worth seeing, and it really is a lovely day."

To this Jenny agreed, and getting on to an omnibus they were driven up to Broad Street, in a quiet street off which their lodgings were. At the lodgings there was a letter for Jenny.

"I seem to know the handwriting," she said as she looked at the envelope, "but I don't know who it's from."

"Look inside and see," said Hazel laughingly.

The letter was as follows:

"Belle Vue,
"Augustus Road.
"Edgbaston.

"My Dear Jenny,—

"Seeing that your Company is here in Birmingham, and not having seen or heard anything of you for some time, your aunt and I are writing to ask you to come and see us this afternoon. We shall be delighted if you would bring Miss Harlow with you.

"Your affectionate uncle,
"Jacob Dimsdale."

"Well I never!" cried Jenny, handing the note over to her companion to read. "It's from Uncle Jacob. I'd quite forgotten about the old boy. He's my mother's brother," she said explanatorily, "and he owns a big electro-plating business in busy Birmingham. What do you say, Hazel? Shall we give up the Botanical Gardens and go and have tea with Uncle Jacob and Aunt Sarah? They've got a lovely house and garden, and he's as rich as Crœsus."

"I shall be delighted, dear," answered Hazel. "I never knew you had an uncle in Birmingham."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I'd quite forgotten all about him. I haven't seen him for some years. It's rather funny he should write and ask us to go and see him now I come to think of it, for Aunt Sarah is rather puritanical in her ideas. She comes of an old Quaker stock, and I remember that when she heard I was going on the stage she wrote me a long letter all about the terrible dangers and awful wickednesses that I was going to be plunged into. Perhaps Uncle Jacob thinks that he owes me something to make up for his past neglect of his niece's existence. Anyhow, he's quite harmless, and there is no reason why we shouldn't go."

At that moment the landlady appeared.

"A gentleman to see you, ladies," she said, "Mr. Monteith."

"Ask him up," replied the girls simultaneously.

The door opened and Eric was ushered in.

"Good morning," he said cheerfully, "I want you two to come and have lunch with me at Lissiter's. I've heard it's a good place for a feed."

The two girls exchanged glances. Eric noticed their hesitation.

"If you have a previous engagement," he said courteously, "please don't let me interfere with your plans."

His eyes looked hungrily at Hazel's beautiful face. It was plain to see the adoration that was in his heart for the young girl whom he had sworn to befriend and cherish, if not as a lover, at least as a brother.

"Oh, we've not got an engagement," cried Jenny, "at least yet awhile. We've promised to go up to Edgbaston this afternoon to have tea with an uncle of mine. There's no reason why we shouldn't come and have lunch with you, notwithstanding the fact that we've been shopping in town all the morning."

Mr. Henry T. Johnson's new serial starts week after next.

"I've got a carriage outside," said Eric deprecatingly, "if you will be so kind as to avail yourselves of it."

There was no legitimate reason under the circumstances for refusing so generous an offer. Accordingly the trio were speedily driving off towards Lissiter's.

During lunch Jenny told Eric about the invitation she and Hazel had received for that afternoon. On hearing the news Monteith's face clouded.

"I suppose it's all right," he began doubtfully.

Hazel broke in with a merry laugh.

"I am quite willing to admit, Eric," she said, "that you have every reason to view with suspicion any movement of mine, especially considering the terrible experiences we have gone through together." Her voice grew suddenly grave. "But," she went on, "I don't really see what harm can come to me this time. Mr. Dimsdale is undoubtedly Jenny's uncle. He is an elderly man; he has a wife with religious scruples. Surely there is nothing terrifying in that."

But Eric was not convinced.

"Jenny has just said," he remarked slowly, "that she is at a loss to understand why her uncle has expressed a desire to see her with such cordiality. The last time she was in Birmingham he took no notice of her at all."

"Yes," broke in Jenny, "but that's easy enough to explain. Everyone's heard of Hazel Harlow by this time, and my uncle, despite Aunt Sarah, is only human after all. He wants to get a glimpse of the famous actress, and he wants to be able to see her in private life."

"You may be right," answered Monteith, "yet I beg that you will both be careful. Every new town we come to I get the idea that something is going to happen, and it makes me as nervous as a woman. If only—" he broke off short, but Hazel knew what he would have said and the colour rose to her face. If only she would become his wife. Those were the unspoken words that had hovered on Eric's tongue. Yet love had not yet thrilled Hazel's pulses, not that love at least that a girl must feel in the presence of the man to whom she has given her heart.

CHAPTER III.

Belle Vue, Augustus Road, was a fine red brick mansion, standing back from the road in its own grounds, ringed in with noble trees. At about the same time when Hazel, Jenny, and Eric were discussing their lunch at Lissiter's, two men sat at meat together in Jacob Dimsdale's house. The one was Jacob Dimsdale himself, a somewhat portly man, the hair on whose temples was thin and grey, whose forehead was furrowed with deep lines, with small, rather crafty eyes resembling a ferret's. The other was he whom we had last seen issuing from Horace Caldecott's town house, the mysterious stranger with the grey beard and white hair.

Dimsdale took out his cigar-case and proffered it to his guest.

"You can smoke here," he said somewhat nervously, as Sarah's confined to her room. "As a rule she doesn't like smoking in the dining-room."

The other laughed.

"Petticoat government, eh, Dimsdale?" he said.

Then he went on. "Now let's get to business. There's got to be no misunderstanding between us. Either you play your cards as I tell you or I blow the gaff about what happened twenty years ago, when Jacob Dimsdale started to build up a big fortune after as deliberate a crime as anyone was ever guilty of."

Dimsdale's face was ashen.

"For goodness sake, Caldecott," he said, "don't speak so loud."

"And for goodness sake," broke in the other roughly, "drop that Caldecott. Remember my name's Antrobus. Colonel Charles Allister Antrobus. Please to remember that."

"Yes, yes," answered the other, "I won't make the mistake again. And I'll do anything you like if you will only swear to keep locked up in your own breast what you and you alone, beside myself, in all the world know."

Caldecott smiled. "I little thought, friend Jacob," he said callously, "that I should ever be constrained to put the screw on you. But it's a strange world this, and you never know what's going to turn up next. To think that the simple little fact of your being uncle to Miss Jenny Lovelace should have necessitated my flying down to Edgbaston and asking your help."

Jacob Dimsdale writhed. He was as clay in this man's hands, and he knew it. For twenty years he had gone on steadily amassing wealth which owed its foundation to an act the true story of which Horace Caldecott alone knew. Twenty years is a long time, yet it was not time enough for the memory of that act of criminality to disappear from Jacob Dimsdale's life. And now Caldecott, the one man above all others whom he never desired to see again in this world, had risen up to confront him with the black story, nay, more, had put as the price of his silence the consummation of yet another deed of villainy.

"What is it you want to do?" asked Dimsdale hoarsely. "I have asked Jenny and Miss Harlow here this afternoon according to your instructions. Have you evil designs upon my dead sister's daughter?"

"You can assure yourself on that point," broke in Caldecott, "my business does not lie with your niece. It is with her comrade. But you need know nothing about that. All you have to do is to keep your mouth shut and your niece out of my way at the same time. And remember if you betray me by the faintest word or gesture I'll not spare you. At your time of life it would be decidedly unpleasant to be forced to visit Portland or Dartmoor."

Jacob Dimsdale shuddered.

"Anything but that," he murmured, "anything but that."

"Good," went on the other. "Then we understand one another perfectly. Your part this afternoon will be an easy one. It will be merely to back me up in everything I say and do most vigorously; to convey to your niece and her companion that I am in every way a desirable and praiseworthy acquaintance. If you do that all will be plain sailing, and the world need never know that Jacob Dimsdale reached his present wealthy position by letting another suffer for his crime."

The last shaft struck home. Dimsdale shuddered and put up his hands with an imploring gesture.

"You need say no more," he muttered hoarsely.

At four o'clock that afternoon Jenny and Hazel, according to arrangement, arrived at Belle Vue to take tea with Uncle Jacob and his wife. They were ushered into a beautifully appointed drawing-room by a tall, stately footman, who informed them that Mrs. Dimsdale was unfortunately indisposed. She sent her love to her niece, and her compliments to Miss Harlow; Mr. Dimsdale would be there in a few minutes. The man retired, and barely had he closed the door behind him when it reopened to admit the portly form of Uncle Jacob, followed by the grey-haired, white-bearded, "Colonel Antrobus."

"How do you do my dear niece?" said Dimsdale, kissing Jenny warmly on the cheek. "I'm proud to meet you, Miss Harlow," to Hazel, "all Birmingham is full of your praises. Allow me to introduce my very dear old friend, 'Colonel Antrobus,' late of the Rosshire Buffs, to you."

The pseudo-colonel bowed courteously. So complete was his disguise that all the two girls saw was a well set-up soldierly old gentleman with pleasant manners.

"I am delighted to meet two such charming members of a profession to which the public owes so much." His voice had a silky smoothness about it quite unlike that of the Horace Caldecott that Hazel knew, and had such good reason to fear. She acknowledged the greeting becomingly, and the conversation soon drifted into topics of general interest.

By the time tea was brought in the little company was on the best of terms. Jenny was secretly charmed to find her uncle so cordially disposed, neither did she see any reason to regret the fact that Colonel Antrobus was the substitute for her austere aunt.

Suddenly Antrobus, fixing his eyes on Hazel, said pleasantly:

"I wonder if I could induce you, Dimsdale, to bring your niece and Miss Harlow to visit me at my house. I should like to contribute somewhat to the enlivenment of your stay in Birmingham. What do you say to a little supper party after the theatre? I could drive you out to my house and see that you were sent back quite safely."

Dimsdale turned to his niece. "What do you say, Jenny?" he asked, "would you care to come?"

Jenny looked at Hazel. She saw no reason to refuse, and indeed read acquiescence in Hazel's eyes.

"We shall be charmed," she answered brightly.

"Good," said the Colonel, "then let us say to-morrow night." And so it was arranged. Dimsdale promised to be at the theatre at the close of the next evening's performance and drive with the two girls to his friend's house.

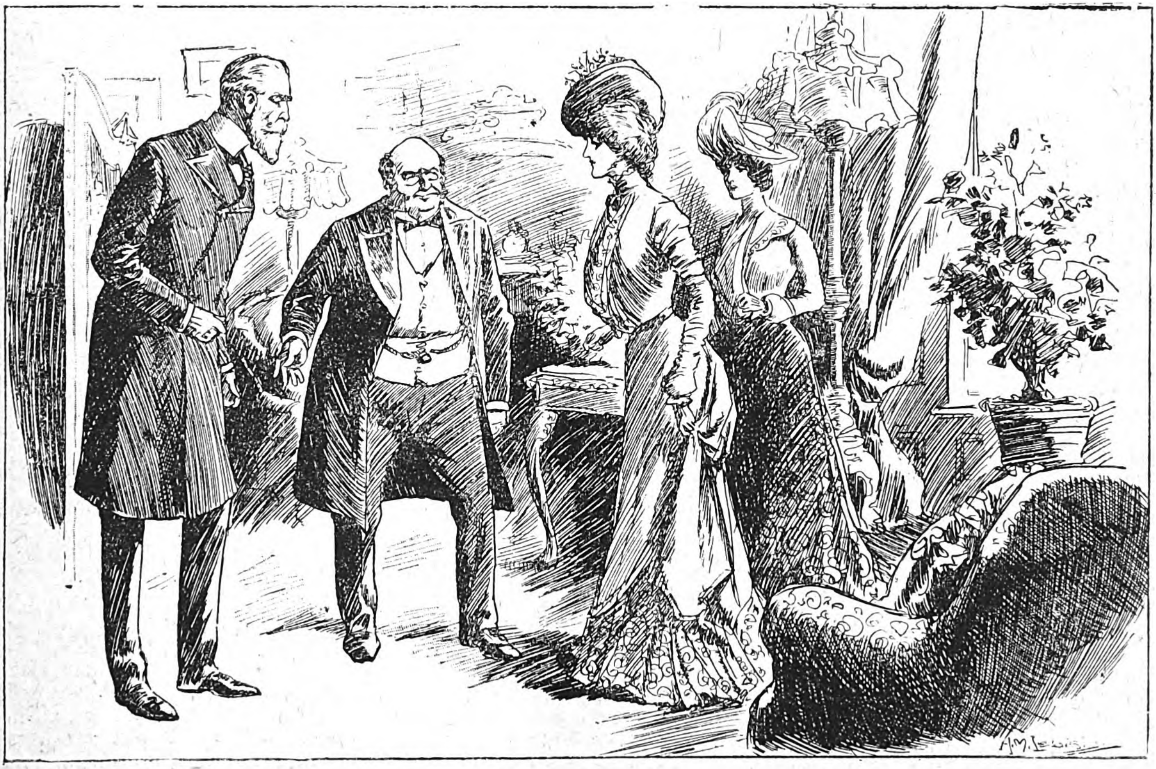
CHAPTER IV.

It was between the first and second act of *The Good Samaritan* on the evening of the same day that had witnessed Jenny and Hazel's visit to Edgbaston. Eric and Hazel were standing at the wings talking together. Hazel was recounting how pleasant an afternoon they had spent and wound up by saying:

"There was an old gentleman there, a Colonel Antrobus, who has very kindly asked us to supper at his house to morrow night under the chaperonage of Mr. Dimsdale."

"Colonel Antrobus," echoed Eric, "do you know if by any chance he was formerly in the Rosshire Buffs?"

"Yes," answered Hazel, "that was the name of his regiment."



So complete was this disguise that all the two girls saw was a well set up, soldierly, old gentleman.

Look out for "Dead to the World."

"How strange," replied Monteith. "That was my father's old regiment, and he and Colonel Antrobus were very great friends. He lives in a beautiful house in Edgbaston. Yet it is rather strange that he should ask you to supper with him."

"How strange?" queried Hazel.

"Because he was a man of the most quixotic views. He was a regular austere man. They used to call him the Covenanter in the regiment. He never went inside a theatre in his life, and he always professed to hold the stage and everything in connection with it in the utmost abhorrence."

"He certainly doesn't answer that description now," said Hazel laughing. "He seemed a most sociable old gentleman, and Mr. Dimsdale evidently thinks a lot of him."

"And what sort of a man is Mr. Dimsdale?" went on Monteith.

"I should say rather a self made man, but very kind hearted."

Eric was silent, yet the thought that ran through him was, "Not at all the sort of man that Colonel Antrobus a blue blooded, stiff old martinet, as I knew him would be likely to cultivate. He must have changed since the old days."

The rise of the curtain cut short any further conversation between the pair, but Eric had determined to inquire more fully into the strange, and to him, absolutely inexplicable change of front made by Colonel Antrobus, late of the Rosshire Buffs.

He was up betimes the next morning, and repairing to the General Post office, obtained a look at the Birmingham directory. Yes, there it was plain enough. "Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Alister Antrobus, D.S.O., G.C.B., Rosshire Lodge, Edgbaston."

Eric noted the address and strolled out into New Street, pondering deeply as he went. Ever since that first day when he had met Hazel Harlow, and had realised that henceforth he could have no other mission in life but to guard her, and to endeavour, if possible, to make her share his destiny and fortune, he had felt that the young girl's life was beset by danger and difficulties of which she herself had but a slight realisation, and how amply had his forebodings been justified? Go where she would danger seemed to dog her footsteps, and her worst enemy was a man whom Monteith knew would leave no stone unturned—and, as events had proved, was absolutely without scruple—to ensnare Hazel into the loathsome net of an all-absorbing passion.

Thus it came about that even when danger seemed farthest away, Eric Monteith was most on his guard. It might be, as Hazel's words had implied, Colonel Antrobus had repented of the austerity that had won him the nickname of The Covenanter in days gone by, and yet—a vision of the grim soldier as Eric remembered to have seen him when a boy, rose up and made the very thought seem preposterous.

"Anyhow," said Monteith to himself, "there is one perfectly simple way of finding out the reason that has caused the Colonel to so suddenly abdicate from the rules of his younger days. I can call on him this afternoon, as my father's son. Then I can satisfy myself that everything is as it should be."

He said nothing of his intentions to Jenny and Hazel, who were both of them looking forward to their evening's dissipation. Hazel in her simple country life had tasted so few of the sweets of civilisation and refinement, that it was quite a novel experience for her to have a supper party to look forward to in a big house where everything must be of the best.

As for Jenny, she had all an actress's love of excitement and jollification. She was Bohemian to the core, and had been agreeably surprised with the change in her uncle's manner towards her. She saw no cloud to dim the horizon of her mental vision.

At three o'clock that afternoon Eric jumped on to a 'bus at the Town Hall and was soon driving up Broad Street towards the Five Ways and the Hagley Road. He had found out the whereabouts of Rosshire Lodge.

At the end of Hagley Road he jumped off the vehicle and walked down a quiet tree-shaded thoroughfare that led to the road where the Colonel lived. Rosshire Lodge he found to be a large red brick building flanked by noble trees, and up to which a fine, carefully-swept carriage drive led. He walked up the drive in some trepidation, and pulled the wrought iron bell-pendant.

Almost as soon as he had let go of the handle, the door swung open, and a respectable looking old manservant, with the evident air of an ex-army man about him, stood before him.

"Is Colonel Antrobus in?" Monteith asked.

"Yes, sir," came the answer. "Will you please to step this way?"

He followed the servant across a stone-flagged hall, hung with trophies of the chase, curious armour, and a few tattered flags whose faded fabric had evidently been riddled and rent by shot and ball.

The lackey opened a door leading out of the hall, and Eric found himself in a beautiful oak-panelled chamber, with a desk in the window, and all the usual appurtenances of a well-appointed study.

"What name shall I say, sir?" asked the man.

"Mr. Eric Monteith," came the answer. "Son of Major Ivor Monteith, late of the Rosshires."

The man stiffened automatically.

"A gallant gentleman, your father, sir," he said respectfully. "I was in his regiment."

Eric's face flushed with pride. "I am glad to meet one of my father's old comrades," he said.

The man retired, and in a few moments the door reopened to admit as fine a specimen of veteran manhood as Eric remembered ever to have seen. With grizzled thick hair, and face browned with exposure to the tropical sun, blue eyes as keen as a hawk, and erect alert carriage, despite his sixty odd years, well over six feet in height, such was Colonel Antrobus.

"So you're Eric," he said, holding out a long lean hand. "What good wind brings you to Birmingham? Ah, I see you're your father's son. A better comrade no man ever had."

"I was only a little boy when I saw you last, sir," said the young man, "but I remember your face distinctly."

"And how goes the world with you?" went on the other "You've not followed in your father's footsteps, have you?"

"No, sir. At the death of my father my sister Alice and I were left rather poorly off. Then we came into a pretty considerable fortune left to us by our mother's sister, and now I've taken to the stage."

"The stage!" A look almost of horror came into the old soldier's face. "That's not the profession for Ivor Monteith's son. A loafing, idling, drinking life, a life that has been the undoing of many a fine young man who ought to have been serving his King and country over seas."

Look at page 432.

Eric flushed. "The profession was none of my seeking, sir," he said almost haughtily. "I did not go on the stage to suit my own interests. I like the life scarcely better than you do."

"Then, why in Heaven's name, not cut yourself adrift from it?" cried Antrobus almost irascibly.

Eric hesitated. Then he determined on a bold course.

"It was for the sake of a lady," he said in a low voice, "with whom I think you are already acquainted, a Miss Harlow."

"A lady with whom I am already acquainted?" echoed the Colonel in utter amazement. "I know no lady of that name. I never was much of a lover of the fair sex."

"Then you have never met Miss Harlow?" went on Eric in a low voice, a growing fear clutching at his heart.

"Never, sir," came the answer with obviously growing ire.

"And you're not acquainted with a Mr. Jacob Dimsdale?"

"He is also unknown to me," came the quick answer.

Eric was in a dilemma. He had learnt what he wanted to know, namely, that somehow Hazel and Jenny had been entrapped by some person masquerading under Antrobus's name, but he found it difficult to explain to the old soldier the full story of what he knew. Then a sudden inspiration came to him. He drew a photograph from his breast pocket and handed it over to his father's old friend for inspection.

"What do you think of that, sir?" he asked in a low voice.

Antrobus took the photograph and examined it attentively. It was a portrait of Hazel. After a few moments he handed it back to Monteith.

"I think it's the picture of the most beautiful woman I've ever seen," he said.

Eric put the photograph back into his pocket. "Then with your permission, sir," he said, "I will tell you the story of the original and how I came to be brought into her life. You shall then judge for yourself."

Then in as few words as possible he told Colonel Antrobus Hazel's story. How the girl had been forced to flee from her home; how alone and unprotected she had come to London; how Fate had sent her to his house; how she had been tracked and persecuted by Horace Caldecott; and how he, Eric, had fallen madly in love with her, and had become an actor to guard her life from ill.

"And now," he said in conclusion, "I will tell you why I asked you if you knew Miss Harlow. It is because she has been invited by a Colonel Antrobus, reputing himself to be late of the Rosshire Buffs, to supper at his house to-night. She is to go in company with another lady and her uncle. I knew that was not like the Colonel Antrobus who was my father's dearest friend, and so I determined to come and find out for myself."

For a few moments after the recital of this story the old soldier found but little to say. His eyes were fixed scrutinisingly on Eric's face.

"Upon my word," he said at last, "The days of knight errantry are by no means over even in this 20th century. So it is for a woman that you have become an actor. Well, let that pass. What concerns me is to think that there is some villain masquerading under the name that has never in my life-time been mixed up in any intrigue. This is a serious matter and must be looked into."

"Might I make a suggestion?" put in Eric. "It is that you leave the matter in my hands. I can quite see that it would be extremely unpleasant for you to allow yourself to be dragged into an affair that may have the most tawdry elements as its basis. Whoever the villain is who is masquerading under your name, I think now that I know the facts of the case I shall be able to cope with him. Do you agree, sir? Will you allow the settlement of this affair to rest in my hands?"

The Colonel hesitated. There was, however, something in Eric's face and manner of quiet, manly decision, that did not fail to make its impression upon the old soldier, and that won the day.

"Very well, my lad," he said, "I'll leave it to you on condition that you tell me how you played the game after it's all over."

"I'll do that willingly," answered the other, "unless ——" he broke off abruptly. It was on the tip of his tongue to say, "unless I am prevented from doing so," for he had of course no idea of what lay before him in his attempt to unearth the mystery surrounding the bogus Colonel Antrobus.

The old soldier noted his hesitation, and read his thoughts. "The lad's a plucked one," he said to himself, "there's danger before him in this business. Ah, well, he won't be Ivor Monteith's son if he can't pull through somehow."

"And now I'll be going, sir," said Eric, "to-morrow I hope to be able to report further to you on the matter."

"And now comes the question," ran Eric's thoughts as he walked down the broad avenue that led to the entrance gates, "how I'm to circumvent this plot of the false Colonel Antrobus whatever it may be. Is it possible that that villain Caldecott's hand can again be traced in this? I think my next move will be a visit to Mr. Jacob Dimsdale. I should very much like to know what his share in the business can be." Thus thinking, he drew in sight of the massive wrought iron gates that opened out on to the quiet thoroughfare that ran along the grounds of Colonel Antrobus' property.

A couple of juniper trees were set on either side of the gate inside the garden. At the foot of one of them Eric's quick eyes were attracted by a sealed envelope that lay as though someone had purposely placed it there. Naturally enough he turned aside to satisfy his curiosity as to what the note might be. This act proved his undoing. Almost before he had time to realise what had happened and just as he was in the act of stooping down to appropriate the note, a quick footfall sounded on the gravel behind him. A figure had stepped out from behind the other juniper; in his hand a short loaded cane. Before Eric had time to recover his normal position, the man had brought down the murderous-looking weapon with stunning force at the back of his head, just above the nape of the neck. With a faint cry the luckless man fell like a pole-axed bullock.

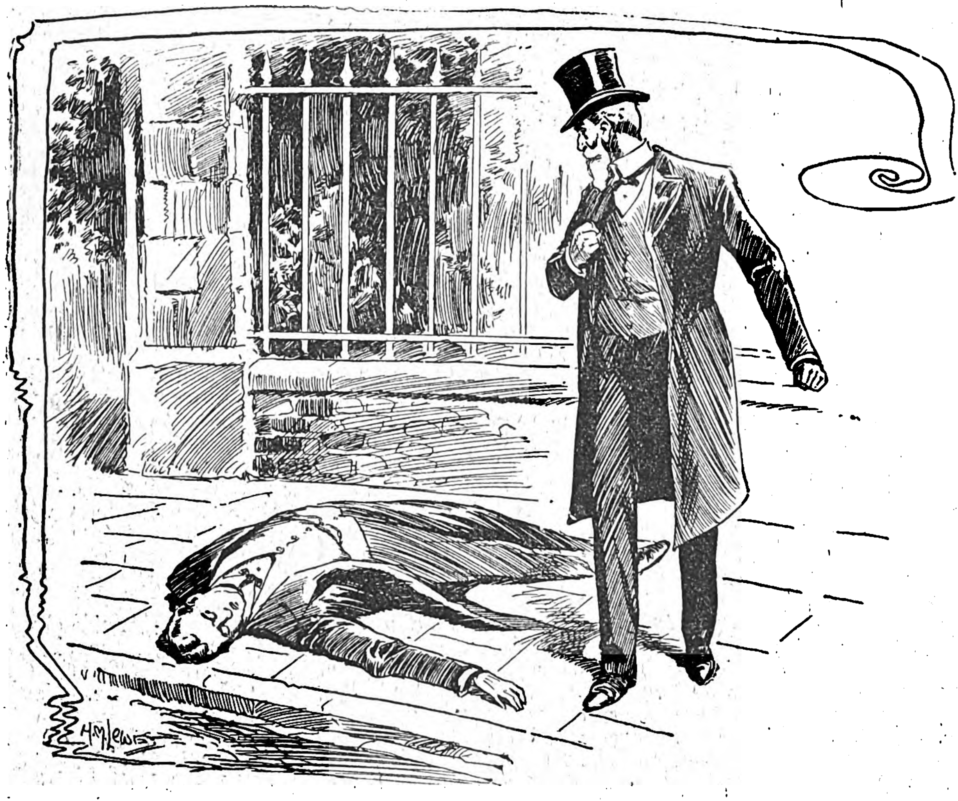
Quick as lightning his assailant stooped down and, ransacking his pockets, removed all the papers he found therein. Then lifting the body, having first of all hurled his weapon away into the brushwood, he carried the lifeless burden out into the roadway. Not a soul was in the street. The unknown miscreant deposited Monteith upon the pavement and gave vent to a low breath of apparent satisfaction. He was a tall, elderly, well-dressed man, and did not seem to be at all the sort of person one would take to be a common footpad.

"Neatly done," he muttered "the fish took the bait.

Mr. Henry T. Johnson's new serial starts week after next.

I think we've settled your hash for a while, Mr. Monteith. It'll be twenty hours or more before you become conscious. That blow means concussion of the brain for a certainty. It'll teach you to mind your own business, and when you do come to yourself I don't think you'll be able to do any further harm. I was rather a fool to adopt the personality of Colonel Antrobus, and if I hadn't dogged your footsteps, and if things hadn't turned out as well as they have, you might have been able to call checkmate."

At that moment the figure of a policeman came into view proceeding leisurely along the quiet road. In a moment Caldecott, for it was the ubiquitous ruffian himself, began waving vigorously to the constable who, perceiving that something was amiss, hurried forward at the top of his speed.



The unknown miscreant deposited Monteith upon the pavement, and gave vent to a low breath of apparent satisfaction.

"Just in the nick of time, constable," said the cool-blooded villain, "here's a job for you. I just found this unfortunate gentleman lying, as you see him, upon the pavement. I should say that he had been knocked on the head by a footpad who hadn't time to appropriate his belongings. I came round the corner of the road to find him lying as you see him now. All his papers are gone, though his watch and money have been left! Look at this swelling on the back of his head; it's a clear case of concussion. You'd better get him into a vehicle, and drive him off to the General Hospital. He's in a bad way. I'll give you my card, so that if necessary I can be called upon to say what I know about the business."

Caldecott spoke quietly and with confidence. There was not the faintest evidence to implicate him in any way with the cowardly assault. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that the policeman saw no reason to disbelieve his story.

"There's a cab rank at the end of the road, sir," said the officer. "Perhaps you won't mind sending a cab down here as you go. I'll wait here with this gentleman, and if you'll give me your card as you said there will be no need for you to stay any longer."

Caldecott pulled out his card-case and handed the man a piece of pasteboard upon which was neatly engraved, "Sir James Henderson, 116 Calthorpe Road."

Caldecott was not the sort of man to do things by halves. Thorough-paced scoundrel as he was he was always equipped with every sort of device to aid him in the furtherance of his crimes. He gave half-a-crown to the policeman. "Do your best for the poor fellow," his said, and hurried away towards the cab-rank.

"That's a gentleman," muttered the policeman, pocketing the coin. "Now I wonder what is the explanation of this little game. This won't be a nice thing for me when it comes known at head quarters that there's been a highway assault here in one of the best streets in Edgbaston in broad daylight. Yet I don't see how a man can be everywhere at once. Whoever the chap was who knocked this gentleman on the head he knew where to plant his blow." The constable stooped down and examined the unfortunate Monteith's pale expressionless face.

"Hullo, my man, what's this?" said a voice in his ear. The constable sprang up in a moment. Colonel Antrobus stood before him. The Colonel gave one swift glance at the motionless body, and a cry escaped his lips.

"Eric Monteith!" he said sharply, "what's the meaning of this?"

In as few words as possible the policeman told the story of how he had come across the senseless Eric.

"Help me to lift him up," said Antrobus with military

Have you claimed that £5 note?

precision, "and let us take him inside my house. I know him well."

The constable obeyed, and together the two men bore the helpless body up the drive.

In the meanwhile Caldecott had hurried down towards the cab-rank only to find that there was no cab there. An expression of annoyance crossed his face. "Confound it!" he said. "It won't do to leave things as they are. The fellow must be got inside a hospital before some philanthropic busybody comes along and spoils my game."

He walked swiftly back to the end of the road from where he could see all down the street in which he had left the policeman and his victim.

An oath escaped him. Save for a solitary pedestrian there was no one to be seen. Eric Monteith had disappeared and the constable with him. Where had they gone to?

He hurried back the way he had just come to run full-tilt against the policeman himself who was issuing from the gateway that led to Rosshire Lodge.

"What's this?" cried Caldecott.

"Colonel Antrobus has got the poor gentleman safe and sound, sir," answered the other quickly. "I'm just going for a doctor. Colonel Antrobus knows the gentleman quite well, and is going to keep him there instead of sending him to the hospital."

With a mighty effort Caldecott concealed the deep chagrin and hot rage in his bosom at this unexpected event. In a moment all his calculations were scattered to the winds. He knew full well that Eric had probably divulged the fact that he himself as the false Colonel Antrobus, had been laying siege to the girlish susceptibilities of Hazel Harlow and Jenny Lovelace. There might, of course, be a chance that such was not the case, but that Eric's visit to the Colonel had been merely a friendly one. If this was so the plot that he and Dimsdale had concocted to entrap Hazel might still be successfully perpetrated. He determined to hurry back to Dimsdale's house and have a hasty consultation with him as to their next move. There was little fear that Eric would recover consciousness for a good many hours.

It was past five when he reached Dimsdale's house. "Mr. Dimsdale was in his study," the footman said. "Shall I show you up, sir?"

"No," answered Caldecott, "I know my way perfectly. I'll run up immediately." So saying he sprang up the richly carpeted stairway, and made his way unerringly to Dimsdale's sanctum.

He knocked at the door. There was no answer. Unceremoniously he pushed open the portal and stormed inside the room.

Dimsdale was sitting at the desk set in a big bay window at the far end of the luxurious apartment. He was apparently engaged in writing. Caldecott hurried forward and laid his hand upon the shoulder of his partner in crime.

"Dimsdale," he cried hoarsely, "rouse up and stir yourself. If we are not careful the fat will be in the ——" his words died away into nothingness.

In Dimsdale's right hand in place of a pen, was clutched a small bottle. His other hand contained a sealed envelope. As for the man's face it had on it a look of ghastly that Caldecott recoiled with a cry of horror while beads of perspiration formed upon his forehead.

Dimsdale's eyes were wide open. They were glassily staring straight before him. The muscles of his grey-hued face were rigid and stiff. His face was contorted out of all semblance to himself, as though he had been seized by some terrible pain.

One look told Caldecott the truth. Jacob Dimsdale had gone to his last account. He had died by his own hand.

Even Caldecott, cool, calculating scoundrel that he was, was so unnerved by the ghastly unexpectedness of this terrible tragedy, that he could find no power of action to help him further. Stock still he stood and gazed with terror-stricken eyes upon the miserable wretch who had been goaded by his own conscience to take away the life he had misused. The terror deepened in Caldecott's heart as the full horror of what had happened possessed him momentarily with greater intensity. In another instant, impelled by a power of which he was scarcely conscious, he moved silently towards the door through which he had just come, and sped down the staircase into the hall below. There he found the servant who had only a few moments before admitted him.

"Go to your master," he muttered hoarsely, and before the astonished footman could recover from the surprise at his words and gestures, he had opened the front door and dashed madly, unthinkingly, away.

CHAPTER V.

Raymond Venables, the manager of *The Good Samaritan* Company, was in the box-office of the Theatre Royal, himself seeing to the sale of seats for that evening's performance. It was about six o'clock, and he was expecting the advent of Monteith, who had arranged to meet him at the theatre at about that hour.

Suddenly an elderly gentleman put his head in through the box-office window and asked courteously if he could see the manager of the company.

"I am the manager," answered Venables, his curiosity slightly aroused. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"I should like a private word in your ear," was the answer, and the old gentleman produced a card, upon which was written, "Lieutenant-Colonel C. Alister Antrobus."

"Will you come with me to my room?" said Venables courteously, and led the way to a private ante-room adjoining the stage of the theatre.

"I regret to tell you, sir," began the old soldier, "that a sad accident has happened to one of the members of your company, Mr. Eric Monteith, with whom I am intimately acquainted. He is at present lying in my house at Edgbaston, suffering from a bad concussion of the brain, caused by a dastardly assault by some unknown miscreant. The doctor tells me it will be some weeks before he will be fit for much again."

Regret was visible on every line of Venables's countenance at this piece of bad news.

"How did it happen, sir?" he asked quickly.

"I cannot tell you any more than I have done," replied the Colonel, "with the exception of the fact that a loaded bludgeon was found in the grounds of my house with which the blow was probably struck. There is no chance of his being able to act to-night, or indeed for a good many nights. I have a favour to ask of you and that is that you will let me have a word with Miss Hazel Harlow."

The mystification deepened on Venables's countenance.

"That is a request I can easily grant, sir," he answered. "I need hardly say how deeply I am grieved to hear such an accident has happened to Mr. Monteith. It

Look out for "Dead to the World."

is at least refreshing to know that he is in such good hands."

Hazel and Jenny were, as luck would have it, both at that moment within the theatre precincts. They were both much surprised to hear that Colonel Antrobus had called to see them without Jenny's uncle, for they were of course under the impression that "Colonel Antrobus" was the man who had invited them to supper that night, and whom they had met at Dimsdale's house.

Judge of their surprise then on being presented to the real upholder of the name of Antrobus, who was so very different from the man they already pictured as being the genuine Colonel.

So mystified was Hazel that the old soldier at once read in her countenance what was passing in her mind.

"You have been the victim of a cruel deception, my dear young ladies," he began kindly, and without further preliminary. "Some rascal has been masquerading under my name; for what reasons I won't pretend to know, but I much suspect that he is the same who has been responsible for the sad accident that has happened to Mr. Eric Monteith," and he forthwith proceeded to give a detailed account of how Eric had come to his house, had told him the sad story, and of the finding of the lifeless body of the young man outside his own front gates.

Jenny's first thoughts went to her uncle Jacob. What on earth could be the meaning of his part in this disgraceful affair? As for Hazel, her thoughts flew to her stricken friend lying so sorely wounded at the house in Edgbaston.

The Colonel road the sorrow in her face aright. "With Heaven's help we'll pull him round, Miss Harlow," he said fervently, "and remember it was for your sake."

Needless to say neither Mr. Jacob Dimsdale nor the pseudo-Colonel Antrobus turned up after the performance that night in accordance with the preconcerted plan. It was not till the next morning that Jenny and Hazel read in the paper the story of how Jacob Dimsdale had met his death. The following is a verbatim account of the dread occurrence:

"SUICIDE OF A BIRMINGHAM MANUFACTURER.

"A TERRIBLE STORY.

"Yesterday Mr. Jacob Dimsdale, the head of the great firm of electro-platers, trading in Regent's Place, under the name of Dimsdale and Company, Limited, committed suicide by taking laudanum. The reason for this terrible act is to be found in a confession written and signed by the late Mr. Dimsdale, admitting to a crime long forgotten, and for which an innocent man has already paid the penalty. It appears that when Mr. Dimsdale first started in business in Birmingham, he had been associated with a young man named Durnford. Both these two young men were greatly addicted to card-playing. A forged cheque was uttered, and the authorship of the crime traced to young Mr. Durnford, who had been hard pressed for money to pay his gambling debts. The young fellow was sentenced to penal servitude, and died in prison, stoutly maintaining his innocence to the last. In the confession found at the late Mr. Dimsdale's house by the police, is a full acknowledgment that his was the hand that forged the cheque for which Durnford suffered punishment. Our regrets and sympathy must be given to Mrs. Dimsdale, who was of course in total ignorance of the black affair that has proved to bear such terrible fruit. Mr. Dimsdale comes of an old and unimpeachable family. The bulk of Mr. Dimsdale's fortune is bequeathed to charities."

As for Horace Caldecott his part in the event that led immediately up to Jacob Dimsdale's death never transpired. Even his passion for Hazel was swamped by the memory of that last scene in Jacob Dimsdale's study.

His one idea was to leave Birmingham, to get away from the city that had been so fraught with incident for all concerned. The plan that he had conceived of ensnaring Hazel remained locked up in his own breast.

But if he had once got the helpless girl into the house that he had hired during his brief stay in Birmingham there is but little reason to doubt that he would have found some means of achieving his fell ends, those of getting the girl into his power, for by diabolical stratagem he had rendered Eric a non-combatant in the affair. It was destiny that had stepped in and over-ruled his machinations.

During the rest of the company's stay in Birmingham Hazel gave up all her time by day to nursing Eric, for a great sadness filled her heart. She knew full well that some time must elapse before Monteith could again take up his part as a member of *The Good Samaritan* Company, and she did not like to think of what life would be without the presence of the young man to cheer and sustain her, for although Love, the divine, had not yet been kindled in her heart, she had still a feeling for Eric such as she had for no other man. The true steadfastness of his nature, the unselfish devotion that had prompted him to give up so much for her sake, had won a hold upon her heart. She knew, moreover, that trials and tribulations still lay ahead of her. Young, beautiful, stainless as she was, she was nevertheless beset by foes who would leave no stone unturned to accomplish her undoing. Small wonder that the future loomed before her dark and forbidding.

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LOOK OUT FOR

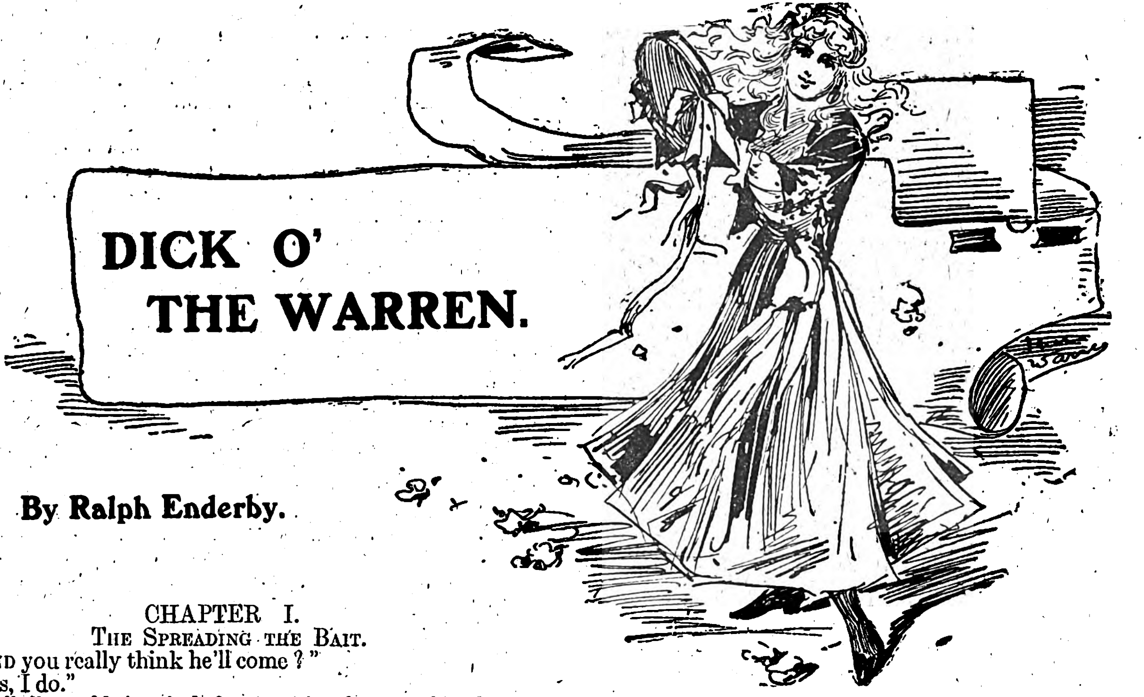
Mr. HENRY T. JOHNSON'S

great new story to follow

"The Golden Dwarf."

Look at page 432.

DICK O' THE WARREN.



By Ralph Enderby.

CHAPTER I.

THE SPREADING THE BAIT.

"AND you really think he'll come?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I wouldn't mind the wagering barest odds that he won't!"

"I'll take you! though it's almost like picking your pocket. Dick Westaway, whatever else he may be—dense, dull, and beastly rich—is, or was, rather, for neither you or I have seen him any time these ten years, punctual to a hair in everything."

"Yes, I know; but he mightn't be quite so dense or so dull now. These slow-witted fools, especially when they tumble into money, sometimes develop highly objectionable wariness and super-shrewdness."

"Sometimes, yes; always, no; and Dick Westaway will, unless I am very much mistaken, remain to the end of his days the blundering dunderheaded ass we knew him at Eton and at King's."

Archie Daunt, the last speaker, was not a man who most people would be inclined to accept at his own valuation, beyond that a general agreement must have been come to with regard to his cleverness—of a sort; cleverness most suspiciously akin to cunning.

Still, he contrived to appear, to the average person, the deft, tactful, pleasant man of the world. The best dressed man in town, people almost invariably forgot to notice the many silvery threads interspersed among the abundant fair hair; the faint, but sure signs of slowly advancing age. Eight-and-forty, if he was a day, Archie Daunt might very well have passed for ten years younger at the very least.

A close man; one who never, by any chance, revealed his own secrets, he was suave and smooth to a degree. With a smile ever, in public, on lip and in eye, both were as the unyielding gates to the real thoughts of the man, the very innermost workings of a dark and dead-cold spirit.

One man there was who knew him, or who, at least, approached as nearly to knowing him as such knowledge was possible.

This was Blair Anstie, his present companion, although even he oftentimes had his doubts as to the real value of his own estimate of his friend.

But Blair Anstie did not trouble himself much on this score. One of the easy-conscienced, "doesn't-mind much" type of individual, he let everything in life swing subservient to his own present peace and comfort—at someone else's expense. That it should have been at Archie Daunt's cost most men marvelled.

The two were always together, or, at any rate, not far apart. It was the elder man's habit of systematically "putting him up to a good thing" that kept Mr. Anstie's mill going and his head above water.

The good thing might not always be absolutely moral, or respectable, but, from the point of view of both of them, it served, and the toady's banking account was kept at solvent point accordingly.

When, many years before, the pair were professed tuft-hunters at Cambridge, Dick Westaway "came up" from Eton. They had known him there, but were never very enthusiastic about him.

In those days Dick was not a rich "possible," or with any reasonable prospect of ever becoming one; Daunt and Anstie, therefore, had no particular care for him.

The son of a fairly prosperous doctor in the West-end of London, Dick was four removes from the baronetcy and Yorkshire estates of Sir John Westaway, of "the Warren," near Ripley, by the river wharf. A boating accident reduced the intervening lives to two, and things stood at this when Daunt and Anstie ultimately left the University. Since then they had heard nothing of their quondam fellow "undergrad" till about a week previous to the above recorded conversation, which took place over late breakfast at Archie Daunt's chambers St. Margaret's Mansions, S.W.

It was a paragraph in the *Times*, first seen by Blair

Mr. Henry T. Johnson's new serial starts week after next.

Anstie, announcing the almost simultaneous deaths of Sir John Westaway and his two immediate heirs, apparent and presumptive.

This was followed by the information that the title and estates now descended to Richard Hoyle Westaway, next in succession, and now tenth baronet. It was added that the deceased's personality, all of which was bequeathed to Dick Westaway, amounted to, it was believed, over three millions sterling.

The consultation, consequent upon this news, between Daunt and his ally, was that morning long and earnest.

"Now, Blair, my boy, this is a gift from the gods," said Daunt impressively, "and accordingly as we work it so will the result be to us."

"As how?" queried the other.

"Simply, my dear fellow, by a reasonable revival of the ancient and gentle pastime of falconry, or hawking."

"I don't exactly see——"

"No, I don't suppose you do quite—yet, but when I say that a 'lure' will be needful to the due snaring of the quarry, why, probably, light will break for you—eh?"

Briefly a plan was arranged which should have for its object the renewing of old-time acquaintance with Dick Westaway, and the persuading him, if possible, up to town for purposes best known to themselves.

Daunt's first move in the game was to drive to the house of his sister in Alma Square, St. John's Wood.

"You know, Margot," he said persuasively, after he had explained the object of his visit, "I have no one but you to do the honours for me, and Dick Westaway is such a big swell now that I want the thing done in as good style as may be. You remember Dick Westaway?" he went on, "that shambling, good-natured young giant who persisted in making love to you the night of your birthday ball in Duke Street, just before the pater died."

"Oh, yes, I recollect him! and he is coming up to dine with you, you say?—poor fellow!"

"What do you mean?" said her brother, badly disguising an angry snarl, and uneasily gnawing his moustache. "I think it is *rich fellow* he ought to be called now."

"Of course! I was forgetting! And you wish me to head your table and play the hostess for you? Very well, I will do so. When is the feast to be?"

"To-morrow evening. Westaway is to be at my place at eight. Make yourself nice, there's a good girl—but there! you always do yourself credit."

"Thanks, Archie, awfully! And now that is settled I am going to be busy, and must turn you out."

Margot Daunt, in years twenty-seven, and one of the most beautiful women to be found in all London (which is saying much), had, up to this, failed in woman's one acknowledged mission, the finding a husband. There was no accounting for this, for she was in all ways formed to be the desire of a good man's heart and eyes.

She was gifted beyond the ordinary with the penetrative sense, and, with regard to human nature, could read where others scarce could spell. She had no very exalted opinion of her brother's character or pursuits, and so instinctively suspected danger for this newly rich but single-hearted young fellow, fresh as he was to all the allurements, so ready to the hand, and so daintily spread when money is plentiful.

But it was curiosity as much as anything else which influenced her to fall in so complacently with her brother's proposal.

She had a strange desire to see Dick Westaway again, why she didn't know beyond that she had a rather pleasant remembrance of her one-time boyish admirer. That she hoped by her presence to counteract any evil intentions Archie Daunt might have concerning his guest was certain, and when, on the morrow evening, her brother entered the room with the big, fair-haired young baronet, and introduced him to her, she told herself that she would see the thing through at whatever cost to herself.

"Do you know, Miss Daunt," said Dick gaily, "that I have never forgotten that birthday dance of yours. Things have changed since with me a bit, but with you—not an iota!"

"It is very good of you to say so, of course, but I must tell you that I never, on any consideration, allow compliments—they make me angry."

"Then I will not pay you another compliment, for, to speak honestly, I do not like them myself. By the way, what name do you think they've given me down at my place?"

"I really couldn't guess."

"No, I don't suppose you could. You are aware, perhaps that my place is called 'The Warren.' Well, the folk round about, only knowing me, on my visits to my uncle, as Master Dick, and sometimes Dick, when familiarity got the better of respect, have actually dubbed me 'Dick o' the Warren,' the veritable nick-name, if you please, of a certain notorious ancestor of ours, who lived uncleanly, and died shamefully, some two centuries ago, in Dutch William's time. How's that, Miss Daunt? The name is assuredly picturesque, but its application to myself isn't quite complimentary, is it?"

"Oh! I don't know," Daunt replied, seeing that his sister was inclined to, as he thought, take matters too seriously. "I don't know, Westaway; it's a good name, a name out of the common, so, as Trent says that dinner is served, I will ask you to take in my sister, 'Dick o' the Warren.' Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER II.

The Quarry Breaks its Wing.

In the little station-yard at Ripley stood a smart dog-cart and a roomy wagonette, in charge of a couple of grooms in dark livery.

"The six-eighteen's late," said he of the dog-cart.

"Is it? That don't matter much—we've done for to-day when we've taken this lot up. The master's with 'em, ain't he, Ben?"

"Yes. Hullo! 'ere she comes round the bend! Woa, fidget (to his especial quadruped), what's up with you? Know who's close handy, I suppose!"

The train ran in, out of it stepping a party of six, two ladies and four gentlemen, followed by a couple of maids.

"Deuced out-of-the-way place this of yours, Dick!" said Archie Daunt.

"D'you think so?" replied his host. "Well, I don't know; perhaps it's because I've known it, on and off, ever since I was a lad, but I hold it to be just the most perfect place under the sun; don't you, Miss Congreve?"

The lady addressed had settled herself comfortably, and to her entire satisfaction, in the only available seat in the dog-cart, which held two, besides the driver. She was a handsome woman, dark, with glorious eyes, and with a mouth which, though in shape and general expression such as alone would have turned the head of any ordinary man, still had about it something hard and unsympathetic. Her attire was ultra-fashionable, betraying, as it did, the

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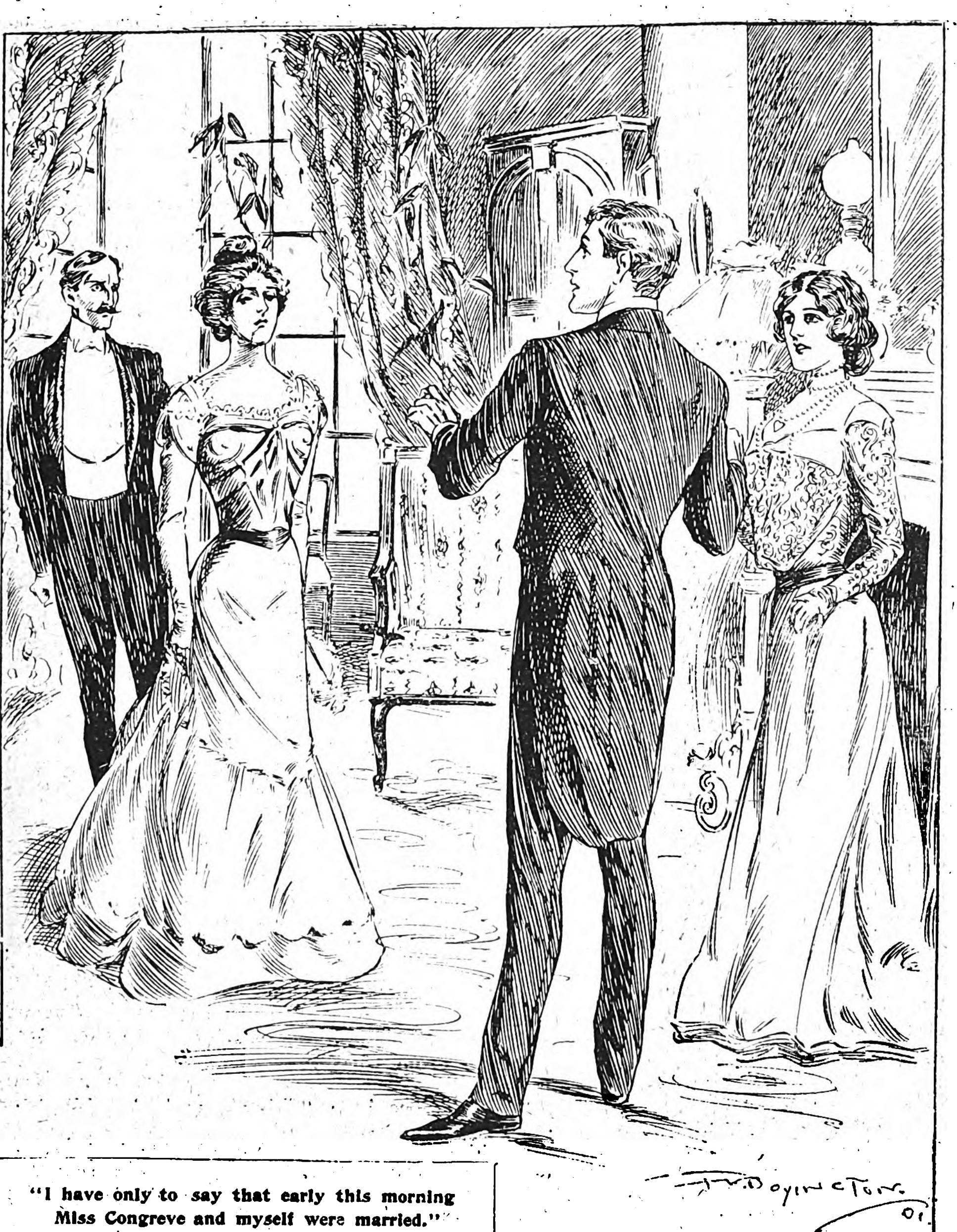

"I have only to say that early this morning Miss Congreve and myself were married."

undoubtedly theatrical taste of the wearer. "Professional"—of a kind—was writ large on every flounce and scrap of trimming; the young lady—she was not more than one-and-twenty—being, in fact, Miss Lilian Congreve, a leading London variety artist, and the especial friend of Mr. Archie Daunt.

Replying to Dick's appeal she said that it looked pretty, what she could see of it, but that she could express no definite opinion until she had seen her dog—her dear, darling Fido — safely disposed in the quarters assigned to her at "The Warren."

Margot Daunt eyed the little lady with undeniable, if furtive, disapproval. She herself would not have come but that she conceived Dick incapable of looking after his own interests, to guard which, as far as in her lay, she had constituted herself his devoted shadow. She felt her position in that company to be somewhat open to question, but would not abandon her determination to watch developments.

It was a jovial, merry party assembled in the old Yorkshire manor house, and Dick Westaway was the lord, if not of misrule, of something, at any rate, very much like it.

True, there was no viciousness in his boisterous boyishness, or in his enthusiastic catering for the amusement of his guests. He was just a happy - hearted, irresponsible king of sports.

Daunt and Anstie, while seconding in a well - bred superciliously tolerant sort of way their host's efforts, were not a little impatient that their scheme did not make the progress they, or rather, Daunt, more particularly, desired.

Then, a hint dropped by his sister, that she was not altogether ignorant of that which he contemplated for Dick's detriment, contributed to make Daunt at once uneasy and savage. Uneasy, as fearing to lose hold of his prospective prey, and savage, in that he had been fool enough to allow Margot so good a view of his ugly purpose.

Look out for "Dead to the World."

"Look here, Anstie!" he said one day to his satellite, when the two were enjoying the after-dinner cigar under a tree on the lawn: "We must hasten things a bit. Anyone—a blind man, even—can see that Margot is more than a little gone on Westaway, and that being so, she'll thwart us at every turn. I think, too, the fool likes her; but it's not my book to let him have her, for, knowing her as I do, once married or even engaged to him, and it will be good-bye to our chance for a share of the Westaway millions."

"Well, what do you propose?" asked Anstie. "You can't exactly order a woman of your sister's age not to encourage Westaway; and I'm sure it wouldn't be safe to try and drive *him*. He's wonderfully like, do you know, that portrait of old 'Dick o' the Warren' in the long gallery; and, I for one, shouldn't care to tackle him on a tender point."

"You're an idiot! You ought to know by this time, I think, that I never, upon principle, resort to force, save under extreme pressure, and we haven't arrived at that yet."

"And I hope never shall!" fervently remarked Anstie, between two dense ejections of tobacco smoke.

"Oh! And why not, pray? You're a cruel coward, Blair, my son! And if ever you back out on the emergency, and leave me to fight it single-handed, mark me! but I'll kill you! Yes, I'll kill you!"

Blair Anstie's cigar dropped out of his fingers on to the grass, as Archie Daunt bent over towards him, and looked him squarely between the eyes. Then the arch-conspirator sank slowly back into his former position, smiling that eternal smile of his, which boded ill for somebody, and which, somehow, always irritated the other, while it tended to frighten and to disturb him.

"Just pull yourself together!" said Daunt again, "and listen to me! You, as well as I, can see that Westaway won't touch the cards. There's only one way, then, by which we can now gain our end, and that is—through Lilian!"

"Well," replied Anstie, with a curiously meaning little laugh, "I fancy you won't have much trouble there. I overheard something last night which——"

"Spit it out! What?"

"Why, which makes it as clear as daylight that your game is being played for you; and in right good earnest, too, by the young lady herself."

CHAPTER III.

In the Snare of the Fowler.

The drawing-room at the "Warren" was an immense chamber, long, and with half-a-dozen big French windows facing the garden terrace.

The men are at billiards. Margot is in her room, and alone, with her hands idly lying in her lap, sits Lilian Congreve.

She has, somehow, lost that lightly-worn smile of hers, that trick of gay, reckless *abandon*, hitherto almost habitual with her.

She is talking to herself.

"Why," she says bitterly, "why should I run Archie Daunt's course? He doesn't know how I love this man!—that 'Dick o' the Warren' loves me! But he does, he does, for he has told me so; has sworn that I—the the daughter of 'old Bet,' the drunken orange-hawker of Drury Lane—the once little flower-girl of the Shaftesbury Fountain—am more to him than is the whole wide world. He is so big, so strong, and splendid, that how could I help but love him?"

"By just packing-up, my dear, and taking the next train for town," said a deliberate voice from behind her.

"Archie Daunt! You are well set to work, I think, to spy even upon my very thoughts!"

"You shouldn't speak them so loudly, then. But I've something to say to you, and as it intimately concerns you, I should strongly advise you to listen to me carefully."

She turned from him with an air of contemptuous indifference, answering him not a word.

"I have changed my mind during the past twenty-four hours," he went on. "You and I have been very good friends up to now; indeed, it was my intention to have done you the honour of making you an offer, but, as I have said, I have changed my mind."

Still she did not speak.

"I find," he continued, in even cutting tones, "on consideration, that your own evident plan will suit me quite as well, if not better. Now I am ready to help you, on one condition—that you help *me*."

"Help *you?*"

"Yes. You surely do not imagine that it was for your mere enjoyment and benefit that I got you here? or that you might *seriously* exercise your fascinations upon our impressionable friend—eh?"

Still silence.

"It was, as you very well know, that you might act as a foil to my precious sister, whom Westaway insisted upon inviting down here, and who is determined to put a spoke in my wheel!"

"You never spoke a truer word in your life, Archie!"

He turned sharply to encounter Margot, who had quietly come in at the window from the terrace.

"Now, Archie," she continued, "don't go, as you and I have something to say to each other. Nor you, if you don't mind, Miss Congreve; it may be as well, perhaps, that a witness should be present."

He threw the cigar he was smoking savagely out through the window, and lit another.

"I know," said Margot, "that you have deliberately planned to rob—don't interrupt me, please—to rob Sir Richard Westaway. I know that you already have, even in this short space, borrowed from him—or, shall we rather say, forced him to lend you—certain large sums of money. From what your friend Mr. Anstie has told me——"

"Oh! he has been talking, has he? Well, I will settle with him by-and-bye."

"I should advise you to be careful, Archie, how you proceed with regard to him, or, indeed, at all. You are my brother, but surely you have not in your veins one drop of my mother's blood! I will never forgive you for even suggesting to me, however indirectly, the bolstering up of your wretched scheme. Miss Congreve, I ask your pardon, but will you let me beg of you, if you are in any way cognisant—which I hope and believe you are not—of what is going on, to cease any further hand-in-handness with Mr. Daunt."

Lilian Congreve was not a bad woman. Frivolous she was, fond of display and admiration, but beneath it all there was a genuine under-current of true womanly right principle.

She stood up and looked Margot steadfastly in the face for half a moment.

"Miss Daunt," she at length said, "your brother, I

Look at page 432.

think, quite understands that any collaboration between us is impossible."

"I am glad!" Margot smilingly replied.

"But," continued the girl, a trifle unsteadily, "the fact which renders it more than ever impossible is, perhaps, not quite so well known to him. It cannot be told by me. Sir Richard Westaway must himself communicate it to you!"

"Sir Richard!"

"Dick Westaway!" Margot and her brother exclaimed in one breath.

"Yes, and as I hear him coming from the billiard-room, he no doubt will do as I wish."

"Hullo! Archie! Hullo! Miss Daunt! What's in the wind?"

Then his glance fell upon the figure of Lilian Congreve, whom at first he did not see, and who stood waiting for him to speak.

"Do you want me?" he said to the girl, his manner conveying to the others present—Daunt and his sister—an impression of studied confidence, and intense, if restrained personal feeling.

"Please tell them," was all she said.

"It was my intention," he said, after a moment's hesitation, "to have kept this matter secret until—well—until I had made certain private arrangements, which I considered necessary; but since this lady," taking her hand and lifting it to his lips, "has asked me to divulge it—for very good reason, I am sure—I have only to say that this morning, during an early drive, Miss Congreve and myself were married at Pately Bridge church, and that 'Dick o' the Warren' is a very fortunate as well as a very happy man."

CHAPTER IV.

Wounded and Free.

One morning all London was startled to its centre by the newspaper announcement of a terrible tragedy.

"Between half-past ten and a quarter to eleven last night, Lilian Congreve, the leading light of the variety stage, who, by mutual consent had, for the past five years, been separated from her husband, Sir Richard Hoyle Westaway, Bart., was shot as she passed to her brougham from the stage entrance of the Stadium. She died immediately.

"The man who fired the shot, and who is in custody on a charge of wilful murder, is a well-known man-about-town, of good family, but of somewhat shady reputation, one Archibald Daunt.

"The assassin made no effort to escape when taken, being calmly occupied in wiping the revolver with his handkerchief."

* * * * *

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Hear what the man says, as he stands in the cool of the tropical evening, with his arm round his wife's shoulders.

"Margot," he whispers, "had I never made my mistake, what would you have done?"

"That which I have actually done, I am afraid," she answers, smiling up at him. "Poor Lilian!"

"Poor Lilian!" echoes "Dick o' the Warren."

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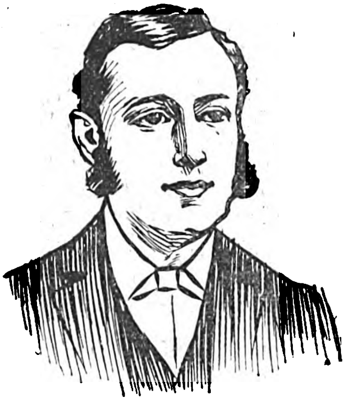

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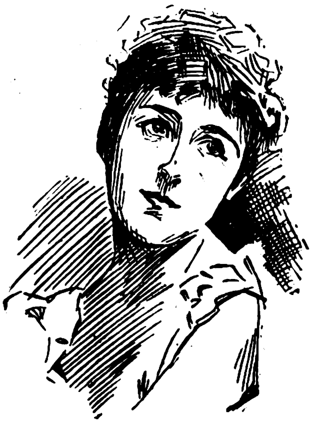

No. 7.

A farmer, whilst entertaining some visitors to tea, somewhat startled the company by exclaiming to one of the guests: "Stick in, man, stick in; Mr. Broon's twa scones aheid o' ye."

"You went right in boldly, did you?" "Yes, after looking in." "And you started ahead and asked the old man for his daughter?" "Well, no; I didn't." "Why not?" "He wasn't there."

Johnny: "Mother wants you to come to tea this afternoon." Miss Passee: "That's a nice little fellow; I shall be delighted. Did your mamma say anything else, dear?" Johnny: "Yes; she said she s'posed she might as well have it done with."

"Children," said the mother of the family, opening the door of the nursery and looking in, "what are you doing to Puggy that makes him yelp so?" "Ben's been using the curling tongs on his tail to make it curl tighter," explained Eunice.

"Charlie, dear," said young Mrs. Torkins, "the baby is trying to talk again. It's wonderful how he takes after you!" "What is he talking about?" "I think it must have been politics. He started very calmly, but in a few minutes he was as angry and red in the face as he could be."

Little four-year Harry was not feeling well, and his father suggested that he might be taking the chicken-pox, then prevalent. Harry went to bed laughing at the idea, but early next morning he came downstairs looking very serious, and said: "You're right, papa, it is the chicken pox, I found a feather in the bed."

His Reverence (at bush accommodation house for the first time): "When does the mail come here, Mr. Clancy?" Mr. Clancy: "It arl depinds, y' riv'rince. Whin there's a letter from our Moike in Western Arstraley, wance in thray months he arlwez carls, but if the letter's a paaper he trows it over the fince widout carlin."

A former vicar of a country parish not far from Sheffield was a distinguished mathematician, and took a high place in the Cambridge Tripos. One day a visitor to the village got into conversation with one of the parishioners, and the talk turned on the vicar. "Your clergyman," said the visitor, "is a very able man. Why, he is a wrangler." "I never heard that," was the villager's reply, "but his missus is."

"How much are these oranges?" said an old lady to a fruit dealer in the market. "Tenpence a dozen, mum." "And those?" "1s. 8d." "What's the difference between them?" "Tenpence, mum."

"Didn't you shoot anything at all, John?" "Yes; I got a fine bag of game, but it was stolen from me on the railway." "Well, never mind, John; you've brought home a bran-new story!"

"What did your wife say when you got home last night?" "Nothing." "Nothing? I can't believe that." "Don't blame you, my boy. Wouldn't have believed it m'self unless I'd been there."

Diner: "Come, tell me straight. Is it any real advantage to a man who gives you a tip?" Truthful Waiter: "Honestly, I can't say that it is; but it is apt to go hard with the gentleman that doesn't tip me."

Sharp Father: "I believe that handsome stranger has fallen in love with you, my dear." Extravagant Daughter: "Do you? Why?" Sharp Father: "I saw him gazing sadly at that expensive dress you have on."

"Never mind," said the poet, as he tossed a rejected poem on the floor, "I'll set the world ablaze yet." "And just to help you start the conflagration," said the better half as she picked up the aforesaid MS., "I'll light the fire in the cook stove with this."

A young Irishman once went to a kind-hearted old squire for a recommendation. An elaborate one was written and read to him. He took it with thanks, but did not move. "What's the matter with it?" roared the squire. "Oh, nothin', sorr," said the lad quickly. "Well, then, why don't you go?" "Sure, sorr, I thought on the stringth of a recommind like that, you'd be wantin' to employ me."

Photo Competition.

The names and addresses of the five photos which appeared last week are:—

Mr. Sydney E. Pridham, 58 Mary Arches Street, Exeter.
Mr. H. R. Pead, 58 Newington Green, Islington
Miss Rosa Tallanto-Leech, Blackdown, Fernhurst, Sussex.
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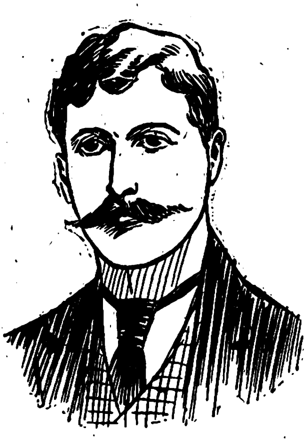

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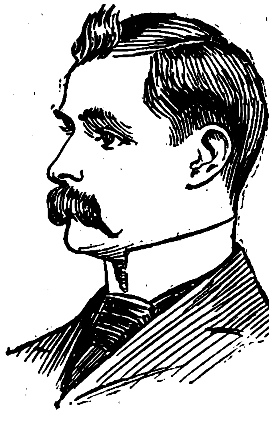

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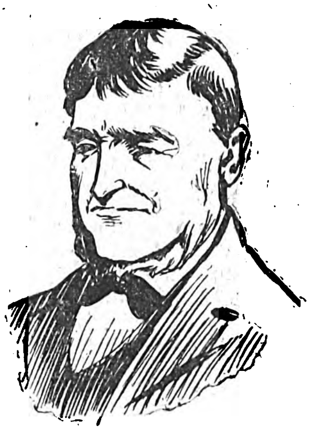


No. 10.

THE HOUSE WITH TWO DOORS.

A Mystery and the Manner of It.

THE PROLOGUE.

Early in the summer of 18—, all London was startled by the supposed murder of a man under somewhat strange circumstances.

The term "murder" is here used with a certain amount of reservation, as, although facts pointed, almost conclusively, to the commission of a great crime, there were not a few criminal scientists who doubted. They could put no theory in the place of that which they questioned; merely suggesting that the murderer, if he ever existed, must needs have been a consummate genius (in a homicidal sense), inasmuch as he had left behind him not even the faintest trace or clue by which the deed could be brought home to him.

Absalom Tighe, bachelor and millionaire, had lived for over twenty years in the dreariest retirement, in an old house on the London side of Edgeware. He kept but one servant, a middle-aged man-of-all-work, his household, such as it was, being supervised and cared for by his niece, Eva Tighe, a girl of twenty-two or thereabouts.

Men of Absalom Tighe's character and disposition often get a reputation for keeping large sums of money in the house—unscrupulous individuals, as often, acting upon the rumour.

When, therefore, the old owner of "The Hermitage" (he was nearly eighty) was one morning discovered by his niece lying with his throat cut from ear to ear on the floor of his sleeping-room, people's minds jumped at once to the conclusion that he had been murdered for as much of his money as there had been in the house.

Subsequent investigation proved, however, that nothing was missing; not even to the value of a single sovereign, or less.

The legal wits working upon the mystery made no headway, and were fain, in less than a month, to give up the chase.

A reward of £500 was publicly offered for the discovery of the criminal or criminals, but elicited nothing; and the "Hermitage" murder bid fair to, in course of time, take its place in the long list of undiscovered crimes.

After her uncle's funeral, Eva Tighe, suddenly and completely disappeared, going none knew whither. All that pertained to her in the shape of personal property she one night removed, without word or sign. The furniture and household belongings were, the week following sold by auction; and, the odd man being paid off—some said pensioned—by Mr. Tighe's solicitor, the house was shut up, pending its sale.

A certain young police recruit, one Paul Wreford at that time qualifying for detective duty, was struck with the curious mysteriousness of the affair. He, for one, did not credit the "murder" theory, "for," as he said at the inquest, where he gave evidence as having been called in by Miss Tighe on the morning of the discovery, "how came it that the razor with which the deed was undoubtedly done was found so close to the dead man's hand? The doctor states that the wound could not possibly have been self-inflicted, judging from, he says natural premises, and from the position of the body when found. That is as it may be — I have my own opinion."

"And that is——?" queried the coroner, blandly, but with just the suspicion of a sneer, expressive of the officer's youth, and presumable inexperience.

"My own," replied Wreford, boldly. "If ever I am to do anything in the solving and unravelling of this mystery, and though I am not officially told off for the duty, no one can prevent me finding out the truth, if I can; I say, if I am to do anything, my ideas and my methods must remain mine, and not the public's."

There was much girding at, and critical contempt for, this callow investigator in both official and lay circles, but he took little heed, and quietly went his way.

One thing troubled him not a little. It was the disappearance of Eva Tighe. For the moment it shattered alike his hopes and one of his most cherished theories with regard to this matter of Absalom Tighe's death.

He had only seen the girl once, and then but for a brief while. It was sufficiently long, however, to thoroughly impress her personality upon him.

"If," he argued with himself, "she knows anything about this thing; or if she herself did it, then I'll give up detecting. But first, to find her! Let me only see her; talk to her, and make her talk, and then perhaps I may find a clue to the death-dealing of old Absalom."

But Eva Tighe was gone beyond his reach, and he felt instinctively that unless chance or fate, or some other like thing, should ever throw her across his path, in some way at present absolutely unknown to him, he should never succeed in the object he had so much at heart.

CHAPTER I.

The policeman on the beat had watched the house for days, in obedience to official instructions; but as yet nothing had come of it.

The house was peculiar, for London almost unique.

Of but two stories in height, rambling, and in length excessive, it presented to the street its back walls only, pierced with four windows. The front of the house, the real front, gave upon a longish and lovely old-world garden, now a very wilderness of tangle and desolation. At one time the residence of an ancient Admiral, of the old school, dead these two years, it was now (had been in fact for more than a twelvemonth) occupied by a tenant whose face no man, not even the landlord, had ever seen.

The most curious feature about the house was its two street doors. Situated at some little distance from each other, they might easily have been mistaken for the respective entrances to separate dwellings. Strangers often made the mistake, but as knocks were never answered, it did not much matter.

It was the mysterious character of the then tenant that had at last set Mr. Superintendent Hastie thinking. He had heard it whispered that, although the house had been taken by some person in the name of Creeve, no one could say whether it was a man or a woman. Public opinion on the subject was about equally divided.

Look at page 432.

The same policeman who reported on Monday the issuing out on Sunday, just before midnight, at one door, of an elderly man, well dressed, but whose face, owing to the darkness, could not be discerned, on the very next night told of a *young lady*, fashionably dressed, but thickly veiled, who left the house about the same time, *by the other door*.

"You're sure," said the superintendent, "that it was a woman you saw to-night?"

"Yes," replied the constable. "I'll swear to it! They may say as there isn't two people living there, but I know better."

"Well, you may be right, and—you may not."

He touched an electric bell.

"Is Wreford in?" to the officer who answered the summons.

"Yes, sir."

"Send him to me. Look here, Davis" (to the constable), "you needn't worry any more about this business, except just to be ready if anything turns up. Ah! Wreford, you've nothing in hand, have you?"

"No—nothing much. Anything special?"

"'M—well, just an enquiry or two, that's all. All right, Davis—that'll do."

Davis would have dearly liked to stay and be taken into confidence. He had a feeling of being slighted.

Plain-clothes-man Wreford was a well set up young fellow of not more than three and twenty, though looking older. Tall, athletic, and more than passably good-looking, he had about him that air of genuine refinement which in the case of the average detective is usually lacking. The "bull-dog" spirit was there, but without the other and peculiar canine characteristics. Add to all this a kindly if keen grey eye, and you have the man.

"It's that house in Underwood Road—we've got to find out what's going on there."

"Do you suspect anything wrong, then?"

"Well, I do and I don't, if you can make that out; but the two are a bit jumbled. I won't tell you what to do, for I believe you're smart enough to act on your own."

"Thanks! You want to know who, what, and why. Well, I'll try and find out for you. Who's on the beat?"

"Davis."

"'M—yokel. Has he told you anything?"

"Yes; says that the night before last, Monday, about 12 p.m., an old gentleman came out of the door nearest to Gwydr Street, and that last night a young woman, fashionably got up, came out of the *other door* at the same hour. He saw neither of them return."

"Ah! only one person supposed to be in the house, is there?"

"So the landlord says."

"He ought to know; but landlord, like other people, don't know everything."

The young detective lost no time in getting to work and within half an hour was outside the mysterious house in Underwood Road.

His first action was ordinary—just a mere commonplace knocking at the right-hand door.

There were no steps, the door sill being on a level with the street pavement. On the left was a small, four-paned window, breast high, and about twenty-four inches square. This window appeared not to have been cleaned for months, its dirty panes needing no curtain to ensure privacy.

Paul Wreford, as became one of his profession, was a model of patience and deliberation.

His first summons having no effect in arousing attention, he knocked a second, and a third time. Still no result.

It then occurred to him to stroll quietly to the corner of Gwydr Street, along the left side of which ran, for some little distance, the boundary wall of the garden of "The Limes."

Turning smartly but stealthily back, and hugging the house wall, he stole silently up to the little window.

As he suddenly advanced his face to the dirty glass he was quick enough to see a pair of big, fierce looking eyes glued to the inside, and evidently trying to spy out the cause of the persistent knocking.

The eyes, on being met with those from without, did not remove for a second or two, enabling Wreford to mistily make out the face of a woman and a wealth of fiery red hair. Behind her was the dim glimmer of a flickering candle, which, while it threw the head outline into a certain amount of relief, did nothing towards revealing the interior of the place.

Wreford tapped at the window. As he did so, the light disappeared, and with it the face of the woman.

He tried to recall whether it were young or old, but for the life of him could not.

"I've seen those eyes and that hair together somewhere, surely," he said musingly to himself, as he walked slowly away.

He could only have reached half way to the Gwydr Street corner, when he heard a door slam violently, as if blown to by the wind.

Turning sharply, he saw the figure of an old man (at least, he appeared to be old), bent, and clad in a long, ulster-like garment reaching almost to his feet, move away from the *other door*, and proceed up the street toward the main road.

Wreford, though having no authority to stay the man or otherwise interfere with him, went rapidly after him. By the time, however, he reached the main road, there was not a trace of him.

He was lost in the hurrying throng of passers-by—vanished completely into space.

CHAPTER II.

In a room at the back of "The Limes"—the house in Underwood Road—looking on to the lawn, sat a woman by the open window. It was an old-fashioned "bow," taking up nearly the whole side of the room, and forming an alcove or divan, the very essence of cosiness and comfort.

It was getting dusk, and the few articles of furniture looked ghostly and weird in the gathering gloom.

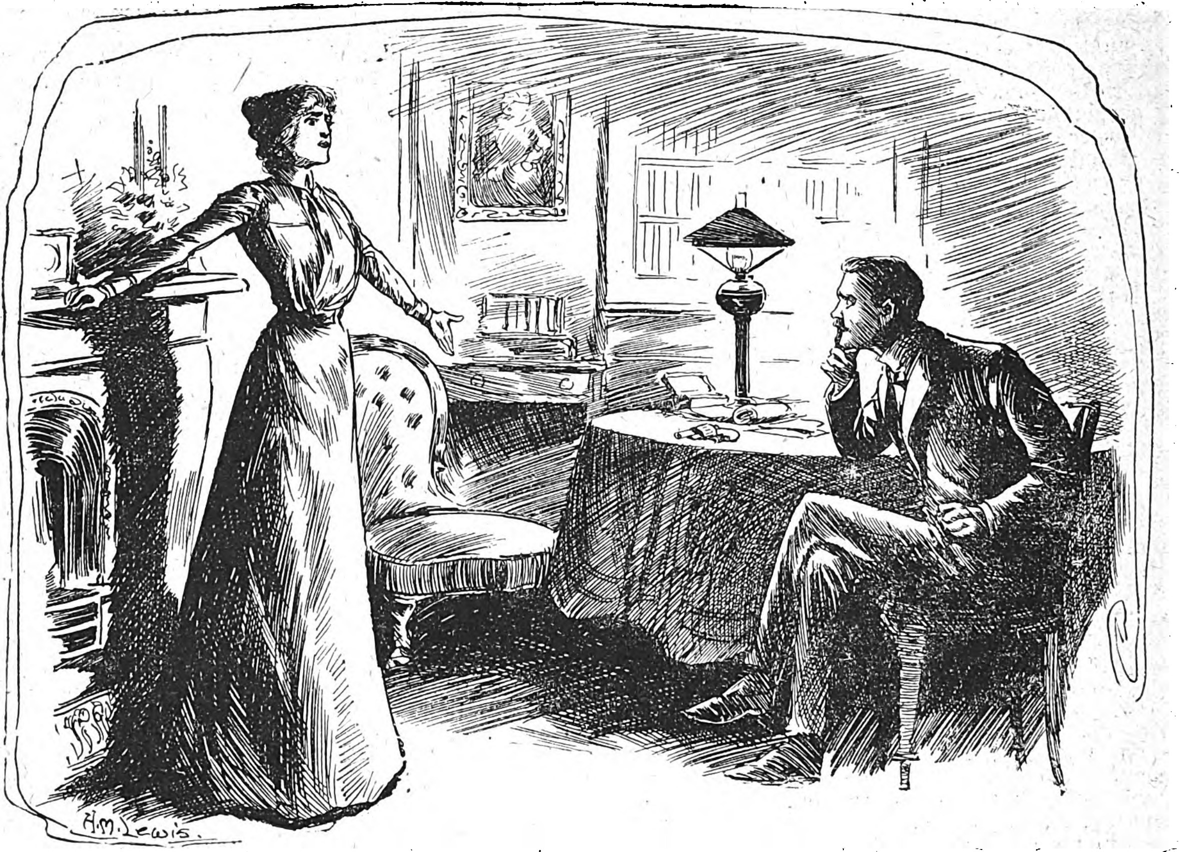
A large round table stood in the centre, upon it being a motley heap of papers, jewelled nick-nacks of all sorts, and, conspicuously handy, a tiny silver-mounted revolver.

The woman, even in the dim light, was noticeable for her mass of red hair, bound up in Grecian fashion with a large knot high up the back of the head.

Her eyes, too, compelled attention, by reason of the strange, unquiet look in them. Sitting in the twilight, with her chin supported upon her hand, her eyes gazing abstractedly out across the grass to the belt of trees at the bottom of the garden, she seemed as one who saw and heard things unrevealed to all other women.

Presently she broke the silence.

Mr. Henry T. Johnson's new serial starts week after next.



"You cannot? I thought all the world had long since made up its mind as to why I—Eva Tighe—had fled from the face of it."

"Why doesn't he come? Why doesn't he? Oh! he would if he knew!"

At that moment a knock at one of the front doors reverberated through the house.

The whole woman was transformed.

From her attitude of introspective depression she passed in a second to high-wrought, nervous agitation.

With a bound like a tigress she was at the table-side, the tiny revolver in her hand.

Then the knock was repeated.

Straining her ears as if to catch some sound she either looked for or dreaded, she crept noiselessly across the room to the door, which opened into the large square hall.

Right in front of her was the street door—the one, that is, nearest to Gwydr Street. Gliding up to it, she stooped and placed her ear to the letter-slit, listening intently.

Hearing nothing, she moved softly along a passage to her right, half way down which was the *other* street door.

Here, too, being conscious of no sound, or presence even, outside, she returned, and tried to peer out through the before-mentioned little window.

The deliberate heavy tramp of the passing policeman was all that she could hear.

Up to this she had struck no light of any kind.

It was while she was crossing the mat in the hall that she indistinctly saw lying upon it, immediately under the letter-slit, a white something.

Swiftly stooping and seizing it, she carried it tremblingly into the room she had but now left; turned up a lamp with a large dark shade toward the window, and opened a folded sheet of notepaper. It was a letter, hurriedly written in pencil.

"Eva," if ran, "I cannot keep my appointment with you to-night. *There are bloodhounds about.* You will know what I mean.

"Your house is evidently watched, so that whatever precautions you have hitherto taken to avoid recognition will, I fear, soon be useless. Personally, I am at a loss to account for all this hiding away, dear, when, as I believe, there is no need for it. Why will you not be open with me?—with me, who loves you so? When you so suddenly left 'The Hermitage,' immediately after uncle Absalom's funeral, I thought then, and I think now, that you did that which at least was unwise and imprudent. Had you confided more in me, and let me advise and see you, all this horribly unnatural state of things would never have been. Eva! you know that it was only poor uncle's death that interrupted our marriage. Are you going, dear, to make this marriage an impossibility? I will be here to-morrow night at the same time, and, if the coast be clear (though I quite refuse to acknowledge the necessity for it) will knock twice.

"Think over what I have said.

"Your own
"ALEC."

"What have I done? What have I done? Even you, Alec, are against me! Oh! God forgive me! if I wrong you—my own love!—my own love!"

With a cry, bitter with the wrung-out agony of helpless misery, Eva Tighe, letting the bright little weapon she still held drop out of her hand upon the table, sank into a chair, her face buried in her hands, and weeping as though her heart would break.

CHAPTER III.

"EVA," said Alec Hurst, when the terrified girl had feverishly shut-to the door, bolting and barring it with trembling hands, "at last I shall know what it all means. You will have to tell me, for this state of uncertainty and doubt is killing me."

For reply she led him into the same large back room where we first saw her. The window was closed now, a heavy curtain being drawn across it.

"And you live alone in this place, Eva?"

"I live alone in this place."

"But why—why?"

"You surely can divine why!"

"But I cannot!"

She was standing by the empty fireplace, one arm leaning on the marble mantelpiece, while he, in deference to her bidding, sat by the table, waiting for the words which should enlighten him.

"You cannot? I thought all the world had long since made up its mind as to why I, Eva Tighe, had fled from the face of it."

"Then I am not of the world," he said, wondering over her drift; "for the one thing concerning you upon which I have made up my mind is that I love you so that I would take you away—now!—this hour—if it were possible, out of this pernicious atmosphere of doubt and fear to some other country, where you could breathe the pure sweet air of content and happiness."

"Alec," and he fancied he could detect through the intervening shadow upon her face the faintest of sad smiles. "Alec! do you not remember how, when after dear Uncle Absalom died, people looked askance at me?"

"Great heavens! No! What are you driving at, Eva? Are you mad?"

"Sometimes I think, dear, that I am," and her voice sank to a low, sobbing whisper.

"Forgive me!" he cried, springing up, and holding out his hands towards her. "I know not what I said."

"Oh, yes, you did; and—you were right, perhaps. It would be kinder to believe me mad than to know that I sanely could endure such tortures as I do."

"But what do you fear?"

"Alec, ever since my uncle's awful death they have suspected me—sought for me—would take and kill me!"

"They! Who?"

"Those dreadful men! I know that one of them is close to me now. I know that only last night about this time he sought entrance here!"

"Eva! My darling! my promised wife! for pity's sake!—for my sake!—cast from you this dreadful cloud of darkness and despair! When, in my note yesterday, I said that 'bloodhounds were about,' my words had no definite intent or meaning. I did but wish to respect your reason for seclusion, whatever it might be."

"You cannot deceive me, Alec. I know now that you know. It was my last hope that you did not—the last straw to which I clung—your faith and trust in me."

Alec Hurst was a brave man and good; a man, too, whom any woman might have been proud to call husband; a man whose love would be as the one thing needful to a heart sore and empty, and craving that which was truest and best.

Being all this and, indeed, more, he could not, apart from his great love for her, but regard this woman with all that pitiful, protective tenderness her state so manifestly demanded of him.

"Eva," he said, very gently, yet with a firm purpose which she could not mistake, "listen to me. My answer to your terrible story is that I refuse, for one moment, to believe it. Say, rather, that I absolutely refuse to credit any man or woman with so great lack of wisdom and of heart as to put this awful suspicion upon you."

"But, Alec!——"

"Do not interrupt me, dear: I have but little more to say—until to-morrow. Briefly, then, put up all those things that you most value and be ready at nine o'clock to-morrow evening to join me at the main road end of the street, where I shall have a cab waiting."

"I cannot—I cannot!" she moaned.

"I will then drive you," he continued, as not heeding her deprecatory exclamation, "to my mother's. Once there, all will be well for you, and—for me."

He looked at his watch, saw it was getting late, and told her he must go.

As the street door closed behind him, neither of them saw the figure of Paul Wreford standing in the shadow at the corner of Gwydr Street.

Half an hour afterwards, the *other door* opened quietly and the shambling, long-coated figure of an old man slipped out, and, shutting the door carefully, shuffled down the street.

Quick as thought, the detective shot out from his dark retreat and followed.

This time the quarry did not escape.

A heavy hand laid upon the old man's shoulder provoked a piercing shriek that rang through the quiet street.

"Eva Tighe! I arrest you on suspicion of having killed one Absalom Tighe, at 'The Hermitage,' near Edgeware, some time on the night of June 17th of last year."

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Alec Hurst left the house in Underwood Road he had much to do.

Jumping into a hansom, he drove to his chambers in Victoria Street, and without tasting meat or drink wrote at high pressure for more than a hour.

At the end of that time there was a goodly pile of letters lying on his desk. These he himself took out to post, returning at once to his rooms. A slight meal, a glass of wine, and a pipe, and he turned in.

He was up again the next morning soon after six, and ordered his breakfast for eight o'clock. It was his usual practice to run through the papers during the meal, this morning being no exception to the rule.

It was a leaded headline in the *Telegraph* that suddenly drove back the blood from his heart and made him sick with apprehensive terror.

"THE EDGEWARE TRAGEDY.

"Arrest of Miss Eva Tighe.

"A startling development of this, well-nigh forgotten case, is the arrest, late last night, by Detective-Sergt. Wreford, of Eva Tighe, niece of the deceased man, on a charge of murder.

"The young lady is quite silent on the subject, refusing indeed, any communication whatever.

"It is expected that at the magisterial examination to-day there will be some highly sensational revelations.

"We hear, on just going to press, that Miss Tighe is completely prostrated, and that the police-court proceedings may, after all, have to be postponed. A curious feature of the arrest is that the prisoner was disguised as a man, wearing also a wig and beard of long grey hair."

Driving like a madman to the family solicitors, Alec quickly put things in train for efficient defence. Then, with the purpose of the night before stronger than ever within him, he made for the old house at Edgeware which still remained empty and unsold.

Arrived—having previously secured the key from the lawyers, who temporarily held them—he entered the deserted place.

It seemed to him like a vault, and as he made his way up the bare oak staircase his footsteps sounded hollow and eerie.

It was not an altogether blind man's search, this upon which he was bent. Wending his way to his late uncle's bedchamber, he carefully tested every panel to see if there was any chance of a hiding-place.

It was not money he was looking for, as all old Absalom's available cash, securities, and so on, had been duly accounted for by the solicitors.

Eva's portion—a not inconsiderable one—was lying waiting for her whenever she should claim it.

It was getting towards evening when Alec's painstaking was at last rewarded.

Close by where the bed had originally stood was a panel in the wainscoting slightly more worn than the others about the edges next to the raised bead.

For some time the young fellow could find no means of moving it; but when he was almost on the point of giving up in despair, his fingers came in contact with a tiny button, and the panel slid creakingly back.

In the black recess were papers without end.

Another hour was spent in going over these by the light of a small hand lantern he had brought with him.

"Thank God!" he at last exclaimed, so loudly that the mice behind the wainscot squeaked and scampered again.

It was but a folded sheet of ordinary notepaper.

"I have nothing to live for. As did my father before me, so have I decided to do. I write this in the event of trouble arising to anyone through this my act. I die without regret. Eva will be the better for my death. She will marry Alec Hurst, and soon forget

"Absalom Tighe."

That night, late, an excited, unreasonable man knocked up the senior partner of Parker, Hyde and Co., who, in his turn, paid a late visit to the magistrate who, in the natural course of things, would hear the case on the morrow.

An appeal, then, to a still higher authority speedily procured poor Eva's release; the only dissatisfied person being Detective-Sergeant Wreford, whose knuckles were duly and somewhat sharply rapped by his superior in that he had exceeded his duty and brought disgrace upon his, Mr. Superintendent Hastie's, district administration.

* * * * *

Mr. and Mrs. Alec Hurst are, it is believed, in permanent residence now somewhere in California, in which delightful State they have an ideal home.

* * * * *

The house in Underwood Street, Kensington, is "To Let."

Ralph Enderby.

HIS ONE LOVE DREAM.

It lasted nearly one day, and he thinks he escaped very easily.

Nine o'clock of a lovely April morning, with the air breathing soft scents of budding grass and early spring violets, while overhead the blue sky stretched its dazzling dome, like an arch of glittering sapphire.

"It's spring in good earnest," said Mr. Petro Peterson, as he sat at his window, his heels poised on the extreme outer ledge, and a fragrant cigar perfuming the surrounding atmosphere. "Heigho! I can almost fancy how the dandelions are starring over the hills of the old New Hampshire farm where I was born. Who would think that it was the 26th of April already? And my house not let. What can the real estate agents be thinking of?"

Mr. Petro Peterson was a stout, bald-headed gentleman of some six-and-forty years of age, with bright hazel eyes, and a neat, compact little figure—one of those men whose very air and gait, even though they were never to speak a word, make the perpetual proclamation: "I am a man of money and position!"

"I don't see why Mrs. Parker wanted to give up the house," went on Mr. Peterson, in his unsyllabled soliloquy. "She says it's because the price of board is falling, and she can't afford to keep up the establishment! A great mistake of hers in my opinion—a great mistake! She's the only woman I ever knew who could make a real French omelet, or knew what *café noir* meant! I'm almost tempted to wish—almost I say—that I had married some nice, sensible little girl twenty good years ago; for—dear me, what can all that ringing at the bell mean? Why don't Mrs. Parker answer it?

Look at page 432.

Do the people mean to pull the wire out bodily, I wonder ?"

He had just tossed his cigar out of the window, with the intention of himself hastening to the rescue, when a servant girl came up to his apartment, breathless and eager..

"What is it, Hannah ?" he cried irascibly.

"If ye please, sir, the mistress is gone to market, and there's no one to show the house. I told 'em would they call again, but they said perhaps Mr. Peterson would oblige 'em !"

"Very cool of 'em, upon my word !" cried Mr. Peterson, mentally execrating the whole race of house hunters.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Peterson," cried a voice as soft and sprightly as the notes of the bluebird, "but mamma and I have so many places to go to, and we thought you wouldn't mind our seeing the house !"

And Mr. Peterson's wrath melted away like a morning vapour before her pretty insolence of demeanour, as she stood in the doorway, balancing a fairy parasol on her finger, and looking with saucy artlessness round his bachelor sanctum, while Mrs. Cope's matronly countenance appeared in the background.

"You can allow us the privilege of looking at your house," said Jeannie coaxingly. "I—that is, mamma has got to move, and although the rent of this house must, of course, be very high, she thought, by taking a few boarders she might contrive to meet expenses !"

"Exactly so," said mild Mrs. Cope.

"Are you going to move elsewhere ?" asked Jeannie of our hero, as she glanced at the half-packed trunks.

"My landlady is," groaned Mr. Petro Peterson. "It's awful to be at the mercy of a landlady, Miss Cope !"

"But it's all your fault !"

"All my fault ?"

"To be sure—why didn't you get married ?"

"Because I was a fool !"

"And why don't you get married now ?" pursued the relentless little sprite.

"Would you," questioned Mr. Peterson gravely, "if you were I ?"

"Of course I would. Get married and board with us. Mamma will give you this room, and——"

"My dear !" checked Mrs. Cope gently.

"My dear madam !" cried Mr. Peterson, still with his eyes fixed on Jeannie's lovely face, "I assure you I think it is an excellent idea !"

And all through their journey from cellar to French roof, while Mrs. Cope considered the relative advantages of this room and that, Mr. Peterson kept revolving this same "excellent idea" in his mind.

"Miss Jeannie," he said, somewhat awkwardly, as they turned downstairs, "supposing I should—ahem—adopt your suggestion, what would be your fancy in furnishing a suite of rooms ?"

"Let me see," said Jeannie, looking composedly around, "I'd paper the room in white and gold, and I'd fill the windows with canary birds and plants , and I'd have a blue carpet and blue silk chairs and sofas."

"Mrs. Cope, if you should decide to take the house, you will please reserve these rooms for me, and—and Mrs. Peterson, ma'am, at ten pounds a week."

"I shall be very happy, sir !" said Mrs. Cope. "Jeannie, stop laughing ; you behave exactly like a little school-girl. You will give me till to-morrow morning, sir, to decide ?"

"Certainly, ma'am—certainly."

As he turned, after seeing them off, already in imagination leading Jeannie Cope to the flower-decked altar, a slender, good-looking young man of some four or five and twenty stood beside him.

"Good morning, uncle," he cried breathlessly.

"Good morning, Joe," returned Mr. Peterson, nodding to Mr. Joseph Franklin, his only nephew. "What brings you here in such a hurry ?"

"Is your house let yet, uncle ?"

"Yes—no—I don't exactly know," responded Mr. Peterson, a little awkwardly. "What does it matter to you whether it is or not, hey, you young scapegrace ?"

"Much, sir. To tell you the truth, I was thinking of renting it myself."

"You !"

"Yes, I. I'm going to be married next week, uncle."

"A very sensible plan," said Mr. Peterson beamingly.

"I'm glad you approve of it, sir, and, in case my wife and I conclude to take a few boarders, can I have your promise to consider you as one ?"

"That is, in case you take the house ?"

"Yes."

"I can't promise ; in fact, I think I've already engaged myself," said Mr. Peterson, importantly. "To speak frankly, Joe, I've some idea of marrying myself."

"You, uncle ?" exclaimed Franklin, in amazement.

"And why not ?"

"There's no reason on earth why you shouldn't uncle," responded Joe, smothering a laugh ; "only, you see, you took me rather by surprise. In that case, why shouldn't we have the pleasure of accommodating both Mrs. Peterson and yourself ?"

"Because, sir," said Mr. Peterson sententiously, "because my mother-in-law that is to be takes boarders, sir—a few boarders in a genteel sort of way, and I've all but promised myself to her."

"And if you should make no other arrangement you will let us have the house ?"

"Y—yes, I suppose so."

"There can be no harm in my bringing her to look at the house this afternoon after office hours ?"

"No, I suppose not."

He was making a little pencil estimate about the probable cost of refurnishing the apartments he occupied with velvet and satin, according to Jeannie's not particular economical ideas, that same afternoon, when Joseph Franklin entered, flushed and proud.

"Uncle," said Joe proudly, "this is my promised wife. Jeannie, this is Uncle Petro Peterson."

"Jeannie Cope !" gasped the astonished bachelor.

"You'll give me a kiss, uncle, won't you ?" said Jeannie, putting up her coral lips in the most bewitching way in the world. "I said it was mamma this morning ; but it was really Joe and I that wanted the house."

"It was, eh ?" said Mr. Peterson, with a curious commingling of sensations.

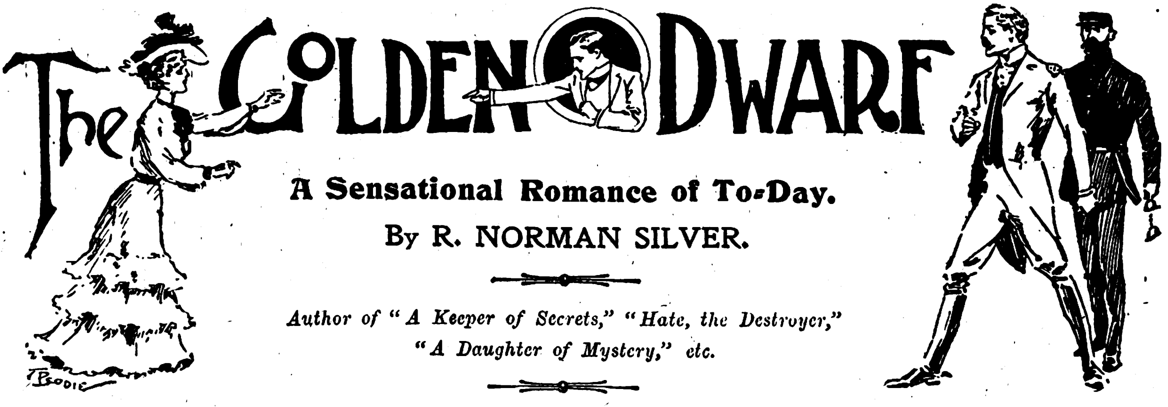
"Yes, and you know you promised to get married and board with us. He did, indeed, Joe."

"I was only joking. Married, indeed,! I'm not such a fool yet. I'll stay here, but I'll not refurnish the rooms this year."

So the bill was taken off the front door ; and Mrs. Joseph Franklin has learned to make an omelet that suits the fastidious taste of her uncle-in law.

"And it's just as well that Fate saved me from making a fool of myself," says Mr. Peterson exultantly.

Mr. Henry T. Johnson's new serial starts week after next.



The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

CHAPTER XLI. (*continued*).

"I don't want nothing for what I've done," she declared; "I was sorry for the kid—a real good 'un, he were, and a perfect gentleman, though a mere baby, as you may say. But I ought to tell you as she called him Jack, and clumped him when he told her it wasn't his name. Tell me who he really was, won't you, sir?"

Felix shuddered to think of the cruelties at which the servant-girl hinted. "His Christian name was Brian," he said; "just now I must not reveal his surname—you shall learn it some day. For the rest I want you to do me another service—and that is to direct me to a second-hand clothier's. I must cover up my tweeds and riding boots or I shall be guyed in the East End, as if I were a Punch and Judy show. While I buy a long overcoat, I'll get you to keep an eye on my prisoner, she musn't escape till I know where to pick her up again."

He had stooped and was taking off his spurs as he spoke—it was the one safe occasion on which he had remembered their existence.

"There's a place round the end of the next street," said Louisa; "Ill sing out to the cabby." And she thrust herself bodily through the window, to shout a few sentences in her broad Cockney. The vehicle swerved, turned at a sharp angle, and increased its speed, to halt before a tiny establishment, one of the few still lighted in the depressing quarter they were penetrating. It was a Jewish slop-shop.

Felix descended, went in, and purchased a soiled Newmarket of fawn cloth; it reached, as he donned it, nearly to his heels. When he regained the four-wheeler, the baby-farmer was still slumbering, Louisa sitting sentinel.

"I'm off now," she decided; "I must scoot back, or I'll get the sack, without any wages. 'So-long' and good-luck sir." And, nodding cheerfully, the little servant vanished in the gloom.

Felix ordered the puzzled driver to proceed, and re-entered the cab. The old crone, huddled on the front seat, apparently slept. Felix permitted her to snore until they drew towards the end of their journey. As they passed into Whitechapel-road, the quarter to midnight chimed out from an adjacent church-tower, and Felix, touching, with a certain reluctance, the grimy form of his companion, wakened her by force.

She stiffened herself and stared wildly around—there was no doubt she had been genuinely in the arms of Morpheus. "Who are you," she faltered; "and where am I?"

Her escort pointed out of the window. "I promised your friends to see you home," he answered; "as you may perceive, you are on the way thither."

Mrs. Dobson blinked at him. "You take a mighty interest in me," she snapped.

For reply, Felix produced the sovereign he had uselessly offered to Louisa. He struck a vesta and held up both the light and the coin. The sunken eyes of the baby-farmer gleamed.

"This child you were given," he said; "it had reddish hair, had it not?"

The other snatched at the piece of money. "It had," she owned, with her cackling laugh; "but the red was dye—they couldn't trick me in that way He-he!"

A further golden coin was shown her in the glow of a flaming vesta.

"You got rid of the child to go abroad?" he said; "now tell me exactly all the circumstances of that bargain and I will pay you five more of these."

"He-he," quavered the old crone; "a fool and his money are soon parted. Well, if you'll buy, I'll sell!"

The baby-farmer was interrupted by the halting of the cab—they had attained their destination. Mrs. Dobson tottered to her feet.

"Come in," she said; "and you shall learn what you want to know. And I'll not have you robbed or murdered, because you're a gentleman. I can hear it in your voice, the sort of voice I haven't heard for sixty years, when I was a pretty girl in the country and had many a soft word from the quality sparks."

Felix dismissed the cab and followed the baby-farmer into her mean abode. She preceded him into the wretched kitchen and put a match to a candle-end. Upon the visitor's gaze there burst the squalid horrors of the place, the damp, foul floor, the filthy infants, drowsing in the heavy torpor of exhaustion the crawling vermin, the shattered panes that gaped to the autumn night.

The baby-farmer stamped out the remains of the match and approached him unsteadily.

"He-he," she said; "it's a queer tale, and worth the money. In all my old life I never saw the like. I was paid to hold my tongue, which was always providing I wasn't paid to wag it. So you shall be the wiser and I the richer. He-he!"

She rested a skinny hand on the back of a damaged chair and began to whisper. The candle-end spat and guttered and Felix Dering listened—amazedly.

CHAPTER XLII.

Mr. Brasher Goes on the War-path.

"I do not expect you to assume for me a love you do not yet feel. But there is a difference between a slight lack of enthusiasm and a frigidity which verges on the statuesque. Your demeanour is not flattering to your future husband, Esther."

Have you claimed that £5 note?

And Otto Hare, with a sudden scowl and a tempestuous outburst of passion, lashed at the trotting roans. They broke into a wild gallop.

Esther Carew shivered, not so much at the spurt of terrifying speed or at the Golden Dwarf's vicious display of temper, as at the sound of her name upon his lips.

Otto Hare dragged the cobs into their trot again, and put by the whip. "I do not know, Esther," he went on, "whether you have actually given Dering an explicit dismissal. If not, it would be as well to do so. He must leave Wyresdale, that is flat; his presence here can only be disturbing to you and irritating to me."

The girl beside the Golden Dwarf knitted her gloved hands. "I—I have not seen Felix—Mr. Dering—for some time," she faltered, "and I—I only promised to—to marry you yesterday. But I could not face him now; I dare not tell him I have been false to him, even though it was for his own sake."

Otto Hare sneered. "Have the goodness not to remind me," he requested, "of your absurd interest in Dering. Otherwise I may cancel the bargain you view so ungraciously, and, instead, pursue a policy of revenge. In that case I shall effectively deprive you of Dering, and you will receive a gratifying public sympathy as the romantic maiden who loved the notorious Wyresdale murderer."

Esther's delicate fingers gripped one another in a desperate effort at self-control. "You—you are horribly cruel!" she stammered.

The Golden Dwarf laid a tiny palm upon her arm, grasping it like a vice. "I could kill you," he muttered, "when you mention Dering—kill you myself by lingering degrees. Esther, I love you to distraction, and the measure of my love is the measure of my jealousy. To win you I have had to make a certain agreement with you: did you not love Dering and desire his safety above all things you would not have consented to marry me. If you wish me to observe our contract teach me to forget that it was ever made. Were you a fraction less beautiful, I would kill you—first—and revenge myself on Dering afterwards."

His small features glared distortedly into hers, she felt his hot breath upon her cheek, and shrank from him, recognising that in the Golden Dwarf's diminutive body two awful emotions struggled for the mastery, and that on the issue of this struggle hung the fate of Felix Dering. She fought for the power to bend her proud spirit—since her lover was in danger—and a weak smile crossed her pale countenance.

"I suppose I must be glad, then, that I am presentable," she said, attempting a jest.

Otto Hare looked at her, a gleam of madness in his contracted pupils. "How lovely you are!" he exclaimed; "if you would smile upon me oftener you could mould me to your will, whatever it might be."

Esther trembled at the extravagance of the sentiment that spoke in his accent. "I—I have only one wish just now," she replied, "and that is to be taken home. Your horses go so fast, they frighten me."

The Golden Dwarf drew rein immediately, and the cobs relapsed into a walk. "See," he declared, "how they obey your least command; they and all I have are yours. Which reminds me—your mother says you have not ridden the mare I gave you. Believe me, she is worthy of a better destiny than your old groom's exercise canters. One of these days I will ride down to the Rosery and you shall go for a gallop with me."

He shook up the roans as he made this promise and turned their heads towards the white villa. "If I have seemed a trifle harsh this afternoon, Esther," he said patronisingly, "I trust it is for the last time." He patted her soft fingers with his whip-hand. "We shall be very happy, Esther," he added, "when we are man and wife. You will spend thousands where other women spend hundreds; you will have the finest horses, the smartest dresses, the most luxurious establishments, and, on the whole, the most devoted of husbands."

With this prophecy he checked the roans at the Rosery gate and alighted in order that he might help her to descend. Then, opening the wicket for her, he watched her go up the gravel path and waved an adieu as she disappeared into the hall.

Esther heard the rattle of the phaeton wheels die away before she stole, numbed and dizzy, into the drawing-room. Someone advanced to meet her, someone tall and stalwart, with a quiet yet affectionate gravity. This someone was Felix Dering.

"At last," he said, almost gaily, "you see me again under your own roof. Barbara told me, though, I admit with reluctance and a spice of mystery, that you were out driving, and I insisted on waiting. Esther, the shadow begins to lift. I have great news for you."

Esther gave a sharp cry and retreated. "Don't come near me," she whispered, "you'll hate me when you know what I have done. I'm not yours any longer. I—I am to be married to Mr. Hare."

Felix staggered. "Esther," he cried, "what magic have they used to make you yield? Did I not urge you to believe nothing you were told; did I not write to you that I was on the track of the real mystery of my uncle's death. Did I not bid you be hopeful, since the darkest hour was over, and the dawn in sight?"

Esther sank into a seat. "I could not hope," she sobbed; "Mr. Hare brought a man here who assured me he had seen you in Wyresdale that night in July at the cross-roads. Mr. Hare gave me the choice between marrying him and allowing Mr. Garland to go to Inspector Brasher. Mr. Garland, he said, would keep or reveal your secret as he wished. I could not let you be ruined. Everyone would think you guilty, after you permitted them to believe you were in Duchester all the while."

Her lover was staring at her, astounded. "So that was Garland's purpose in calling here," exclaimed Felix Dering; "good heavens, now I understand all. He was Kraft's tool in a double sense, but for the same object—to separate us. Esther, my darling, your sacrifice is to no end and shall not be consummated. I would save you not only at the cost of my reputation, but my life, if need be. Yet neither is necessary. At length I can prove my innocence—Esther, I have discovered how my uncle died, and who killed him."

Incredulous of her own ears, Esther sprang up. But there was no mistaking the sober self-possession of her lover's face. He carried his shoulders well back and his head was borne proudly—she perceived in every lineament the consciousness of freedom and security. As he flung his arms about her she sank into them and pillowed her fair curls upon his breast. A great peace filled their hearts, so loyal and so long-suffering.

A sudden peal at the door-bell of the Rosery interrupted them. Barbara's feet hurried through the little hall outside and they heard her voice in colloquy with the visitor. There was a heavy step on the threshold, the latch whined, and Michael Brasher strode into the drawing-room. The lovers had moved apart at the first intimation of a call, and Mr. Brasher, stalking deliberately between them, cleared his throat.

"I arrest you, Felix Dering," he proclaimed, "on the charge of procuring the abduction of your cousin, Sir Brian Dering—a child under the age of fourteen years—and also with aiding and abetting in the said abduction. It is my duty to warn you that anything you say may be taken down and used in evidence against you. I have a cab in readiness," added Mr. Brasher, subsiding into his usual manner, "so if you will come quietly, there need be no fuss for the present."

He made a peremptory motion and a couple of con-

Look out for "Dead to the World."

stables, who had posted themselves at the entrance of the apartment, stepped forward. Barbara had darted to Esther's side immediately upon the disclosure of Michael Brasher's mission. But Esther was gazing, in an agony of apprehension, at Felix Dering.

A half smile played about Felix's mouth. "Very well, Inspector," he said, "I suppose I must consider myself your prisoner. I am afraid, however, that this is not one of your lucky cases. You are on the wrong scent again." He turned to Esther and his unruffled bearing comforted her, despite the abruptness of this new and crushing blow. "Adieu for an hour or two, dear," he murmured, reassuringly, "till I convince the worthy Mr. Brasher he was not born for a detective."

He took up his hat, nodded to her cheerfully, and fell into line with his escort in blue. Michael Brasher marched his men and their captive out to the Rosery gate, installed them in a fly, gained it himself, and was rattled off, the incarnation of official calm, towards Wyresdale police depôt.

Once Felix, tickled at the Inspector's stern reserve, asked a question, "May I know," he inquired, "the immediate reason for this action."

Mr. Brasher shook his head. "I'm not at liberty to give you any information," he said briefly; "you cannot be brought before the magistrates until to-morrow, so you may be sent to Duchester over this evening. I have wired for instructions, but you can communicate with a solicitor, if you wish."

Felix laughed. "No more trusting the strong-room after Spencer's escape?" he queried. Michael Brasher blushed and was silent.

Reaching the police-station, Felix was guarded into the office, the charge formally booked, and the accused searched. Then Mr. Brasher glanced about him uneasily.

"There's a drunk and disorderly case in the cell," he said: "I'll make you comfortable in my private room if you'll let me slip a pair of irons on; you'll be less public so, till the reply comes from Duchester."

The prisoner held out his wrists and the steel bracelets snapped upon them. He was marshalled into the indicated chamber and a constable lit a gas bracket—for the autumn day was beginning to close in. As an afterthought, Inspector Brasher opened the hand-cuffs, re-adjusted them through the stout arm of a wooden chair, and Felix Dering was fairly hobbled.

"Can I wire for any lawyer?" inquired Michael Brasher, as he prepared to leave.

"No, thank you," answered Felix: "my solicitors are a Duchester firm, and if I am to go there I can send to them later. It will prevent a double journey and possibly confusion."

"As you choose," retorted the Inspector and went out, locking his important captive securely in.

Hardly had the lock clicked than there came a tapping at a door, which, to all appearances, divided the room from another and neighbouring one. It was a singular, impatient summons, and it was followed by a cautious whisper.

"Is that you, Felix Dering?" said a woman's voice, thin and piercing; "it is Judith Garland who speaks to you."

Felix twitched himself close to the door whence the question emanated. "I am Felix Dering," he responded, "and alone. Why on earth are you near me?"

"I also am arrested," replied the voice. "Neal has turned informer—they must have got on his track, somehow. At least so I conclude from what I wheedled out of the fool Brasher. He told me guardedly, 'Your brother has made a certain confession and your other accomplice will be in custody in half an hour.' When I heard you speak to Brasher a moment ago I guessed everything."

The listener drew a deep breath—in a flash he comprehended the purport of the letter that Neal had written and of his mysterious merriment over it. By now Mrs. Schwartz and her lodger were out of England, and a skilful plan to revenge himself upon Judith (doubtless for the supposed "blabbing," which had so excited his anger) had been put into effect. He started from his meditation; Judith was whispering again.

"I was not able—for my own sake—to destroy the cheque you had made out for Neal, and which I have kept with a purpose. Brasher has it—Neal must have put him on the scent of it. It will go against both of us. You see, Felix Dering," she continued, "I make you smart at last, even in my defeat I drag you down. If Neal has not given you away over your uncle's death I will—I still have the bloodstained links. How your pretty Esther will enjoy her notoriety and your ruin!"

Felix recoiled from the barrier through which penetrated the vindictive sentences. As he did so the door at his back was unlocked and pushed wide. Michael Brasher entered—an embarrassed expression on his bearded lips. He crossed to his prisoner and unfastened the hand-cuffs.

"Will you please come this way, Mr. Dering?" he said, and his accent was both nervous and respectful. Surprised at the 'Mr.' and the change in Mr. Brasher's demeanour, Felix rose and followed him into the outer office.

A thrill of amazement struck him. Sitting in the sergeant's chair at the charge-desk—rather weak and wan—was Edward Spencer, the missing groom accused of Sir Christopher Dering's murder. Near him stood Archibald Geddes, in his shirt-sleeves, and carrying a bundle composed chiefly of his own coat. From an extremity of this bundle projected a childish head, parti-coloured gold and auburn. And the wasted cheeks and delicate brow beneath the strangely-hued locks were those of—Brian Dering.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"What's Become of Kraft?"

"Spencer, Brian, Geddes!" gasped Felix Dering, as he stared incredulously at the trio before him: "what does it all mean?"

Archibald Geddes settled the tiny baronet upon his bosom and withdrew a flap of the coat in which the child was enveloped. Brian Dering's face was pinched and withered—he seemed, while retaining his infantile stature, to have grown years older. Also the astounded observers were able to perceive—for his little body was devoid of any other clothing than the Scotchman's impromptu wrap—that Brian Dering's limbs were as shrunken as his countenance. The pupils of his delicate blue orbs were widely dilated, yet he appeared to be in a species of waking slumber; no gleam of recognition illuminated his features as he glanced wearily at Felix.

The chemist's assistant pointed to one frail forearm—it was pitted by minute holes, several of which showed still sore and inflamed. They were the scars left by the needle of a hypodermic syringe.

"The child is under the influence of cocaine," said Geddes: "he is not properly conscious." And, with a touch as gentle as a woman's, the Scotchman refolded the coat about his burden. "Don't be alarmed at the look of his hair," added Archibald Geddes: "it has simply been dyed and is regaining its own colour in patches."

"How in heaven's name!" cried Felix, "did you discover him—and where? And why have you, Spencer, chosen this, of all moments, to return to Wyresdale?"

Edward Spencer answered faintly—a wan smile flickering across his now thickly bearded mouth. "I haven't been away from Wyresdale, Mr. Felix," he declared; "though I didn't know that for certain till Mr. Geddes

Look at page 482.

got me out and gave me a glimpse of the dear old place again."

"But you escaped from the cell here," persisted Felix; "did you meet with an accident and get laid up?"

"Twern't no escape of mine, sir," responded the groom; "I dropped asleep in Mr. Brasher's lock-up and woke to find myself in another half as big and twice as strong. Not that there was a window in it—I've seen nowt but electric light for two months. And, though I never dreamed it, little Sir Brian has been my neighbour for long enough. Curse them as blighted his sweet body."

Felix Dering passed his hand over his brow—his brain reeled. Geddes touched him on the shoulder.

"You'll understand all in a few moments, sir," was the Scotchman's comment, "and, indeed, we've no time to lose. Mr. Brasher, if I can lay this poor child down and substitute some other wrap for my coat, I'll take you off immediately."

"The sergeant's wife is a good motherly soul," said Michael Brasher; "will you carry him through to her, Mr. Geddes?"

The Inspector spoke with deference—evidently he had abandoned his cherished conviction that Mr. Geddes was a person of unsound mind.

Archibald Geddes acted on the suggestion and came back alone, donning his jacket as he walked. Mr. Brasher had moved from Felix Dering's side to deliver a series of rapid instructions to a subordinate. As a result of these a couple of constables tramped heavily into the room.

"You'll stop where you are, Spencer," Geddes told his remaining patient; "you're not fit to stir. But if Mr. Dering can be allowed out without bail, now that he has been formally charged, it might be as well, Mr. Brasher."

Michael Brasher blushed. "In view of Sir Brian's reappearance," he said stiffly, "I will take it upon myself to withdraw the charge—I acted purely on my own initiative and in respect of the gravest possible information; I did not ask for a warrant."

"So that Mr. Dering has the right to sue you for false arrest and imprisonment," supplemented the Scotchman, cruelly. Mr. Brasher winced.

"In such an event, Mr. Geddes," he responded; "I should have to contend that your discoveries do not necessarily vindicate Mr. Dering from a charge brought against him by an alleged confederate. But, for the present, we will postpone discussion of the matter. I have arranged for an escort to accompany us—are you ready?"

"Quite," said the chemist's assistant and led the way out of the police-station into the early September evening. The party of four followed him, to proceed, by shadowy ways, in the direction of the cross-roads. Arrived there, they scaled, at the Scotchman's request, the brick wall of Wyresdale Park and threaded its plantations towards the tower in which, twenty odd hours earlier, Archibald Geddes had been conveyed by force.

An occasional deep bark warned them that the great dogs ran loose according to their nightly wont, but, unlike Geddes on his prevous visit, they got through unmolested by the canine guardians of the place. Felix Dering moved thoughtfully, yet as one who was not surprised either at the route or their destination. Geddes was talking confidentially to the Inspector.

Ascending the smooth green slope, the quartette halted by the low door in the bottom of the tower. The Scotchman tried it—to find it locked.

"The dickens!" he muttered; "and I left it ajar—we must breek it in."

"Not without a search-warrant," objected Michael Brasher, "you forget my position, Mr. Geddes."

"Deuce take your position," growled Geddes; "will you spoil all for a legal scruple?" And he flung his powerful frame against the barrier. His attack was futile—the steel fastenings of the door held obstinately.

"Be on your guard," whispered Felix; "someone is coming. Kraft it may be—the figure is too tall for Hare."

Geddes glanced at the speaker curiously, as if to ask what he knew of the German or his patron, to prompt the caution. Then, obeying a murmured command of the Inspector's, the quintette dodged into the angle formed by the tower and the wall of its flanking structure.

The vague shape stole nearer through the gloom, displaying much vigilance. Reassured by the dusk and the stillness, it approached the door, produced a stout key, and undid the portal. The new-comer was Zorn, that lean, dark Prussian whom Esther Carew had seen in the telescope-room the day of the garden-party.

As the hinges whined, the Inspector made a rush—his men at his heels. Felix Dering and Archibald Geddes sprang after, and the Prussian, clutched, over-weighted, borne down, was a prisoner.

Felix closed the tower-door behind them and struck a match. In front was a second entrance, giving access to a lighted chamber of considerable dimensions. They dragged their captive through, throttling him into silence as they went.

The five explorers found themselves in a round cellar-like apartment—the ground floor of the tower. In it throbbed and spun a huge gas-engine, driving monotonously a pair of large dynamos. The regular hollow "cough" of the former and the tremor of its strokes were responsible for the singular vibration which had so puzzled Archibald Geddes.

Hard by the dynamos there descended, from the upper floor, a spiral iron staircase. Its last steps seemed to be built into the concrete pavement of the chamber.

Geddes wrinkled his brows. "I left that open also," he said; "Mr. Brasher, something has happened since my escape, the way to my prison lies there, and some other hand than mine has closed it." He indicated the base of the spiral staircase. "Help me to pull this aside," he added; "the lower portion is on a swivel."

Leaving their captive to the care of two constables, Mr. Brasher lent a mighty support to the efforts of Felix Dering and the Scotchman. The device creeked and yielding, to swing bodily away, bringing a stone slab that uncovered a square aperture beneath. From the aperture sloped a flight of straight, rock-hewn steps.

"Now, Mr. Brasher," pursued Archibald Geddes, "if you think we can trust our friend here—whom I conclude to be one of Dr. Kraft's compatriots—in custody of your men, I will reveal to you the mysteries of Wyresdale Park."

For answer, Michael Brasher dived into his hip-pocket, fished up the identical brace of hand-cuffs that had ornamented Felix Dering's wrists, snapped them on the Prussian's, and, with a word to the constables who had held him, slid through the trap in the floor. Felix and Geddes were already disappearing down it.

At the bottom of the steps, in the side of the short well, was a door, bolted exteriorly. The Scotchman negotiated the fastenings and passed in. The three entered the dark corridor, athwart whose obscurity still fell the beams of coloured light.

"You might strike another match, Mr. Dering," remarked the chemist's assistant; "I used all mine an hour ago for the same purpose." Felix ignited a vesta and held it up.

"In here," said Geddes, pausing near the first of the small bolted portals on his right, "is Dr. Kraft—armed with a revolver. You see that hole in the wood of the door, it is where he let fly at me as I fastened him in."

The Inspector strode forward. "I am responsible for these proceedings," announced Mr. Brasher; "I will

Mr. Henry T. Johnson's new serial starts week after next.

encounter any risk there may be." And so saying, he grasped the bolt, to draw it.

Geddes favoured his rival with a look of unequivocal admiration, but joined him, almost defiantly. It was as if he shrank from yielding to Michael Brasher the undivided honours of the danger.

Click! The iron rods shot back and the door swung open. Geddes and Brasher thrust into the crimson glare that streamed forth. They recoiled amazed—the cell was empty!

Archibald Geddes swore—not loud but deep. "Tricked!" he cried, "tricked; the scoundrel has got off. There must be a secret way out. Those bolts were fast enough when I left."

Mr. Brasher began methodically to sound the walls and the floor—both rang dull and solid. Felix was gazing at the red lamp, the bare rock-hewn compartment, the shallow metal trough—lined with cotton-wool—in a corner. He noticed the elaborate system of ventilation, the artificially high temperature of the cell.

"What is the explanation of this mysterious recess?" he demanded, addressing himself to Geddes.

The Scotchman relinquished his share in the search for a concealed exit. "Come further on," was his response, "and I will satisfy you."

With which promise, he strode out of the cell and unbolted the door of the next. A red glow met them, but of a tint less intense than that they had previously experienced.

The second compartment was as bare as the other, and had the same long metal trough, piled with cotton-wool, at its extremity. From this receptacle there started, when they passed into the cramped place, a thin form, unclothed, stooping, yet tall as that of a well-grown man. But its eyes were vacant and its face had the tremulous childishness of an infant.

The creature cowered again into its cotton bed as they advanced, fumbling with its skinny fists about its features as a frightened nursling will do.

"Good heavens!" cried Michael Brasher; "is it an idiot?"

Geddes shook his head. "Only so far as lack of education and human society will make idiots," he answered. "It is a boy, doubtless, despite its appearance, of tender age, and forced to this stature by the operation, presumably, of that infernal light. There were four degrees of colour, you would observe, in the rays from the keyholes—which, luckily for my explorations, Kraft had superseded by bolts—so I suppose his subjects are inured to the lights by instalments. He has two more of these embryo giants under lesser intensities of red illumination. All are as good as blind—thanks to the effect of the colour upon the retina."

"But the room in which you secured Kraft," said Mr. Brasher; "the room in which you yourself were confined—that had a red light and no tenant such as this."

"Possibly Kraft had lost one of his involuntary patients," hazarded the chemist's assistant; "there are, however, four red compartments in all, and two more are occupied."

"But the blue lights," said Felix, surveying the huddled figure in the shallow cradle, so cold-bloodedly scientific in its hygenic simplicity.

"You shall see," replied Geddes, returning to the threshold. He piloted them a pace or two down the corridor, and unfastened a third cell.

A profound azure radiance filled the compartment. The Scotchman entered it, crossed to a smaller cradle than they had seen before, and lifted from the cotton-wool bed a little being, some twenty inches in height. It was a miniature of humanity, for its stature sturdy and robust. As Geddes set it on its tiny limbs it regarded the visitors fearlessly.

"Here," continued the Scotchman, "you have an example of the Doctor's skill in stunting. Illegal as his experiments are, he is apparently on the road to the production of both giants and dwarfs. There are three more subjects under the blue lights and all are midgets. I suppose it was Mr. Hare's own affliction that led him to patronise these morbid inquiries."

"Are they English children?" asked Felix, thoughtfully.

"No," said Geddes; "Asiatics of some sort, and either they have remained dumb by reason of their captivity, or—to allow of their transit from abroad—their vocal chords have been extirpated, for they make no noise whatever."

"Heavens," put in the Inspector; "you don't mean that Sir Brian Dering has been rendered permanently speechless?"

"He has been sufficiently fortunate," admitted the chemists' assistant, "to be spared that, for he was muttering deliriously when I rescued him. Otherwise he has suffered terribly, unlike Dr. Kraft's trio of midgets, who must have been introduced to his methods very young. I found him in a cell with a blue illumination. Doubtless Kraft wished to ascertain the effect of his treatment upon a maturer and more cultivated child. Part of the dwarfing process evidently consists of injecting cocaine—Sir Brian was plainly under the influence of some narcotic which, as cocaine does, had dilated his pupils. And I noticed an empty cocaine bottle with our label in a store-cell at the end of the corridor—in which cell, by the bye, there is a larder and a cooking-stove, so that the laboratory has been equipped to be complete in itself. No wonder; Dr. Kraft could scarcely afford to draw attention to the peculiar nature of his researches."

"Then it was for these purposes that they kidnapped Sir Brian?" inquired Michael Brasher.

"So it seems," allowed the Scotchman; "but what beats me is why Spencer should have been stowed away here. He says Kraft has never tried any experiments on him, and has fed him, at least adequately. Yet it must have been Kraft who carried him off from the strong-room—impossible as the feat seems. What was Kraft's motive?"

Felix Dering interrupted the colloquy of his companions. "Spencer apart," he told them, "you are wrong about Brian. Dr. Kraft did not know it was my little cousin he was experimenting upon."

Archibald Geddes gasped. "How can you be sure of that, sir?" he asked.

"From the facts of the case," said Felix; "you followed one line of investigation, I followed another—each of us learned half the story. At some more convenient time we must put the halves together. Now our duty is to recapture Kraft and his villainous collaborator, Hare."

There was a call from the rear of the corridor—one of the constables left behind was summoning them. The Inspector went back with his allies.

"The man we've got upstairs, sir," reported the policeman, "wants to speak to you immediately. He says he can give you valuable information, which must be acted on at once if it is to be of any use."

Michael Brasher dived through the doorway and hurried up the steps with alacrity. Felix and Geddes pursued him, and the constable formed the tail of the short procession. When they arrived in the engine-room it was to behold the Prussian waving Mr. Brasher away.

"I don't want policemen," he intimated, disdainfully. "I want a gentleman. You, sir," he told Felix, "if I, who am a trifle less black than my associates) aid you to capture them—nay, to convict them of crimes you could not prove without me—how will that help me before the law?"

Felix Dering shrugged his shoulders. "To the traitor," he retorted; "the law is often lenient, for its own purposes. It uses, if it cannot respect him."

"*So,*" observed the Prussian; "well, I can't do myself any harm and I may profit in the end. This, then, is my news. Dr. Kraft—whom I myself released, twenty minutes ago, from the durance in which you put him—and Mr. Otto Hare are to join me here before leaving for the Continent. They are now due any moment and if you dispose yourself artistically you will catch them at your ease. When they are captured I will sell you some more information about them on terms more definitely satisfactory to your humble servant, Johann Zorn."

Mr. Brasher scratched his head. "We ought to hide," he said, "that is, if Dr. Kraft has a key of his own to come in with, for I need scarcely say we should not trust you to open for him. But where is there a suitable place to pounce on them from?"

Zorn pointed to the spiral staircase. "Both Dr. Kraft and Mr. Hare have keys," he answered, "and as for your strategic position, there it is, at the top of those stairs. Close the entrance to the laboratory, go up into the telescope-room, taking me, if you prefer, with you, and wait."

"He is right, Inspector," remarked Felix Dering, "and there is not an instant to be lost. Lend a hand, Geddes."

He grasped the moveable section of the stair, and, assisted by the Scotchman, dragged it into place, and mounted it. The constables imitated his example, bringing their prey with them. The ground floor was left untenanted, save by the throbbing gas-engine and the spick-and-span dynamoes, hurling so silently their tremendous currents into the bowels of the earth, to feed the lights in Dr. Kraft's terrible laboratory.

Felix had been correct—they were only just in time; as Mr. Brasher slipped into the dusk of the telescope-room above, a key rattled in the outer door of the tower, a murmur of voices ensued, and Kraft ambled in. With him was Otto Hare. The contrast between the two had never seemed so fantastic as now—the former tall, bland, plump, enormously large in every limb and lineament, the latter scarcely more than a midget and nervously irritable to a degree.

Kraft, the concealed watchers saw, carried a small linen-covered parcel, which he set down carefully. A chirp broke from it—the Doctor's burden was no less than his cage of tropical birds.

"Hurry up, for Heaven's sake!" cried the Golden Dwarf; "it's a fool's trick to come back at all, much more on such an errand. But since you have chosen to risk your liberty, and, possibly, your life, end the risk to mine as speedily as may be."

Joseph Kraft gained the foot of the spiral staircase (from the gloom of whose upper trap Felix Dering and Archibald Geddes looked down on his unwitting cranium), swung aside the loose section, and prepared to descend.

"I shall reappear," he announced, "in precisely the same time as it requires for Miss Esther to blink her pretty eye. And then, hey for the phæton and the Hull express. When these meddlers have sought in vain for evidence and the storm has blown over, we can return from our urgent business abroad and settle once more under our—that is to say your—vine and fig-tree. How surprised we should be to learn of an accident to the costly laboratory which you had built for me to study earth-currents in!"

(To be concluded.)

ASTHMA CURABLE

THE CURE of ASTHMA, HAY FEVER, CHRONIC BRONCHITIS, SHORTNESS OF BREATH, BLOOD SPITTING, LUNG DISEASES, &c., is generally considered impossible.

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"Will you please accept my sincere thanks for the excellent results I have obtained from your most marvellous cure. Previous to commencing with your treatment I had been a sufferer from Asthma for a great number of years. The attacks usually came on during the night, which caused me to lay up several days, but I am thankful to say that since I commenced with the treatment I have been entirely free from these attacks. Not having had one for close upon 3 years I can say with every confidence that I never felt better in health than I do at the present time, in fact, I am an entirely different man from what I was previous to commencing with the treatment. In my opinion the treatment is within reach of every person who is a sufferer from that distressing complaint, Asthma. I shall be pleased to recommend it to anyone, if you will kindly refer them to me."—C. W. DEPLEDGE, Sheffield.

(Full address on application.) 234 II.

The Director is prepared to pay £1,000 to any CHARITABLE INSTITUTION if the above is not a genuine extract from the patient's own letter. The original may be seen at The Paul Weidhaas Hygienic Institute by bona fide Inquirers

Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a *P.W.* penknife to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, October 7th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Mr. John Sewell, of The Lund, Lamplugh, Cockermouth, Cumberland, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

Wife (club night): "Will you be home early, John?" Husband: "Ye-es, I think so. But don't keep breakfast waiting for me."

Boy: "Mrs. Smith, can yer lend me mother your wheelbarrow?" Woman: "What 'a' ye done wi' ye own?" Boy: "Faither's taken the wheel out of ours because foalk keep comming a-borrowin' it."

"Fame," said the youth with the earnest intellectual expression, "is so hard to attain! It is so difficult for one to get himself talked about!" "Humph!" rejoined the woman with cold blue eyes and a firm jaw. "You just ought to live in our neighbourhood."

Sherlock Holmes: "I have not looked around, but a very tall man just came in and sat down in the opera chair behind me." Miss Marvel: "It is true! Really, you do the most wonderful things. Now, tell me how you knew without looking, of the tall man's presence." Sherlock Holmes: "His feet are sticking through under my chair."

Bridget, a new importation from the Emerald Isle, was very fond of reading novels, and the mistress, noticing the gas burning very late every night, took Bridget to task. "Why, I declare, ma'am," says Bridget, "I cannot read at all; but as you told me that the house was pestered with mice, shure, I lit the gas so that the cat could have a chance of catching 'em."

They sat on the portico of the house. "Annie, dear," he said, "do you love me?" She looked down at the tall, handsome youth, who spoke to her with such pleading in his tones. "You say you are soon to become the junior partner of the firm, George?" "Yes, my own." "And that you have £10,000 in the bank?" "Yes, darling." "And that you will inherit at least £200,000 from your mother?" "Yes, pet." "Then, George, I love you. I am yours." She fell into his outstretched arms.

*A burglar was on trial for housebreaking, and conducted his own defence. "My lord," he said, addressing the judge, "you cannot possibly convict me in this charge. I will tell you why. As the evidence clearly proves, I did not break into the house at all. I found the parlour window open, as the witnesses admit, and all I did was to put in my arm and remove some unimportant articles. Now, my lord, my arm is not myself, and I fail to see how you can punish the whole individual for a fault committed by one of his limbs." "Very well," said the cautious judge, "I find your arm guilty, and sentence it to six months' imprisonment. Go with it or not as you choose." The prisoner smiled broadly, and quietly proceeded to unscrew his cork arm, leaving it in the custody of the court.

Downer: "I am very glad it is good form not to wear a watch with a dress suit." Upper: "Why?" Downer: "Because I never have my watch and dress suit at the same time."

Gentleman (caressing a pretty little girl): "You little beauty; you shall be my wife when you are grown up—will you?" "No, I don't want to get married; but aunty there would like to!"

Sarcastic Inquirer: "What good will it do you to take your bicycle with you to Africa?" Prospective Soldier: "If I become homesick, sir, I can puncture one of my tyres and breathe my native air again."

"In this sentence we read that 'Thomas strikes Henry,'" said the teacher. "Now what is the object of the word 'strike'?" "Shorter hours and higher wages," replied the future Labour Candidate at the head of the class.

She: "Mr. Faresplease doesn't waltz as divinely as he might, but he certainly has an easy, graceful way of putting his arm about one's waist." He: "Yes. He was a conductor on a Kensington 'bus for a long time, you know."

Mr. Ferguson was later than usual in coming home, and as his wife met him in the hallway with her usual kiss he said apologetically: "The train was crowded, Laura, and I had to ride in the smoking-carriage. I suppose I smell like a tobacco factory." "No, George," said Mrs. Ferguson, "you do not. The smell from a tobacco factory, as I remember it, is not at all offensive."

The other day a gentleman entered a restaurant and ordered chicken. The chicken was evidently tough, for when the waiter came in he beheld the gentleman in a great state of wrath. "Waiter," he said, "this chicken is very tough." "Very sorry, sir, that chicken was a peculiar bird. Why, when we came to kill it, we couldn't catch it, so at last we had to shoot it. It flew on the housetops, and——" "Ah, by jove, that accounts for it; you must have shot the weathercock by mistake."

Two yokels, members of an obscure Lancashire village cricket team, recently challenged one another to a single-wicket match. The first man batted and scored fourteen runs. His opponent refused to take his turn until he had had his tea. Remonstrances were of no avail. The man wanted his tea and was going home to get it. "Tha con bowl at th' wickets, an' if tha hits 'em Aw'm out," he said to his opponent at last. This was agreed to, and the hungry one went to his tea. Returning leisurely forty minutes afterwards, he found the match over. "Tha's won!" said the umpire. "Nowt o' the sort!" was his reply. "But tha has. *He's bowled fifteen wides!*"

A worthy Yorkshire Canon, who had been greatly displeased by an act of disobedience perpetrated by one of his gardeners, sought an interview with the offender in order to reprimand him. Knowing that if he was able to avoid the interview until his master's wrath had abated, he would come off with only a few mild words of censure, the man kept out of his way. A few days afterwards, however, when the storm was quite over, master and man came face to face in one of the hothouses, and the Canon asked: "Why have you avoided me in so pointed a manner of late, Johnson?" To which the gardener replied. "Now I'll put it to you as a man, sir. Would you, if you could help it, stand in front of a cannon to be blown up?"

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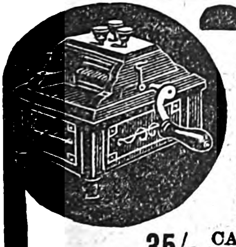

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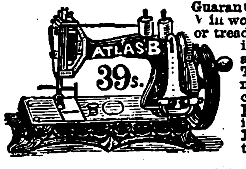

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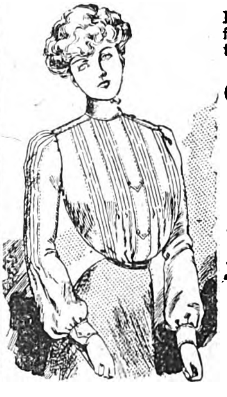

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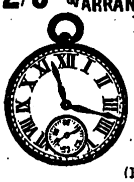

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

THE first thing you must do on opening this week's *Short Stories* is to turn to page 432 and see if your portrait is there. If it is, lose no time in sending in your claim to us. If your claim is just, we shall certainly lose no time in sending you a crisp five-pound note. If you only knew how eager we are to give these fivers away you would be surprised. If your portrait isn't in this week, don't let that worry you. It may be in next week or the week after that. And whenever it goes in, so long as you comply with the printed conditions, that five-pound note is waiting for you.

* * *

ANOTHER great attraction will appear in *Short Stories* the week after next. In that number Mr. Henry T. Johnson's new serial story will begin. It is called

"DEAD TO THE WORLD,"

and is about as thrilling a story as could possibly be written. It grips the attention right from the first line, and once you have started it, you will find it impossible to relinquish reading it till the end is reached.

* * *

HERE is a little essay, written by an esteemed lady contributor, which will probably be of interest to most of my readers.

* * *

How to Make the Most of a Little Money.

MANY of us may know the story of the two young girls who, on being given a quarter's allowance of dress money in advance, proceeded to spend it in different ways. The one bought everything that she fancied; the other, before buying anything, asked herself the question: "Can I do without it?"

The consequence was that the one girl spent her allowance within a very few days, while the other was a standing example to all her friends.

We may laugh at the story, but we are compelled to admit that those who wish to practise small economies, cannot do better than follow the example taught by it.

To abstain from small extravagancies is the secret of making money go a long way. Anyone who feels that she cannot resist spending more money than she ought, would do well to leave her purse at home when taking her walks abroad, or, better still, keep an exact account of every halfpenny spent. It is astonishing how foolish small extravagancies appear when they are put down in black and white, after the temptation to indulge in them is over. Do not, however, enter them as "sundries." No "sundries" are admitted as an item of well-kept household accounts. Large savings are generally made from little sums. Few people make a large purchase without due consideration, and yet many people spend as much in unconsidered trifles in the long run. It is the pennies and halfpennies that lie loose in the pocket which are not properly appreciated. "Many a mickle makes a muckle" is true of nothing more than halfpence. Little savings are mostly made in personal expenditure. What is spent in the household is generally needed, but small personal luxuries are not.

Money saved thus should not be mixed with the spending fund. Keep it apart as savings, and you will be surprised how it will grow. The Post Office Savings Bank is good for the purpose, as the little formality required to get money out acts as a check to thoughtless extravagance.

There are many ways of saving. One is to buy provisions in large quantities and take proper care that they are not wasted; another is to pay ready-money for everything.

It is false economy to give bad or insufficient food for a large family. By so doing you incur a doctor's bill. The things to save in are shams, false appearances, and self-indulgences, *not* necessaries.

* * *

ADVICE ON LOVE AND OTHER MATTERS.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

YOU want to know, "Ivy Leaf," whether it would be wise for you to give your lover, whom you have quarrelled with, a birthday gift, and add that you will do something desperate if you are not friends with him again soon.

By all means send him one; it is such a pity to let a quarrel drift on until a breach is made which can never be healed. Write him a nice letter, and say you hope he has forgotten all about your difference of opinion, and I am sure he will be only too glad to make it up with you. Thanks for your good wishes.

YOU tell me, "Harry's Darling," that you are in a dilemma, and hope that I can help you. You are engaged to a soldier in the 11th Hussars, one of the best-hearted fellows you have ever met, but your parents and friends are all against him, and say that soldiers are a reckless, worthless set, and no good to anyone. They will not consent to your marriage, and you don't wish to go against them as they have always been good to you; but you love Harry dearly, and don't know what to do in the matter.

If your parents are really so unfair as to take a dislike to your lover merely because he is a soldier, I should certainly advise you to do whatever you think right in the matter. If you are sure that he is really all that you think him, and he loves you and can keep you in comfort, I should tell your parents quietly that your mind is made up, and much as you would have liked their consent to your marriage, you feel that as they won't give in you must do without it.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I AM open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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A YOUNG LADY CURED OF

INDIGESTION, DEBILITY, & HEADACHE.

ANOTHER BILE BEAN VIOTORY.

Amid pretty rural pastures about ten miles from Melton Mowbray and half the distance from Belvoir Castle is Harby Bridge, where lives Miss Lizzie Starbuck, who has recently been cured of headache, debility, and indigestion by Bile Beans for Biliousness in a remarkable manner. A *Melton Mowbray News* reporter, who inquired into the case, writes that the young lady looked such a picture of health that it was at first hard to believe the story of torture and then of triumph which was unfolded to him. "As a little child," said she, "I was never very strong. I grew too quickly; and up to quite recently endured much agony with headache and sickness. Last summer I went out cheesemaking, but had indigestion so badly that it took all the life and energy out of me. I felt as though I could not work; and although I struggled on till the end of the season, my condition grew more pitiable. Head and stomach pills I tried in vain. Still the pain of indigestion racked my whole frame. It interfered with my appetite; I slept very poorly; and I was far too weak to carry the buckets of water as I am doing now. It was something more than the ordinary 'out of sorts' or run down feeling. One day we saw an account of the wonderful properties of Bile Beans, and sent for a few. They did me good, and I then bought a large box. Before I had been taking the course long, I began to feel a marked change. The sickly feeling grew less, and there was less headache. Then these both vanished completely. Meanwhile I seemed to be pulling round in general health. Instead of being weak and low like I was before—poor in spirits, pale in looks, wasted, and fatigued by the least effort—I began to feel quite strong again. Now I am not like the same person. I feel equal to any ordinary effort, and can carry those two buckets of water (pointing to two buckets standing near) easily; and one has to be pretty strong to do that. I can honestly say that it is to Bile Beans that I owe all this. My uncle (with whom Miss Starbuck lives) did not believe in patent medicines; but I gave him some of the Beans when he was taken ill, and they did him so much good that he is now perfectly convinced as to the justice of the claims of this medicine at any rate."

"Yes," interposed the young lady's mother, "Bile Beans have done her a world of good and I can recommend them to anybody."

Mr. Starbuck also said he willingly gave Bile Beans their due, adding "They're the best things I've met with in my life!"

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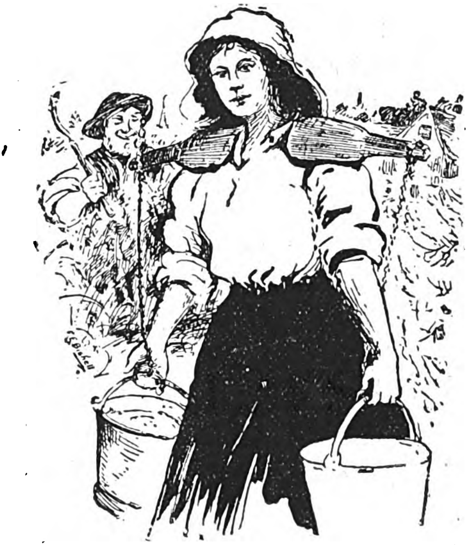

"Can carry two buckets of water easily."

Bile Beans for Biliousness are unequalled for indigestion, debility in all its forms, loss of appetite and energy, headache, pallid complexion, anæmia, dizziness, nervousness, chest pains, backache, palpitation, all liver and kidney disorders, constipation, piles, and "summer end fag." Bile Beans may be had of all chemists, or post free, if this paper is mentioned, from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Company, 119 and 120 London Wall, London, E.C., for price 1/1½ or 2/9 (2/9 box contains three times 1/1½). Three large boxes 7/6, or Six for 14/-.

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The proprietors have so much faith in the efficacy of Bile Beans, that they will forward a sample free if you send your name and address, and a penny stamp (to cover return postage) along with accompanying coupon. Address the Bile Bean Manufacturing Company, 119 and 120 London Wall, London, E.C.

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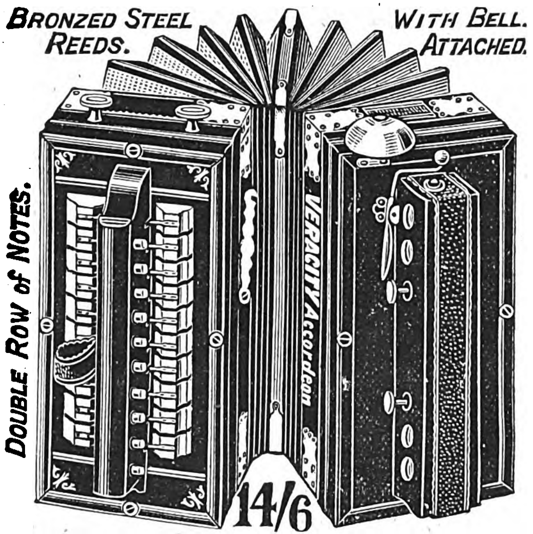

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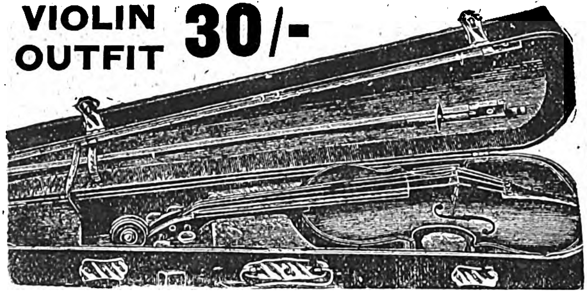

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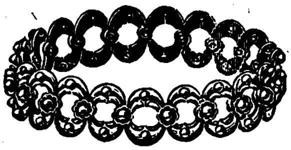

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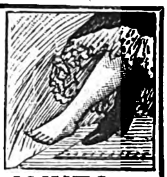

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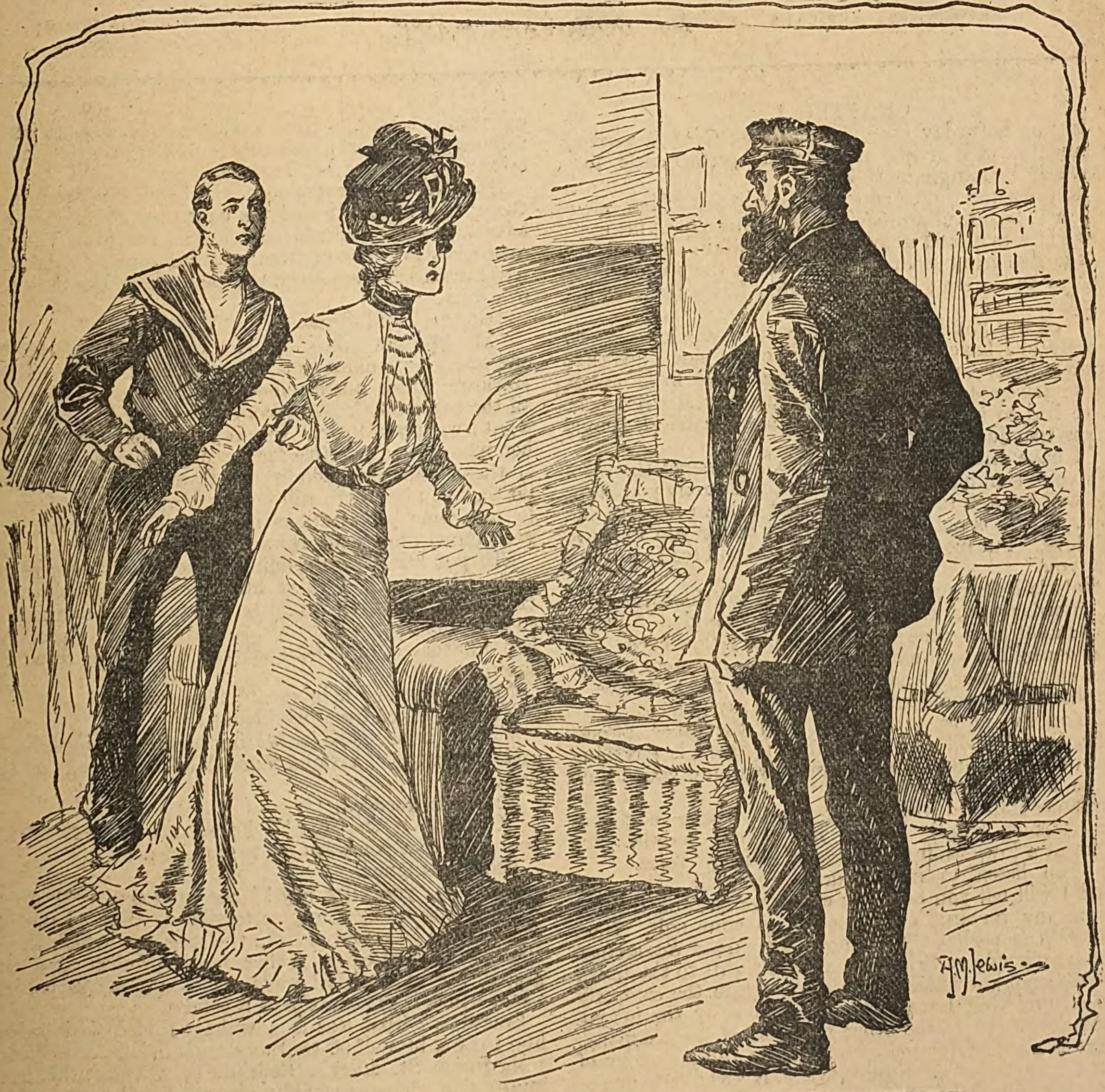
SHORT STORIES

No. 667.] For the Week Ending October 12th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

The Adventures of an Actress.



"What is the meaning of this, Captain Tucker?" she demanded. "How dare you commit such an outrage?"

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A THRILLING INSTALMENT.

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

X.—Mid Ocean's Perils.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

It was Saturday evening, and *The Good Samaritan* Company was giving its farewell performance to a crowded Birmingham theatre.

At the same time, upon the sea wall at Clifton, one of the most beautiful promenades of Bristol's most beautiful suburb, a man and a woman were walking side by side in the gathering gloom. Below them the Avon wound its way to the sea; across the valley lights flickered like fireflies.

"You say you love me," the woman was saying. "I am afraid I have heard that from other men's lips than yours. They are easily said, those three little words, as we actresses know; and you, my dear Maurice, who have had so much to do with things theatrical, should know that just as well as I do."

"I have said I love you, Valerie," answered the man, in a voice tremulous with passion, "and surely you know me well enough to understand that I mean it heart and soul. There is nothing I would not do for you to prove my love. Put me to the test, and you will see I shall not fail you."

Valerie Bellairs gave vent to a low, mirthless laugh.

"Words again," she said, almost mockingly. "Words that might have come straight out of a yellow back. It's easy enough to say that sort of thing. If I were to take you at your word, and ask you to do me a service, I wonder if you would really do all you say you would."

"You can at least try me," cried the other, almost defiantly. "I tell you again that if there is anything I can do that will make me sure of winning you, I'll do it, no matter what it is."

Silence followed the young man's words—a silence that was at length broken by Valerie herself. She spoke in a low, strained, curiously insistent voice.

"Then listen to me, Maurice Scarsdale," she said, "and I will tell you how you can serve me, and thereby ensure my turning a willing ear to your suit. Next Monday, as perhaps you know, *The Good Samaritan* Company is due at Bristol on a week's visit to the town. You may not know that I was once acting in the company myself, and that I was turned out of it by the instrumentality of one of the other members of the company. There is no need for me to tell you in full the story of how I came to leave. Suffice to say, it was due to one of the other ladies who played a trick upon me that I shall not readily forget." Here Valerie paused, so as to let the full weight of her words sink into the brain of the infatuated young man at her side.

How wilful a perversion of the truth her words were those who have followed the course of Hazel Harlow's adventures will readily acknowledge; for it was Valerie's own treachery towards the beautiful young actress that had caused her dismissal from the ranks of the theatrical company.

"Go on," said Scarsdale. "What then?"

"The woman who wronged me," said Valerie, "is one with whose name you are probably familiar—Hazel Harlow—whose much self-advertised name has been in all the papers of Great Britain. And now I will tell you what I want you to do. I want you to help me to punish her who was responsible for my degradation in the eyes of those who were blinded by Hazel Harlow's beauty. So that you see there will be ample opportunity for you to put your protestations into active operation; and you know what your reward will be."

She put her hand confidingly upon the young man's arm. Her touch thrilled him through and through. He felt that nothing would be too much, no sacrifice he could make too great, to win the love of the woman who had infatuated him with all the wiles of a seductive siren.

"But how can I help you?" he went on.

Valerie paused for a few moments.

"There is no good in beating about the bush," she said suddenly. "I want Hazel Harlow got out of the way."

Scarsdale recoiled.

"Got out of the way!" he echoed hoarsely. "Do you mean that you want me to murder her?"

Bellairs laughed.

"No, no, you silly boy!" she answered. "I don't want you to do anything so terrible as that. I merely want her to be removed from the sphere to which she is absolutely unsuited, with her mock prudish airs and graces, her hypocritical ways, which she masks behind a face which is as beautiful as it is false."

Scarsdale's head was in a whirl. Had Valerie asked him to fling himself off the Suspension Bridge, or to dance a jig inside St. Mary's, Redcliff, he would, in his mad infatuation, have probably obeyed her behests; but when he found himself confronted with an exceedingly

More £5 notes to be given away. See page 466.

subtle form of intrigue, at the back of which was a jealous woman's hatred of another, small wonder that his somewhat narrow brain refused to grasp the potentialities of the case. Valerie noted his hesitation, and read its meaning rightly.

"Oh, I see," she said, pettishly, "it is as I thought. You are like all the rest; ready enough with lip service, but, when it comes to action, you retire with the best grace you can."

"No, no, no!" answered the love-sick swain, impetuously. "It's not that. You misunderstand me. As I have told you, I will do anything I can to win your love, but I hadn't bargained for so unusual a request as this. How on earth am I going to get Miss Hazel Harlow out of the way, here in the twentieth century—I who have had no experience in such sort of things?"

Again Valerie laughed.

"You speak like a child, Maurice," she said. "Where are your inventive faculties? Can you think of no scheme whereby a girl can be put out of the way without danger to yourself or harm to her? And think—help me in this, be successful in removing the woman who has wronged me so deeply from my path, and I will do anything you like. I can't say more."

Had not Maurice Scarsdale been so desperately infatuated with the unscrupulous actress, he would most assuredly have paused before committing himself indiscriminately to so unusual a request. He must have seen that there was something more deep than mere personal spite at the back of the business. Here was a woman who had won for herself a name in the theatrical profession—for this assuredly Valerie Bellairs had done—who was so carried away by animus that she was ready to go to almost any extremes to have removed a young girl, little more than a *débutante*, who could not surely assail her own position as an actress.

He must have seen, moreover, that such a story as Valerie had told him required more sifting than to be immediately swallowed as gospel when so sketchily presented.

But he saw none of this. He saw only a woman of undoubted charm, who had shown him only one way whereby he could win her love. At that moment Maurice Scarsdale was a monomaniac; his one idea was to win Valerie's consent to become his wife, no matter what means were employed in the achievement of his ends.

"Look here," went on Valerie, "to-morrow is Sunday. Think if you can't work out some plan in the morning. I'll meet you in the afternoon, and you shall tell me what decision you have come to; and, if all goes well, before the end of the week perhaps you will come to me and say, 'Valerie, I have earned the right to call you my wife. Let me name the happy day,' as the conventional phrase has it."

Intoxicated by her words, and favoured by the obscurity and the loneliness of the spot, Scarsdale suddenly flung his arms round the actress, and, drawing her to him, pressed his lips against her own.

"Valerie, my darling!" he murmured, hoarsely; "I'll win you, come what may!"

With a little cry, the actress disengaged herself from her lover's fervent embrace.

"Naughty boy!" she said archly. "I didn't tell you you might do that. You haven't really earned it yet. I must go now. I'll meet you on the Clifton end of the Suspension Bridge to-morrow evening at six o'clock. I hope then you will have something to tell me."

CHAPTER II.

As can be well imagined, there was but little sleep for Maurice Scarsdale that night. Fitfully he lay awake, tossing from side to side on his bed, all the time thinking, "How can I get Hazel Harlow put out of the way?"

So intoxicated was he with passion for Valerie that it never for one instant occurred to him that not only did he run a great risk in solving the problem, but that he was also participating in a peculiarly cowardly and underhand crime. And when morning came he was still no nearer the elucidation of the problem than he had been the night before upon the sea-wall.

He rose early, and after a hurried breakfast, determined to take a good long walk down to the docks at Avonmouth, under the impression that by so doing he might be able to discover a way out of the difficulty. Think as he would, however, his brain remained as barren as ever.

At about mid-day he turned into a little public-house not far from the docks to have a glass of beer and some bread-and-cheese to appease the healthy appetite that not even the difficult problem could overthrow.

The bar of the public-house was partitioned off as some old-fashioned hostelries still are. At one end of the room was the bar proper, then came a wooden partition, behind which was a table with forms on either side of it, then another partition, and a table and forms as before.

He sat down in the end partition and began discussing his frugal meal. Suddenly voices on the other side of the boarding that formed the back of his seat, attracted his attention.

"I must sail on Wednesday then," the voice was saying. "As you know, we're bound for New York, and it's money out of my pocket to wait later."

"Whether you sail on Wednesday or not depends upon yourself; I must have that twenty pounds you owe me before Tuesday, or you'll have to stay here. I can't wait any longer, Si Tucker."

"That would spell ruin," answered the man thus addressed, in a hoarse voice. "I can't find twenty pounds, and that's all there is to be said about it. Surely you can give me a while longer. I hope to clear a bit this voyage."

"That's just what you said before," answered the man who had previously spoken. "No; I give you fair warning. You can't say I've been hard on you, and it's gospel truth I want that twenty pounds powerful bad. Either you hand it to me before you sail, or I shall have to put the law on you."

Silence followed these last words. Then came the sound as of a man rising to his feet and preparing to leave the inn. Scarsdale looked eagerly round the partition. A big, black-bearded man was sitting moodily at a table; a smaller, keener-faced fellow, was just on the point of going. The next moment he had gone, and the black-bearded sailor was left seated gloomily alone.

In a moment Scarsdale had risen from his seat and slipped inside the place vacated by the insistent creditor. That the sailor resented his intrusion at once became apparent.

"Who the blazes are you?" he said savagely; "and what in Hades do you want in shoving yourself down afore my nose?"

But Scarsdale was not to be put off by this ebullition of somewhat natural spleen.

"Steady on, mate," he said pleasantly. "I came here because I may be able to do you a service."

Surely that's your photo on page 466?

"A service! You? How?"

Scarsdale hesitated. Then he plunged straight to the point.

"A matter of twenty pounds, and perhaps more," he said shortly.

The man half rose to his feet and uttered an oath.

"You've been spying, curse you," he said savagely. "I shall have to teach you manners."

"Sit down and don't make a noise," answered the other quietly. "I haven't been spying, only I couldn't help hearing what you said. I tell you that perhaps I can put you in the way of making twenty pounds, and saving your bacon on Tuesday. If you'll be reasonable I'll tell you further what I mean." For the conversation that he had overheard had suddenly given Scarsdale the inspiration he had waited for.

The man, whose name we have heard as being Tucker, was quiet in an instant.

"Are you in earnest, governor?" he said, suspicion still latent in his voice.

"Yes. But can't you take me to a place more private than this? I can't say what I want to say here."

"Come aboard my schooner," answered Tucker; "she's scarce two cables' lengths from here. There's no fear that we shall be interrupted there. All my hands are ashore; we shall have the whole ship to ourselves."

Scarsdale paid for his beer, and followed the seaman out of the inn. A black-hulled schooner was lying alongside the quay. On her stern was painted in white "*Susan Tucker*, Bristol."

"That's her," said Tucker, with a jerk of his thumb towards the vessel. "She's called *Susan* after my missus, who died some years ago."

As he spoke he swung himself from the quayside on to the schooner's deck, and Scarsdale made haste to follow him. Tucker led the way down the companion hatchway into a by no means uncomfortable cabin, the cleanliness of which was almost painfully apparent.

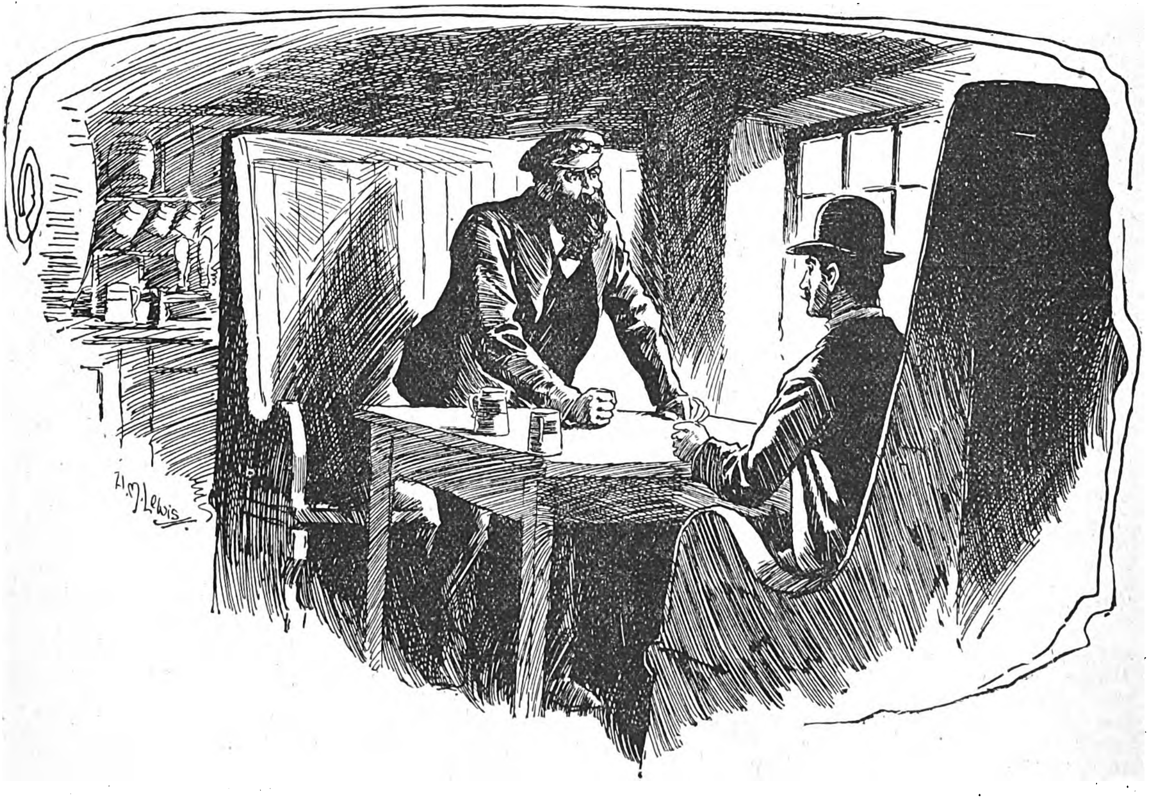
"Now then," said Tucker, "I'm a plain-dealing, plain-spoken seaman. You've made a suggestion to me; supposing as you comes to the point without more beating about the bush. You deal fair and square with me, and I'll do the same by you."

But it was by no means easy for Maurice Scarsdale to obey so simple a behest. It was some moments before he could find speech.

"I won't disguise from you the fact," he said, "that the earning of your money will be by no means an easy job. In fact, you will have to work out the details of it yourself. All I can do is to guarantee you the fifty pounds if it comes off, and as an earnest of my offer I am ready to discharge your debt in advance."

The man's eyes gleamed.

"Well, that's square enough," he said heartily. "There's



"You've been spying, curse you," he cried savagely. "I shall have to teach you manners."

H. T. Johnson's new serial begins next week.

something to get hold of there, and if you're ready to do as you say, well, I'll do all I can to help you in what you want."

Then his voice changed.

"It isn't murder you want me to do, is it ?" he said constrainedly.

Scarsdale shook his head.

"No, it isn't murder," he replied ; "and remember I don't want to bind you down to do anything. If, when you hear what I have to say, you think the task is beyond you, I shall have to have your word that not a syllable passes your lips as to what has transpired between us to-day."

"There's my word and hand on that," cried Tucker, and he thrust out a hairy fist as a token of his sincerity.

"Good !" continued Scarsdale. "And now let's come to business. There is a certain lady possessed of undoubted external charms who is, nevertheless, an exceedingly dangerous personage. This woman has it in her power to do a great deal of harm to another lady, towards whom my feelings are of the tenderest. I hope I have made myself plain so far ?"

Tucker nodded.

"Go on," said he, with interest.

"Now it is as well for all parties concerned," continued the young man, "that this same woman should be removed for a certain time from a sphere of action in which she is more of an ornament than a credit. I will be perfectly frank with you. Can I obtain the spiriting away of the lady for a month or so my dearest object will be attained, and I shall be able to call the woman I love my very own !"

The seaman's eyes glittered.

"I see how the land lies," he said slowly. "It's a case of kidnapping I'm in for. Well, it's a dangerous job, as you know, sir, but fifty pounds is a lot of money to a poor man like me. There's a good deal to be thought of, though. Who's the lady ? Is she in Bristol ? Where does she live ? Has she many friends ?"

But Maurice put up his hand with a half laugh.

"One at the time if you please," he said. "I'm coming to details now ; but, as you say, it's a pretty desperate job. If you still think you're game to go on with it, I'll give you fuller details."

"I'm game all right," came the reckless answer. "Silas Tucker ain't the sort of man to turn up his nose at fifty pounds, especially when he's in such a hole as I am. Why, ruin stares me in the face unless I raise the wind somehow. There's a big hole below my water-line, as you might say, and it's all I can do to keep the pumps going fast enough. Drowning men catch at straws, so you needn't be afraid to trust me."

The man was evidently in earnest.

"Very well," said Scarsdale, "we'll get to details. In the first place, the lady's name is Miss Hazel Harlow, and——"

But Tucker sprang to his feet with an oath. "Miss Hazel Harlow, the actress !" he cried, and his face went pale beneath his tan.

"Yes," answered the other in amazement. "Why ?"

"You need say no more," said Tucker.

"Say no more ? Do you refuse ?"

"Refuse ! no ! Give me the twenty pounds you promised me and ask no more. The fifty pounds is mine."

"Have you taken leave of your senses, man ?" cried Maurice, an expression of the blankest amazement, as was indeed pardonable, upon his face.

"Taken leave of my senses—no ! I should think not ! Why, look here, I'll give you my signed agreement to the undertaking. Do I look like a madman ?"

"No ; but surely you'll be more explicit ?"

"By your leave, sir, I'd rather not. You've asked me to work it out in my own way, and I've done it already. You've made your bargain, now let me make mine. Give me the twenty pounds that you promised, and forward me the other thirty to an address in New York which I'll give you, and which you can send on as soon as you discover that Miss Harlow has disappeared."

Maurice Scarsdale's mystification was only intensified by the seaman's last remark, yet hasty reflection convinced him that Tucker knew what he was saying. He spoke with the air of a man who knew what he was about, and surely a rough seaman could not be expected to be a master hand at intrigue. No, there must be some extraordinary chain of circumstances by which the skipper of the *Susan Tucker* had been led up to an acquaintance with Hazel Harlow, and besides, it might perhaps be as well for Scarsdale not to know the full details of the plot. His name would be all the less likely to be mixed up in the affair.

"Very well," he said suddenly, "I'll consent. It's a big thing to trust you like this, and I wouldn't do it unless there were reasons for my keeping in the background."

He took a pocket-book from the inside of his coat, and produced two ten-pound Bank of England notes.

"Here's the earnest money," he said. "I shall want your receipt and the agreement you promised to give me. Then, when I learn that Miss Harlow has really disappeared—and you seem pretty confident of being able to achieve that—I will forward the thirty pounds to any address that you like to give me."

And thus the dark bond was ratified.

CHAPTER III.

It was Monday morning. *The Good Samaritan* Company had arrived in Bristol the day before, and were ready to begin their campaign in the western city. The week at Birmingham had been an eventful one. It had witnessed the temporary loss of the volunteer actor, Eric Monteith, to the company. It had also witnessed the tragic death of Jenny Lovelace's uncle, and the averting of a terrible danger to Hazel Harlow from the unwearying hand of Horace Caldecott.

There were members of the company who had been secretly delighted at the untoward accident that had deprived them of Eric's companionship. Needless to say, this feeling was not shared by Raymond Venables, the manager, by Hazel, or by Jenny. But Eric was of a different calibre to the ordinary travelling actor, while he had not enough so-called levity in his composition to endear him to the minds of the other ladies of the company. He did not flirt or pay them those attentions so dear to their frivolous hearts. He looked askance at their goings-on with unknown young "mashers," and besides, he was the champion of "that stuck-up Miss Harlow."

It was a lovely autumn morning. Jenny and Hazel had determined to devote their first day to exploring Bristol, and had set out to visit Clifton and the famous Suspension Bridge. They had reached College Green when suddenly Hazel's attention was attracted by a young man dressed in the garb of a merchant sailor,

"Dead to the World" begins next week.

with brown face and merry blue eyes, who approached her and pulled off his peaked cap.

"Why, surely," he began diffidently, "it's Hazel—Miss Harlow, I suppose I should say now."

Hazel drew back a few paces. A look of wonderment came into her eyes. "Well, of all the extraordinary things," she said, "it's Amos—Amos White! Jenny, this is a very old friend of mine. We used to play as boy and girl together at Honeycote. What in the world brings you to Bristol, Amos?"

"I'm a sailor now," said the young man pleasantly; "I said good-bye to Honeycote more than a year ago. And in the meanwhile you've grown to be a famous actress. I thought you would have quite forgotten Amos White. Hazel and I were boy and girl sweethearts, miss," he said, turning to Jenny.

There was something exceedingly winning in the sailor's face. Jenny could not help feeling fascinated by his breezy, open manner, and the frank admiration with which he regarded his beautiful ex-playfellow.

"So you're a sailor, Amos," cried Hazel. "That's a good deal more interesting than old sleepy Honeycote would be—travelling all round the world and seeing all sorts of beautiful places."

Amos laughed.

"Well, there's something in that," he said, "but, unfortunately, the life of a sailor isn't exactly what you read it is in books. It's all right in summer, when you're sailing along beneath the beautiful sun, and it's no hardship to skip aloft and reef the topsail or some such job. But in winter, when you can't walk on the deck for ice and there's a roaring north-easter kicking up the sea, it's a different story. Then the food isn't of the best, and the pay is mighty little. Still, I like it in a way, and I wouldn't go back to Honeycote now."

"Is your ship in Bristol then?" went on Hazel.

"Yes, but we're outward bound this week. I'll tell you what," he said, "it would give me an awful lot of pleasure if you would come down to the docks and have a look over the vessel before she sails."

Hazel's eyes sparkled.

"I should like nothing better," she said. "I have always longed to see over a ship, and it would be doubly interesting to see yours."

"It's not mine," laughed the young fellow, "and it's not a big liner. It's only an old sailing boat, though she's a pretty big one of her class. Supposing you come down to-morrow morning. I'll come and fetch you wherever you like, and I can bring you back, as we don't sail till Wednesday."

Hazel turned to Jenny. "Would you like to go?" she said.

"I can't go to-morrow, dear," was the answer; "I've promised to go and see Lily Desmond. She's living in Clifton now, as I told you. She's married and given up the stage, and I promised her I would go to-morrow, but I am sure with such a protector as Mr. White, especially as he is such an old friend, you'll be perfectly safe."

Jenny spoke with all sincerity. She could see no danger ahead for Hazel. Surely this frank-faced, blue-eyed young sailor-boy, the friend of Hazel's youth, would see that she came to no harm? And so it was settled, and Amos was invited to call for Hazel at her lodgings at ten o'clock the next morning.

Punctually at the appointed time the young fellow made his appearance. Hazel was full of high spirits. The prospect of a visit to the busy dock was most alluring. She chatted gaily to her comrade as they sat in the train that was to convey them to Avonmouth. It was quite refreshing to meet an old friend. As he had said, Amos and she had been boy and girl sweethearts. They had played together round the old farmstead, ridden bare-back horses together, and helped in a hundred and one farm duties so dear to the youthful mind.

Hazel told the young fellow how she had come to leave the farm; how the horrible persecutions of Squire Caldecott had made her take the somewhat formidable step of coming to London and embarking on a theatrical life.

"And are you happy, Hazel?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," answered the girl. "If it were not for one thing: the horrid shadow of Squire Caldecott's attentions. For you know, Amos, he has tried in a hundred and one ways to entrap me into becoming his wife."

The young sailor's face darkened.

"I wish I could get near him with a rope's end," he said. "I'd make him smart for his blackguardism." Then his voice changed and became strangely tender. "Surely it would be better for you, Hazel, to rid yourself for ever of his unwelcome attentions. You can only ensure that by leaving the stage, by finding someone who will give you the protection that you need to keep such as Squire Caldecott at arm's length. By that I mean you ought to find some man who honestly loves you and who would be ready to give up everything for your sake."

The young sailor spoke in a manly, straightforward way, that went direct to Hazel's heart.

"But then I should have to forfeit my liberty," she said almost plaintively. "I should have to get married and give up all my aspirations of becoming a really good actress. I don't want to marry unless I can find a man whom I really and truly love."

"And you haven't found that man yet?" There was a strange eagerness in the questioner's voice.

"No. And until I do I shall struggle on as best I can with only myself to rely upon."

Amos said no more. His face had grown curiously grave, and his manner remarkably constrained. Hazel was too pre-occupied with the thoughts reawakened within her by all her companion had said to notice his constraint.

So little more in the way of conversation passed between them until the docks were reached.

The novelty of her situation and surroundings soon dispelled the serious thoughts in Hazel's mind. The bustle on the quayside, the many vessels lying in the port, the din and rattle of the steam cranes as they hoisted great bales from the black interiors of the vessels, or lowered great packages into the holds, were a revelation to her. On every hand was bustle and confusion. Crates of bananas from Jamaica, bales of tea and sugar with queer foreign-looking marks upon them, live stock and machinery—there was nothing apparently that the ships did not devour or emit.

"Here's our boat," said Amos suddenly, pointing to a schooner that lay alongside the quay. Hazel looked at it with interest. It seemed to her a thing of grace and beauty with its raking forepeak and long, tapering masts, which seemed connected one with another by an absolutely bewildering network of cordage. The deck of the ship was as white as snow; the boats that hung from the davits on the deck had lately received a new coat of paint. There was a neat deck-house amidships painted green. Everything seemed to have been polished with scrupulous care and lavishness.

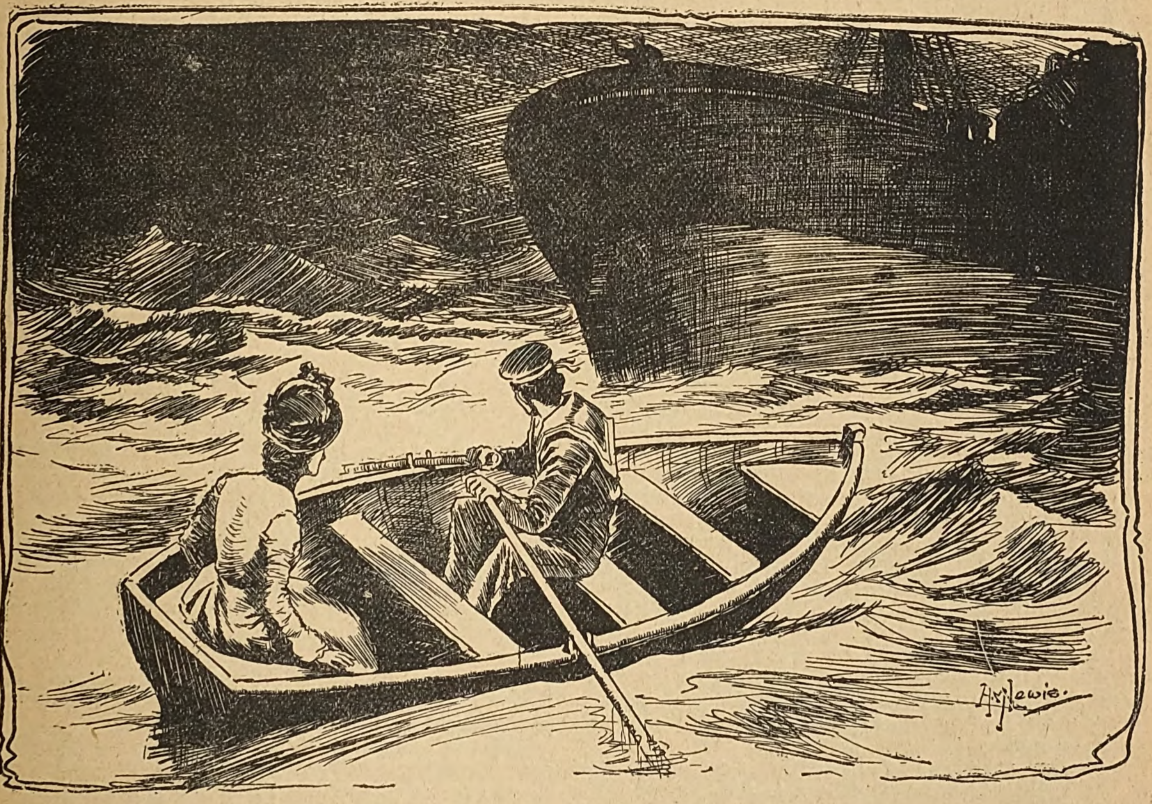
"What a lovely ship!" cried the actress in unaffected delight.

"That's the skipper leaning on the taffrail," said Amos, "If you step across this gangway he will be only too pleased to let me show you round. I told him I wanted to bring you when I got back yesterday, and so he set us all to work making things shipshape. He's been a good skipper to me, and he saved my life. I can tell you about that later on."

Hazel's face grew grave as the memory of that awful episode came back to her. (See *Short Stories*, No. 664.)

"Amos told me at the time," the skipper went on, "how you and he had been playmates together, and how he hoped that perhaps some day he would have the pleasure of seeing you again. So when we got into Bristol and learnt that you were due here this week, I says to Amos, 'Here's your chance. I'm sure Miss Harlow is not the sort to go and forget old friends,' and I see I was right."

The bluff, hearty way in which Tucker spoke quite won Hazel's heart.



The dark sails of the ship, silhouetted against the darker sky beyond, melted slowly away from view.

In a few moments Hazel was on board the vessel, and skipper had come forward and was welcoming her aboard.

"Honoured to see you, miss," he said. "It's a long time since the *Susan Tucker* had such a fair visitor aboard."

Hazel laughed. "I always have heard that sailors knew how to flatter," she said, "and now I see I was not misinformed."

"Oh, we heard of you some time ago," answered the captain. "We got into Belfast just after the company you were acting in left. All the town was talking about an adventure you had been in—how you had been picked up at sea and rescued by a warship."

"Old friends are always the best," she said with a winning smile, turning towards Amos as she spoke.

The blood leapt up into the young seaman's face; a sudden thrill ran through him. How beautiful she was; and this was the little Hazel who had played with him among the fields and pastures at Honeycote. Little did he dream of this day then.

"And now," said White, "let me show you over the ship. First of all I'll take you round the deck and explain as much as I can, and then we'll dive below and explore."

There were three or four other sailors on board, and probably more below. They all grinned somewhat sheepishly at the young girl, but made no remarks.

Surely that's your photo on page 466?

Amos was a good guide. He explained to the girl as much as he could about the working of the vessel, told her the names of the chief spars, and muddled her head with technicalities about "to'gallantsles" and halliards until at last Hazel cried for mercy.

"Very well," said the young man with a laugh, "let's go down below. I want to tell you how the skipper saved my life." He took her into the galley and showed her the cook's quarter's, and then into the fo'castle, where were the seamen's quarters.

"And now we'll see the captain's quarters," he wound up.

The captain was evidently a man of somewhat luxurious ideas, to judge by the cheerful little curtains that were drawn in front of his porthole, a well-filled bookcase and a comfortable lounge chair. There were many little ornaments about the cabin that struck Hazel as being remarkably out of keeping with a man of his appearance and manners. She made no comments, however, and at the young man's bidding sat down on a chair and prepared to listen to his story.

"You must know," he began, "that we had reached Bahia, which is a South American seaport, and a pretty lively sort of place. I had gone on shore to see the town, and was strolling down rather a narrow street when I was suddenly set on by three or four Dagos, rough-looking half-castes, who generally have a knife or something on their persons. Well, they set on me, and I was cornered. I used my fists as well as I could, but one of them got his knife in my arm"—he rolled up his sleeve and disclosed a livid scar upon his muscular forearm—"and I was pretty nearly done for. Suddenly there was a shout and something rushed up like a typhoon, which turned out to be Captain Tucker himself. He let out right and left, and before you could say 'knife' the Dagos had gone for all they were worth, and I was saved. It doesn't sound so much in the telling, but it was a pretty plucky thing to do to come single-handed and go for such ruffians as those. I've owed a debt of gratitude to the skipper ever since, and it'll take a long time to repay."

After that Amos took up the tale of his numerous adventures on land and sea, and he proved to be such an excellent *raconteur* that Hazel sat spell-bound, taking no heed of the fact that time sped on much more quickly than she would have believed possible.

As for Amos, he was in the seventh heaven of delight. To sit there with his old playfellow, now developed into the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, was in itself a delight as enthralling as anything he remembered to have experienced. His eyes and ears too were blind and deaf to anything that was passing beyond the environments of the little cabin, so that it was with a sense as of a rude physical shock that he heard Hazel say:

"Why, good gracious! Surely we are moving!"

The young sailor sprang to his feet with an exclamation of amazement, and rushed to the door of the cabin. To his still deeper sense of surprise, mingled now with a faint feeling of apprehension, he made the discovery that the door was locked; neither could there be any doubt but that it was true what Hazel had said, the vessel was moving slowly through the water. He could hear the gentle lap, lap, of the wavelets against the vessel's side, could tell by the hurried footsteps overhead and the noise of creaking blocks and rattling shrouds that the *Susan Tucker* was gathering way towards the open sea.

What could be the meaning of it? Tucker had distinctly told him that the vessel was to put to sea the next morning. He rattled at the door handle and shouted with all the strength of his lungs: "Hi! Let us out! We're locked in!"

For even now he could not conceive of foul play. He could not see that behind Tucker's eagerness for him to bring Miss Harlow aboard lay something more sinister than the mere expression of goodwill; and besides, what possible object could Tucker have had in abducting the young actress? For of course Amos had been kept in total ignorance of the interview between Maurice Scarsdale and Tucker.

No one answered the young sailor's shouts. He turned round and faced Hazel with a somewhat helpless expression upon his face.

"Upon my soul, I don't know what's the meaning of this," he said gravely. "There must be a mistake somewhere."

Hazel read the suspicions dawning in his eyes that there was foul play afoot somewhere. The colour left her face.

"Are we really putting out to sea?" she asked in a low voice.

"Yes," came the somewhat reluctant answer. "But keep up your heart, Hazel. It's a long way down Channel, and perhaps the skipper is only going to take you for a short trip and put you ashore somewhere Portishead or Weston way."

"But it's preposterous!" cried Hazel. "Break open the door, Amos. I must get out. What will Jenny think? What will they all think?"

Suddenly a voice from outside rang on their startled ears. It was Tucker's.

"If you try and break that door open, Amos," he said in a stentorian tone, "I'll have you put into irons and clapped below hatches for insubordination. I'm skipper aboard this ship, and don't you forget it."

Amos's heart seemed to turn to lead within him. He stood stock still, as though turned to stone. The truth was at last forced home indeed to him that there was foul play afoot.

The next moment the door was flung open, and Silas Tucker entered the cabin, closing the portal behind him. In a moment Hazel flung herself forward.

"What is the meaning of this, Captain Tucker?" she said peremptorily. "How dare you commit such an outrage as to attempt to kidnap a helpless woman who has never, so far as she knows, done you any harm? You cannot be really in earnest in trying to keep me aboard here against my will. What is the meaning of it all?"

"It means, miss," came the stolid answer, "that you've got to make this voyage with us. You're going on a trip for the benefit of your health to New York and back. It will only be three or four months at the most, and that's all there is about it."

Amos stared at his captain with horror-stricken eyes.

"You're joking, captain," he cried, hoarsely. "It can never be true what you say—that you're going to make Miss Harlow go to New York with us."

"You heard what I said," answered Tucker fiercely. "Now, either you give me your parole not to kick up rough, or else I clap you in irons, as I said, for insubordination. You signed articles under me, Mr. Amos White, and you know perfectly well what that means."

"Yes, but—" broke in Amos.

H. T. Johnson's new serial begins next week.

"There are no 'buts' aboard my ship," came the answer. "Now I'll leave you here to talk with your old playfellow a bit, and come back in an hour or so to find out whether you are ready to obey my orders." And without another word he turned round and left the cabin, locking the door behind him as he departed.

Dead silence reigned between the pair after Tucker's departure. Hazel was too dazed, too stunned by what she had heard, to realise the full purport of the black business.

Amos was no whit less astounded. A wild rage boiled in his heart, yet what could he do? Tucker was his master, with despotic authority aboard his own vessel.

"Look here," he began, suddenly, sitting down beside Hazel, and speaking in a whisper, "our only chance is to acquiesce. If we pretend to fall in with the skipper's views, and to make the best of a bad job, perhaps we may find some way of escape. It's our only chance, I am sure. I know the captain pretty well. I can't believe he's really bad-hearted. There must be some influence at work about which we know nothing that has brought about this action of his. And, whatever happens, I'll stick to you through thick and thin, Hazel. Tell me you believe that I have no hand in this business. I know no more of it than you do. I swear it."

"I believe you—oh, I believe you!" murmured the girl brokenly, faintly comforted by the knowledge that Amos was really loyal and ready to help her. "And if you think that's our best course, why, I'll back you up with all the means in my power."

"Good! And now tell me"—this somewhat shamefacedly—"have you any money on you?"

"Five pounds," answered Hazel.

"Then will you give it to me? There is reason in my request. I don't want it for myself. I only want to use it as a means to obtain an end."

"Then you have a plan?"

"Yes; but I daren't say any more, for fear someone may be listening. But when Tucker comes again we shall know how to behave."

CHAPTER IV.

On leaving her friend's house on the afternoon of the same day upon which the *Susan Tucker* had set sail, the first thought of Jenny Lovelace was of Hazel, who had promised to be back at their lodgings not later than four o'clock.

As she hurried along the streets, she suddenly ran into a woman. Both recoiled—both involuntarily uttered an exclamation of surprise. The woman was Valerie Bellairs.

Jenny recoiled. She had not forgotten the discreditable part Valerie had played at Scarborough in attempting to bring about Hazel's downfall. In a moment the thought flashed through her brain—"What is Bellairs doing in Clifton?"

"How do you do, Miss Lovelace?" said Valerie, sneeringly. "Where is Miss Harlow? I thought you and she were inseparable."

Angry words were on the tip of Jenny's tongue. With an effort she restrained herself, and with a haughty gesture of disdain swept on in silence. Her action goaded Valerie to fury.

"See that you keep your eye on your friend," she muttered in a low voice. "It wouldn't be nice if you were to lose her." With which words she hurried on.

Jenny hastened back to the lodgings a prey to a mighty wave of anger; yet all the time she kept saying to herself—"Why is that woman in Clifton? She's up to no good, I'll be bound."

There was no sign of Hazel at the lodgings. Jenny waited till five in growing anxiety, and at last could bear the suspense no more. She determined to rush off and find Venables and to ask his advice. Now that Eric was no longer at hand to assist them, both she and Hazel relied on the manager much more than either of them would ever have thought possible.

On learning that Hazel had disappeared, Venables was at once of the opinion that they should take train to Avonmouth and see if they could discover the name of the vessel that Hazel had gone to see. Jenny knew the name of the captain to be Tucker, and this fact was sure to be of assistance to them.

"Upon my word, it's enough to turn a man white-headed," said Venables. "As if it wasn't bad enough to have all the responsibilities of a theatrical company upon one's shoulders, without having one's leading lady continually in some desperate strait or other. I've been connected with the profession fifteen years, and I never remember to have conducted a tour that's been fraught with such terrible dangers as the present one. Unless one really participated in them oneself, and knew exactly the nature of the perils that confront our beautiful Hazel, upon my word, human credence wouldn't swallow their possibility."

Inquiry at the docks elicited the astounding information that the *Susan Tucker* had sailed outward bound some hours before. She had had one passenger, so quayside loafers affirmed, a lady, who had seemed overjoyed at the prospect of a trip.

This information nearly drove Venables and Jenny frantic. Yet of what good would it be to raise a fuss there? They dashed off to police headquarters, and laid their case before them. Here they were met with that official indifference and incredulity which anything out of the common so often produces in the minds of those used to red tape and laws of rule of thumb.

In vain Venables stormed and raged, and implored that steps might be taken to waylay the vessel before it really got out to the open sea. His excited demeanour only produced irascibility in officialdom. "A pretty job," growled the superintendent, "to go and hunt for a three-masted schooner on the high seas, and how do we know that the young lady hasn't gone off of her own free will? There was a lover in the case, I'll be bound, and when you once have dealing with an actress, well, you never know what's going to happen. Why, the very people on the quay say the girl was jolly and laughing. There was no suspicion of foul play there. The young lady went on board of her own free will. No, you may make up your mind there was a parson on board and she's off on her honeymoon trip."

This apparently brutal callousness, which was nevertheless only the commonsense view of a man through whose hands passed all sorts and conditions of men and women, and who had got into the habit of hearing the most outrageous stories without attaching much importance to them, had, as can be well imagined, a most depressing effect upon the two comrades in misfortune. They were powerless to do more than they had done, however, and as all their prayers and entreaties availed nothing, they were bound to retire, baffled and beaten.

Hazel's fame and beauty had reached Bristol before her,

"Dead to the World" begins next week.

the advance bookings at the theatre had been almost unprecedented, and now Hazel had disappeared, and there seemed but little chance of ever seeing her again.

The performance that night was a dead failure. The whole company was demoralised by the news that Hazel had somehow mysteriously disappeared, though Venables and Jenny both resolved to keep the true facts of the case, as far as they knew them, locked up in their own breasts. Hazel's understudy was but a poor substitute for Hazel herself. Jenny could hardly speak her lines for utter misery. The audience soon grew intolerant, and among them sat the two who had been responsible for this heart-rending state of affairs, Maurice Scarsdale and Valerie, jubilant at the success of her lover's plot. And Scarsdale was radiant in the knowledge that Valerie had promised to become his wife when *The Good Samaritan* Company had left Bristol.

CHAPTER V.

In the meantime the *Susan Tucker*, under a full spread of canvas, was drawing steadily away beneath the influence of a six-knot breeze towards the open sea. In accordance with their preconcerted arrangements, Hazel and Amos had apparently resigned themselves to the inevitable. Hazel had brought all her powers of acting into play, and Tucker was jubilant at her change of front. It was evident to the skipper's somewhat narrow brain that the girl already viewed her prospects with equanimity.

"If it wasn't for Amos, Captain," she said archly, "I should feel most unhappy; but we are such old friends, he and I; you know we were boy and girl sweethearts. Of course I had to appear reluctant, but"— she treated the captain to a witching glance from her radiant eyes —"we know each other well, he and I."

Tucker chuckled. "So that's how the wind blows," he said good-humouredly, "Well, you're a deep one, you are. Well, Amos is a lucky fellow, and" (so ran the unspoken conclusion of his sentence) "I've never earned fifty pounds so cheaply in all my life."

This change of front enabled Amos to see about the carrying out of a scheme that had occurred to him with comparative ease. No restriction was made upon his or Hazel's actions. They were allowed to go hither and thither on the vessel as they liked, and Amos went about his duties as though nothing had happened.

He had ascertained who were to be on watch that night. There was to be a man at the wheel, and another seaman in spells of two hours each the night long. The man who went on watch at about eleven o'clock was a seaman named Dan Perkins, a good-hearted, jolly sort of fellow, on friendly terms with Amos. Him the young sailor sought out, and after a whispered conversation between them, pressed some money into his hand. The same thing happened with the man who was to take the wheel.

At ten o'clock Tucker retired to rest, free from any suspicion that anything untoward was amiss. At about half-past eleven Amos tapped noiselessly at the door of the cabin that had been set aside for Hazel. He then stole on deck, where in a few minutes he was joined by the girl herself. They went forward steadily, where they were met by Perkins.

What happened to them is soon told. Amos and Hazel clambered up into the long-boat, that was swinging on the davits, and were let noiselessly down into the sea by Perkins. So far, so good.

The schooner slid past them as they lay motionless upon the heaving waters of the Bristol Channel. The dark sails of the ship, silhouetted against the darker sky beyond, melted slowly away from view. Then White, shipping the oars between the thole-pins, began pulling with the quick, practised hand of a man used to such work, in the opposite direction to which the vessel was travelling.

* * * * *

The steamer *Windermere*, bound from Waterford to Bristol, in ballast, was churning a leisurely way up the Bristol Channel towards her port. She was somewhere off Portishead when suddenly her look-out yelled in a stentorian voice, "Small boat on the starboard bow, sir, signalling for assistance!"

A bell rang in the engine-room; the screw of the *Windermere* ceased revolving.

"Ship ahoy!" came out of the darkness. "Throw us a line. I've a lady aboard who wants help."

In a moment all was bustle and confusion on the steamer's deck. The small boat drew alongside her, a ladder was let down, and, aided by the light of a lantern, two figures swung themselves up over the vessel's side, the one a tall, beautiful, stylishly-dressed lady, the other a man clad in the garb of a common sailor.

"What's this?" said the skipper of the *Windermere*, who had come down from the bridge, attracted by the unusual incident.

In a few words Hazel gave him the outline of her story. Deeply interested, he led the way to his own private cabin; his interest only grew more intense as he heard the girl's story in full, and noted the wondrous beauty of her face and form.

"You are never Miss Hazel Harlow?" he said. "Why, all Ireland knows the story of your adventure at Belfast. You seem destined for maritime excitement. It was smart the way you escaped this time. Won't Captain Tucker be mad to-morrow morning? Anyhow, you're safe here. What an old rascal the fellow must be' I wonder what the true story of the business is."

But the skipper was never destined to know that nor indeed, was Hazel, for what means had she of discovering the real facts of the case, how that it was again the hand of Valerie Bellairs that had been raised to work her undoing?

There is little more to be told. It was early the next morning when the *Windermere* arrived in Bristol, so that Hazel was enabled to start for her lodgings before Jenny had risen from a couch from which all thought of sleep had been banished.

As for Amos, the captain of the *Windermere* was so pleased with the young man's part in the affair that he had then and there offered to take him on as one of the steamer's crew.

"You needn't be afraid of old Tucker trying to find you," the captain had said. "He probably thinks you are in Davy Jones's locker by now."

And so the event did not turn out so badly for Amos as he had anticipated.

"Perhaps we may meet again some day, Hazel," he said, as with tears in her eyes she thanked him again and again for his devotion to her.

"I'll write to you sometimes if I can," he went on, "and tell you how I'm getting on. And now as an old friend let me give you a word of advice. Try and find a gentleman worthy of you, who will make a home for you and protect you from the recurrence of such an accident as the one that has just befallen you. Anyhow, good luck be always with you."

Jenny's joy at having her friend so miraculously restored to her can be well imagined. Hazel poured into her willing ears the full story of what had happened. After she had finished Jenny cried out:

"I am sure Valerie Bellairs has had a hand in this." And she told Hazel of her meeting with the actress, and of the veiled innuendo that Valerie had thrown out concerning Hazel herself.

And if the performance of the night before had been unworthy of the traditions of *The Good Samaritan* Company, the same could not be said for that night's representation.

Hazel received a tremendous ovation, though there were two people among the audience who could only sit and gaze fearfully at the radiant vision presented by the leading lady of the company.

"I take back my promise," hissed Valerie in Scarsdale's ear; "you have made a fool of me for nothing."

As for Scarsdale, he could find no words to answer her. Somehow Tucker had played him false, though he was never to know the true story of how his villainy had been defeated.

As for Tucker himself, we need concern ourselves no more with him. He had not earned his fifty pounds, though he had not come out the poorer by the transaction.

He was sensible enough to realise that it is best to let sleeping dogs lie, so he never made an effort to trace Amos White or to take revenge on the young sailor for having thus cavalierly broken his indentures and absconded with the *Susan Tucker's* longboat.

Portsmouth was to be the town next visited by *The Good Samaritan* Company. Here Jenny Lovelace was to pit her strength and woman's wit against a man whose cunning had been proved over and again and for Hazel Harlow's sake. How she fared in her enterprise will be told in a thrilling story in next week's *Short Stories.*

* * *

She: "You ought to be ashamed of yourself for stealing a kiss." He: "But you are equally guilty, because you received the stolen goods."

* * *

Scene: Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh. "Papa, who owns the Gardens?" "We do, my son," replied the boy's father, "we, the people. As a part of the people, James, we have a right to consider ourselves the owners. It is a glorious feature of our form of government, my boy," he continued, his eye kindling, "that the people are absolute. All property rights are based on their consent. All titles thus come from them and will finally revert to them. Here we have a right to come and rest from the toil and worry of life. We are on our own soil. To stroll at will, my boy, through these lovely——" "Halloa, there!" shouted a harsh, imperious voice. "Come off the grass, will ye, or I'll run ye in?" It was the voice of a policeman. "Come off the grass, James," said the father, meekly. "Princes' Street Gardens belongs to us, the people, but the grass belongs to the town council."

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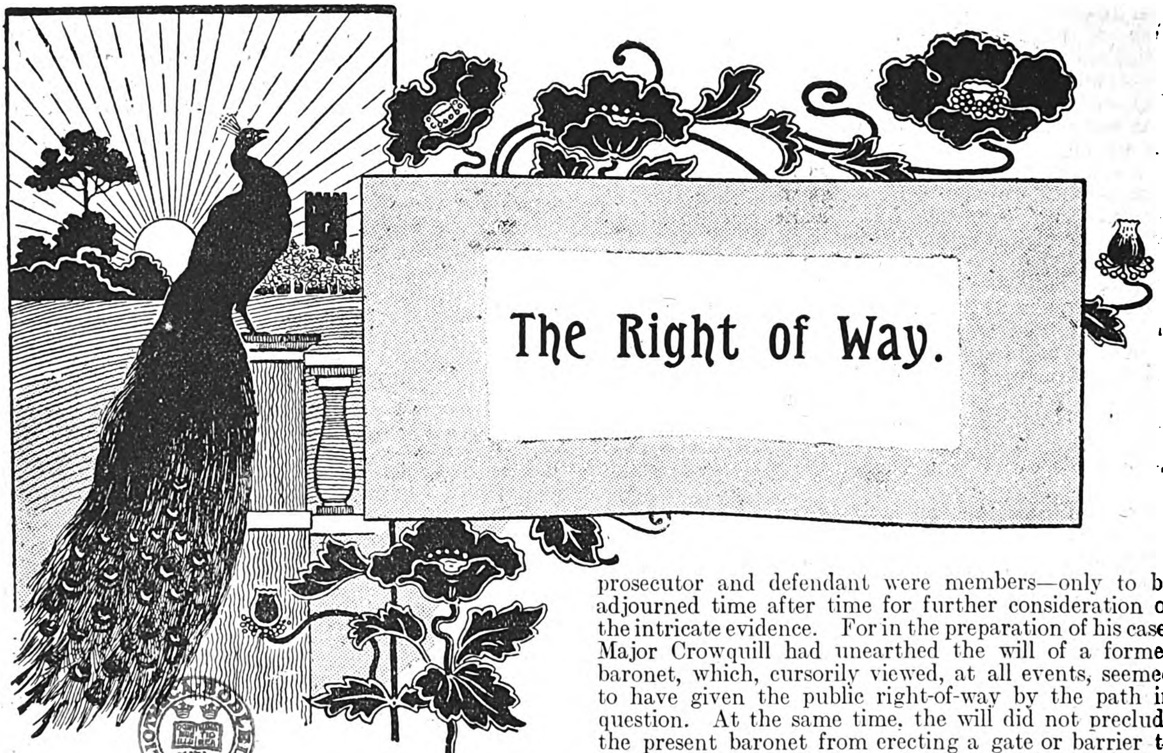

The Right of Way.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

CHAPTER I.

Nobody understood the case, and nobody apart from the disputants held any definite opinion as to who was in the right. It is sufficient for present purposes to say that the disputants were respectively Major Crowquill and Sir Robert Bettany; and the subject of dispute the right-of-way by a path that led from Major Crowquill's garden gate and skirted a wood belonging to the other litigant.

The gallant major, more fiery surely than any other of his proverbially fiery rank, was a retired Mutiny campaigner, living on his half-pay in a picturesque old house in Kent with his daughter Dorothy and a couple of servants. Dorothy was just twenty, pretty as a picture, far more interesting to gaze upon, and imbued with the paternal pertinacity to just that degree which, wedded to winsome femininity, added to it so potent and subtle a charm.

Sir Gilbert Bettany, Bart., was handsome, rich, and thirty, of studious and retiring habits, and a most pronounced objection to the "other sex." Rarely going into society, and still more rarely receiving other than men friends, he had swathed himself with the reputation of a woman hater. That he would ever marry seemed an impossibility.

In the matter of the disputed pathway, Sir Gilbert had shown that he, too, could be obstinate or strong of purpose, according to the aspect in which his action was viewed. On the major persisting in the use of the contested path, the baronet had retaliated with a solicitor's letter, threatening a summons for trespass; and when the gallant officer, his blood stirred to boiling point, ignored the letter, the summons was duly served. The case had come before the county bench—of which both prosecutor and defendant were members—only to be adjourned time after time for further consideration of the intricate evidence. For in the preparation of his case, Major Crowquill had unearthed the will of a former baronet, which, cursorily viewed, at all events, seemed to have given the public right-of-way by the path in question. At the same time, the will did not preclude the present baronet from erecting a gate or barrier to prevent people making use of the way. So that, altogether, there was a pretty legal web, in which acuter brains than the average county magistrate's might easily become entangled.

The bench, after some dozen adjournments, decided that the case involved a question of the rights of property, and refused absolutely to deal with it. The upshot was that the case was set down for hearing in the Probate Court. So the lawyers went on writing letters and piling up big costs, and K.C.'s went on talking of precedents (which their "devils" looked up for them) and piling up bigger costs; and the case loomed darkly in the future.

Meanwhile, Major Crowquill and Sir Gilbert Bettany each sturdily maintained he was in the right—the former using the path, and the latter doing all he could to prevent him.

CHAPTER II.

Dorothy Crowquill loved her father. And perhaps her love for him was the more intense since there was no other masculine object on which she poured out her affection. She had never loved in the limited sense of the word—had never had a sweetheart, though her bright eyes and sunny hair had played the *rôle* of light to the impetuous human moths that exist in London society, seeking whom they may fall in love with. But Dorothy had returned with her father after her first brief London season, bringing her heart back, absolutely whole and unimpaired. Her only feeling was one of disappointment. Naturally somewhat romantic, she had in the secret recesses of her fluttering little heart, imagined that in town she might meet the fairy prince of her inmost thoughts—the hero, noble and brave and strong, whom she had conjured up in her fanciful brain. And, instead, she had met with a lot of shallowpates,

Surely that's your photo on page 466?

with absolutely nothing of the hero in them; but ever ready to admire and flatter and flirt, to say idiotic nothings by the hour together, to treat and humour her like a child. Yes; undoubtedly Dorothy Crowquill was grievously disappointed.

As well as loving her father, she admired him; admired him for his sound intelligence, and above all, for his indomitable spirit, which, as we have already said, she inherited from him, in a diluted form. She admired resolution in a man; and, in the present case, she firmly believed her father to be in the right.

So it was with but little compunction that, one July morning, she took a walk along the disputed path. It was a lovely day. The sun in all its summer splendour was gilding the green of the trees whereon perched myriads of birds, singing their hearts out in thankfulness to Heaven for the happiness which was theirs.

Of part of this joy of living, Dorothy seemed at the moment to partake. As she tripped along, blithe as a lark herself, she too sang—or, rather hummed—the melody of a simple ballad which was a favourite with herself and her father.

Suddenly, however, she broke off, and halted. A bend in the path had brought her face to face with a gentleman seated on a gate. At her approach he looked up and frowned a little as he saw that it was a girl.

Neither spoke for a moment. Then, driven to speech by the awkwardness of the stare they were directing on the other, Sir Gilbert Bettany (for he it was) said:

"You may perhaps not be aware of it, but you are trespassing."

"I am aware you hold such to be the case," returned Dorothy icily; "but my father thinks differently. I believe my father."

The baronet was taken aback somewhat by this spirited reply. He gazed at his antagonist with curious eyes.

"You are Miss Crowquill, I perceive," he said.

Dorothy bowed distantly, and made as though to go on. Sir Gilbert Bettany, his woman hating spirit piqued at her demeanour, got off the gate and stood facing her.

"I am sorry," he said, "to appear to be impolite. But this is a question of principle, and I must insist on my right."

"If, in insisting, *you* intend to use brute force," Miss Dorothy retorted, her face flushing and eyes flashing with indignation, "I shall of course turn back. Otherwise *I* insist on my right to go on."

Sir Gilbert paused, astounded. What a girl this was!—so different from the dolls he met in society. Why, she had the spirit and will of a man! It was a revelation in womanhood. He looked at her again, and now there was distinctly something of admiration in his gaze. Disconcerted by the unflinching angry look of her big, beautiful eyes, he stammered out:

"Why, of course, Miss Crowquill, if *you* wish to go on, I—er—have no objection—not the least. Pray go on by all means."

"Thank you! I have no wish to be merely tolerated." Dorothy's eyes flashed defiance. The baronet looked on in surprised admiration at the girl's spirit.

"To suggest that I am capable of *tolerating* you," he said quietly, "is to make me feel guilty of gross impertinence. I am sorry to be impertinent." He glanced at her penitently.

"I am sure I do not mean to imply that you are," she replied, with relent in her tone. She rather liked his quiet, unassuming manner.

"It is kind of you to say so," he rejoined, with a ring of genuine sincerity in his tone. "I should never have forgiven myself if you had thought otherwise." He was dragging out the conversation. Dorothy pleased his sight, and he seemed to want her to tarry near. But she was already on the move.

"Good-day, Sir Gilbert Bettany!" she remarked, with just a touch of roguishness in her manner. "I am glad we have settled this wretched question of the right-of-way." And ere he could do more than acknowledge her adieu, she was well on her way along the disputed path. The baronet gazed after her, admiring the beautiful outlines of her figure till she disappeared round a bend in the path. Then, with wonder-set eyes, he sat down on a gate near by.

"She's a beautiful girl!" he said to himself, flicking his leg contemplatively with his stick. "She's better than that—she's a splendid woman. What spirit she has, and what dignity! By Jove, what a—Bah! here am I, known to all my friends as a confirmed woman hater, growing sentimental over the daughter of my arch-enemy. It was her eyes that beat me—they're beautiful eyes." He looked to dream for a moment. "And hang it all," he continued, pulling himself together, "she insisted on her *right* to use this path, and I tamely submitted! I don't mind, of course, but there's a principle involved. I'll have to talk to her quietly but firmly when I see her again."

While he was thus "audibly thinking" of her, Dorothy, in her turn, was thinking of him.

"It's strange that papa and he should be at loggerheads about this stupid path. He seems such a nice man. What a pleasant soft voice he has, and how polite and serious! So different from men who are always paying compliments and saying silly things. Perhaps I was a little bit rude in insisting on coming this way. . . . . But no! I mustn't let him, simply because he happens to be nice, make me alter my mind. Of course, papa is right, and if I happen to meet Sir Gilbert again, I must tell him, kindly but firmly, that I consider myself fully entitled to use this path whenever I choose."

CHAPTER III.

Although Sir Gilbert Bettany had shown himself (according to his own belief) a little weak in dealing with Miss Dorothy Crowquill, he was determined to maintain his claim to the disputed path.

Then the fat was in the fire! Hostilities were renewed.

And so, one day, in pursuance of this purpose, he had a strong five-barred gate erected, upon discovering which, Major Crowquill grew tempestuous in his wrath.

"Gate, is it?" he stormed. "He thinks he'll keep me out with a gate, does he? I'll show him!"

And duly the Major "showed" him. For at five o'clock one morning, he armed himself with a crowbar and sledge-hammer, and with his own hands demolished that five-barred gate beyond recognition.

Sir Gilbert Bettany issued a summons for wilful destruction of his property, and the Major promptly replied with a cross-summons for obstructing the public pathway. Previously there had been a very pretty legal tangle, and these later developments added to it. For the matter, being already *sub judice*, was fought shy of by the local bench, and both summonses were dismissed, each party paying his own costs.

This was equally unsatisfactory to both parties. The baronet immediately had a second gate erected, and anticipating a depredatory visit from the irate major, rose very early himself the next morning and sallied out to place himself on guard. In his hand he carried a hunting crop. He was going to take the law into his own hands should it be necessary.

Sure enough, as he got within earshot of the newly-erected gate, he heard through the trees the sound of blows, as of a hammer falling on iron bars. Evidently the major had got to work early. Sir Gilbert Bettany gripped his whip tighter and strode on quickly.

But what a sight met his eyes when he emerged from the coppice in full view of the gate! Instead of the fire-eating major whom he had expected, he beheld Miss Dorothy Crowquill, hatless and jacketless, swinging a sledge-hammer, and inflicting such blows on the gate as would not have discredited a blacksmith.

The baronet stopped dead with surprise. He had not foreseen this development, and was quite unprepared for it. He looked as if he would have liked the earth to open and swallow him up. Failing that, he did actually try a strategical movement back into the shelter of the trees.

But it was too late.

Pausing for a moment's rest from her task, Dorothy espied him.

"Ah! good-morning, Sir Gilbert!" she called out.

There was no indication of confusion in her manner. She was as composed as if she had merely been caught gathering a posy of flowers, instead of in the wanton destruction of another person's property.

"Good morning, Miss Crowquill!" He was actually blushing with bewilderment.

"You are an early riser, Sir Gilbert."

"Not so early as yourself apparently."

"Oh! I am up early this morning in order to get rid of this stupid gate which you have had put up. It is exceptional for me to be about so early as this."

"You think the object worthy of such a change in habit?"

"Oh, yes, certainly! You see, papa is laid up with an attack of gout, or he would have come himself. And he worried so much about not being able to do it, that in order to prevent him making himself worse, I resolved to destroy the gate myself."

She was punctuating her remarks with hammer-blows by this time. Sir Gilbert looked on amazed. Was ever such temerity known as this girl's? How strong she seemed! How supple her body was; how graceful the swing of her arms; what a lovely bloom the exertion put upon her cheeks! She paused again in her work.

"You put up very strong gates," she murmured. There was more than a suggestion of banter in her manner.

"Do I?" he answered slowly.

"Yes—awfully strong. I've been hammering at this silly old bar for ever so long—and I'm quite tired."

"Why not leave off, then?" he suggested.

"What! give up my task—never! papa would be awfully angry. No, I'll go on till I drop!" And she fixed both her beautiful eyes full upon the baronet.

Those eyes did for him. He made a step forward.

"Can I help you?" he enquired desperately.

"Oh! now that's very kind of you," and she handed him the hammer through the bent bars.

For the next three or four minutes the gate echoed to the ponderous blows which the baronet dealt it. When he paused to rest for a moment, his eyes sought those of Dorothy. There was a twinkle in the latter.

"Why are you smiling?" he asked.

"I can't help it," she replied. "It really is too funny!"

"What is?"

"Why, to think that you should take the trouble to erect this gate yesterday, and then help to destroy it to-day!"

She laughed merrily.

"Was there ever such inducement to destroy one's own property?" he asked.

"How do you mean?"

"I mean this, Miss Crowquill," he burst out; "that *you* asked me to do it. And there's nothing I wouldn't do for your sake."

"Sir Gilbert!" she dropped her eyes and blushed as she uttered the exclamation.

"Forgive me, Miss Crowquill!" He had dropped the hammer by this time, and was by her side, holding her hand.

"Forgive me—Dorothy! I love you—love you as I never dreamt a woman could be loved before! Will you—will you be my wife?"

Dorothy's head dropped lower, and she did not try to release herself from his arm, which somehow or other had stolen around her waist.

"Dorothy—say yes!"

She didn't say "yes," but she allowed him to kiss her; and there's a language in that sort of thing which even a woman-hater can understand. Sir Gilbert Bettany evidently understood it, and was satisfied. Furthermore, the language was repeated.

* * * * *

To the mild chagrin of the members of the legal profession engaged in the case, the famous right-of-way lawsuit suddenly came to an end, in consequence of a settlement having been arrived at.

The cause of that settlement became apparent a few weeks later, when the friends of the respective Bettany and Crowquill families began buying wedding presents. Major Crowquill doesn't quarrel with his son-in-law about the right-of-way now.

FIND OUT SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF.

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Inclose six penny stamps and a stamped addressd envelope with each specimen of handwriting.

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MRS. PEMBERTON'S PAYING GUEST.

TO LADIES, Widowed or Single.—A lady with house (much too large for her own use), in good locality, and well furnished, would be glad to receive as a paying guest one or other as above.—Address, for terms, etc., Mrs. Pemberton, Dynevor Lodge, Eynesford Crescent, Bayswater, W.

"The very thing! I'll investigate at once. It sounds all right. At any rate it's better than this!" and Freda Periera threw around a discontented look, expressed and emphasised by curling lip and contracted brow.

It was a private sitting-room on the third floor of the Hotel Cecil. Breakfast was upon the table, and it was an advertisement in the *Morning Post* that had attracted the lady's attention.

Young she was (eight-and-twenty or thereabouts), and passably good-looking, but her somewhat small, steely blue eyes had in them an over-shrewd, calculating expression, which, together with thin lips, tightly compressed as a rule, gave an unpleasant impression of hardness to most people with whom she came in contact.

Her dark skin and jet-black hair told of Southern blood, while her nervously quick movements implied that, as a daughter of the South, she had inherited its temperament in no small degree.

The father of Freda Periera had been a cadet of a certain noble house, whose principal ancestral seat is the glory of the North of England.

Extravagant—vicious even—he had been compelled, as the result of his own folly, to seek the Continent as a safe place of residence.

It was during a summer's sojourn at lovely Sorrento that he met the Italian girl whom, to her own sorrow, he ultimately married.

The daughter of a small wine-shop keeper in the outskirts of the town, one Carlo Periera, she could not, somehow, resist the persuasive tongue of the well-dressed, perfectly mannered Englishman.

Fortunately for herself, in one way, Carlo would permit no love-making for its own sake—no inconsequent, irresponsible flirting.

"You want," he said, "to marry my daughter—good! You only make your love to her, and then—pht!" and he made a significant snap of the finger in the direction of the road to the frontier. "Well, then I say 'No, Signior Inglese!' No, I, Carlo Periera, have my pride as have you 'milords,' and can claim the best blood in Italy for my own—*si!* And so, signior, no! if you love only, and will not marry."

As Carlo Periera looked quite capable of not "saying" merely, but "doing," Arthur Delane clearly had but two alternatives.

He loved Margharita—after a fashion, and yet in such a way that he could not let her go.

He took her away, after the marriage, to Florence, where they contrived to live for the best part of ten years. Then Margharita died, and Delane, first consigning the little Freda, like any commercial package, to the care of Carlo Periera, disappeared, to be seen no more. Whether he died, or, indeed, what became of him, nobody knew, and, for the matter of that, nobody cared.

Brought up by her grandfather, the Italian part of Freda's nature greatly developed, save in that, much to the old innkeeper's disgust, she invariably spoke English.

One thing, however, Periera insisted upon, viz., that she should adopt his surname, her father's being, for obvious reasons, hateful to him.

When, just before the completion of her eight-and-twentieth year, Periera died, leaving her the bulk of his savings of fifty years, Freda rejoiced within herself that her time was come; the realisation of her life-dream was made possible; wealth, position, everything! might now be had for the trying for them.

That her legacy was considerable was evidenced by her manner of living in London, whither she had come after a brief stay in Paris.

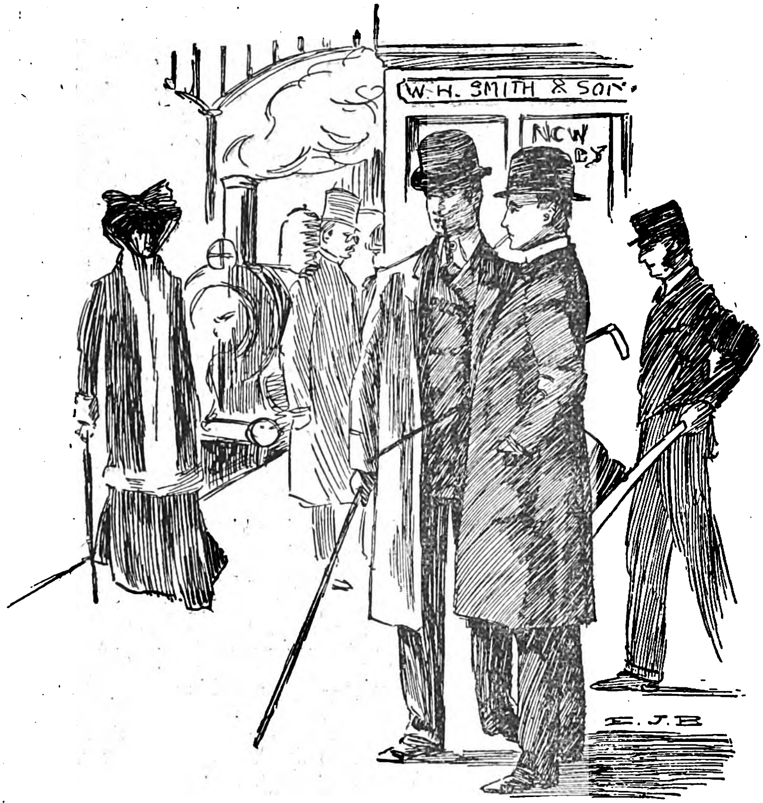
Her main motive was undoubtedly matrimonial. Her money, she knew, would not last for ever, and she looked upon it, while it remained, to furnish her with the means of securing a good settlement.

Up to the present she had been unsuccessful; all her social ventures had turned out "fiascos," so that now when she was beginning to find that her resources were perilously near their end, she saw that she must make some supreme effort before disaster should render effort of any kind an absolute impossibility.

* * * * *

Eynesford Crescent is in the best part of Bayswater,

H. T. Johnson's new serial begins next week.



"Some crank, I suppose, with nothing better to do than to stare at people."

close to Ladbroke Grove, in fact, Dynevor Lodge being one of the most desirable houses in it.

Mrs. Pemberton, the owner and occupier of the latter, was a quiet, refined lady of advanced middle age, and the widow of a distinguished general officer.

Two sons, one a sub-lieutenant in the navy, the other a military cadet at Sandhurst, lived with their mother when they were in London on leave; otherwise, with the exception of her servants, her life was companionless and solitary.

Some little while before the anticipated home-coming of her boys it had struck her that a paying inmate of the house, of her own sex, would benefit her in more ways than one.

In the first place, it would add materially to her income, which, never over large, had been depleted in no small measure by the sacrifices she had made for her children, the starting in life of whom had sadly crippled her means. The presence, too, of a lady would be much to her if the new-comer were in every way suitable, the prospect of even such companionship being, after her hermit-like existence, doubly pleasant.

"Miss Freda Periera."

So ran the card handed her about three o'clock on the afternoon upon the day on which the advertisement appeared in the *Morning Post*.

An account of the interview would not be particularly interesting; sufficient that both ladies were on the alert to make discoveries, and that both were in the end apparently satisfied.

For a time the arrangement seemed to work splendidly, then the rift appeared, and clouds began to gather.

Mrs. Pemberton, probably because she was altogether unused to the boarding-house business, even on a limited and a genteel scale, had, in spite of the polite fiction implied in the term "paying guest," somewhat hazy notions with regard to the "guest's" true position.

She evidently imagined that the monetary consideration she received gave a commercial complexion to the affair, while it as evidently necessitated a certain assumption of dignified stand-offishness on her part as toward her new acquaintance.

On the other hand, Freda Periera soon began to take liberties (or that which Mrs. Pemberton regarded as such), apparently forgetting, when high-handedly intruding her suggestions, and even orders, that her hostess was the real head of the establishment, and that to take upon herself to usurp the domestic throne was at once a manifest proof of ignorance and of crass impertinence.

This forgetfulness, or, shall it be said, wilful blindness, led her into the perpetration of all sorts of unwarrantable things, to the vexation of Mrs. Pemberton, who bitterly regretted, when too late, having entered so hastily into the contract.

Like many another foolish woman before and since, she had, even on the very first day of Freda's appearance at Dynevor Lodge, acquainted her with all the salient points of the family history, quite unaware, poor soul, that Freda's tale of all that concerned herself was far from being a veracious chronicle; was, in fact, as highly coloured as could well be.

Among other things the fond mother, in expatiating upon her sons and their many good points, communicated the pregnant fact that the elder (the naval sub lieutenant), would, upon attaining his majority in the following June, come into possession of an estate in Hertfordshire and a capital sum of £50,000, under the will of the late General Pemberton's brother, a large holder of "Hudson's Bay" and "New River" stock.

It might, perhaps, have been fancy, but Mrs. Pemberton could not shake off the idea that Freda Periera had thoughts about this matter as from time to time she referred to the subject, getting as much information as she could upon it consistently with prudence

About a month after Freda's arrival at Dynevor Lodge, word came from Douglas Pemberton that he should leave the Naval Depot, Whale Island, Portsea, that evening, and should, all being well, be at home some time during the morning of the next day. His letter con

H. T. Johnson's new serial begins next week

cluded with saying that he had arranged with his brother Cecil to meet him at Clapham Junction, from whence they would journey home together.

Immediately after breakfast the following morning, Mrs. Pemberton was surprised to see her "guest" making preparation for going out.

"I may be away at luncheon time," said Freda airily, "so do not wait, please, as, perhaps, it will be three or half past before I return."

The other thought it strange, this early expedition, though why exactly she could not quite satisfy herself.

* * * * *

It was certainly a curious circumstance, a coincidence almost, that as the Portsmouth train steamed into the "Junction" a tall, sealskin-jacketted, foreign-looking lady should be on the platform awaiting its arrival.

When Douglas Pemberton sprang out of the carriage to greet his brother, who had arrived by another train, their meeting was observed and keenly noted by the lady in question; so closely, indeed, that it drew the attention of the two young men to her.

They could not plainly see her features owing to her thick veil, but they saw quite enough to be able to make out that for some reason the stranger was curious with regard to them.

"D'you know her?" whispered Cecil to his brother.

"Not from Adam!" returned Douglas. "Some crank, I suppose, with nothing better to do than to stare at people. But never mind her old cha ! I'm as hungry as a hunter! We'll put the traps in the cloak-room for half an-hour while we see if we can get a chop at the buffet."

The woman must have overheard this, for she immediately descended the stairs, went outside, and, getting into a hansom, drove away westwards.

* * * *

The two young men arrived at the Lodge just after luncheon.

Mrs. Pemberton rather dreaded saying anything about the new inmate, and so postponed explanations until later on.

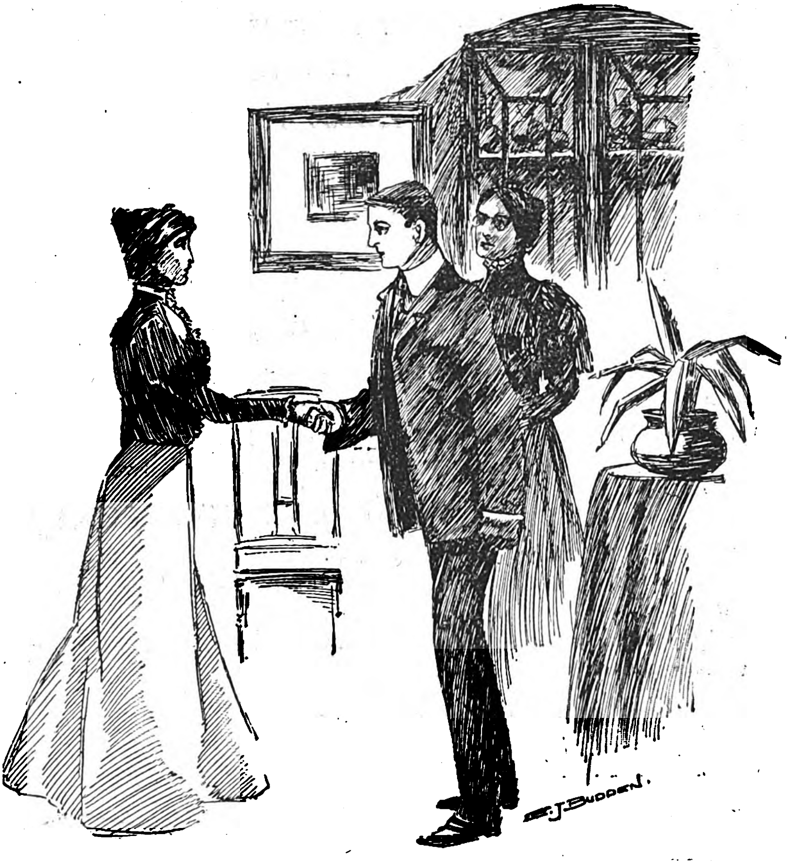
At dinner both Douglas and Cecil greeted the appearance of Freda at the table with well bred but genuine astonishment. The usual introduction conveyed, of course, no meaning. As the meal progressed Freda's manifest disposition to consider the house and all belonging to it as being hers equally with its legitimate mistress caused both boys to exchange puzzled glances of displeasure.

Who was she, this extremely forward individual? No friend and guest of their mother's would surely so far forget herself as to dictate in her hostess' presence and at the latter's own table! The good lady saw the dilemma she was in, and took the first opportunity after dinner to explain matters, if a trifle lamely.

"Yes, mother, that's all very well," said Douglas indignantly, "but neither I nor Cecil see any reason for your having a lady" (strongly emphasising the word) "as a paying member of your family."

"No, mother," said Cecil, "I don't like it, and I am sure Douglas doesn't, and——"

"My dear boys!" implored their mother, "do be reasonable! My life here is rather lonely, as I think you will admit, and I merely thought that if I could induce a lady to honour me with her company" (innocent deception, although I think the lads saw through it) "it would be pleasant for me and——"



The usual introduction, of course, conveyed no meaning.

"Well, but mother!" interrupted her eldest born, "you could have had cousin Dorothy up from Alnwick! She would have been only too glad to come."

Manager as well as mother, Mrs. Pemberton had her own reasons for not extending her invitation to the young lady.

Things went on in this way for the next few days, to

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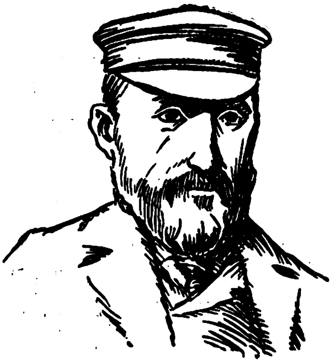

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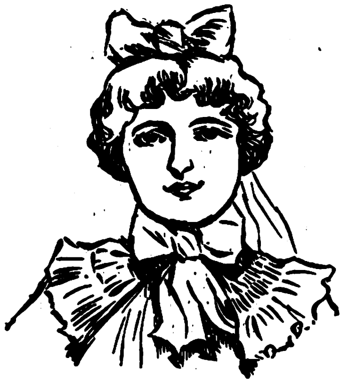


No. 12.

the dissatisfaction of the boys, and to the discomfort and distress of their mother.

Of Cecil, Freda took hardly any notice; it was Douglas whose goodwill she angled for.

But Douglas was not to be caught. First impressions had been so unfavourable that a suddenly developed "angel," wings and all, would have quite failed to lure him to rise.

It was one day when she was dressed for going out and standing, deliberating about the weather, at the window, that it flashed across the young man's mind the strong resemblance of Freda's figure and general carriage to that of the lady upon the platform at Clapham. Even the long, loose sealskin was the same, and yet——?

"Why should she have been on the watch for me?" he mused. "I don't half like it, and I wish she would go."

He would have been still more eager for her departure had he but known that only that morning his mother had given her own open cheque for a crossed one for a large amount—£150.

"I think it will hold up," she said at last, turning towards him; "will you be good enough to see that a cab is got for me—a hansom, please."

Always polite, even to objectionable people, Douglas went out himself and procured a hansom.

Simultaneously with its arrival another cab drew up behind it, from which jumped a smart, spruce man.

Upon the steps Freda and the stranger met.

"Miss Freda Delane, otherwise Pereira," the latter said quickly but courteously. "Perhaps you will not mind returning indoors with me for a few moments."

"Why should I?" said Freda angrily. "I do not know you, sir! let me pass!"

But she had to comply, for the Scotland Yard messenger insisted upon having his way.

And then the truth came out.

Freda's money, with the exception of a few pounds, was exhausted when she left the Hotel Cecil, which she did, unfortunately for herself, as it turned out, without paying her bill.

This had set inquiries afloat, but when it transpired that the crossed cheque, given two days previously, was valueless, the matter became serious, and, a warrant being issued, Freda would have to answer for her misdeeds before a metropolitan magistrate.

It is never pleasant to witness the humiliation of any woman, and Mrs. Pemberton could not help feeling sorry for her, although she herself was a victim but, when, just before leaving with the detective, she turned and told her sometime hostess that she regretted more than anything else the failure of her scheme to entrap the affections of young Douglas, Mrs. Pemberton hardened her heart, and then and there vowed nevermore to do as she had done, but, if it was to be, to live a solitary life to the end of the chapter.

Photo Competition.

As we go to press several claims have come in. These will be immediately dealt with and reported upon next week.

In our next number, too, will appear the names and addresses of the originals of our second batch of portraits.

£100

Cyclist

Insurance

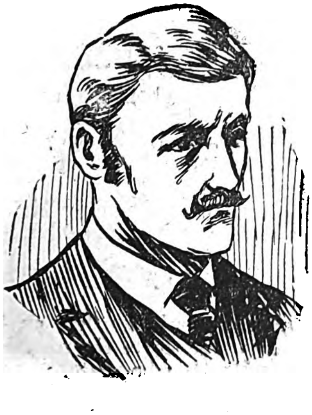
Claim

has just

been paid

by

PEARSON'S WEEKLY.



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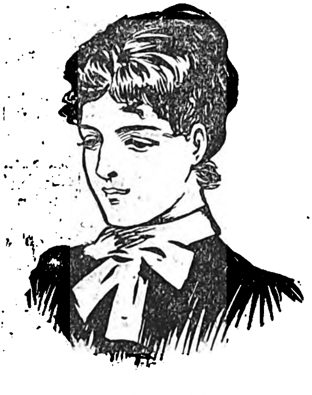

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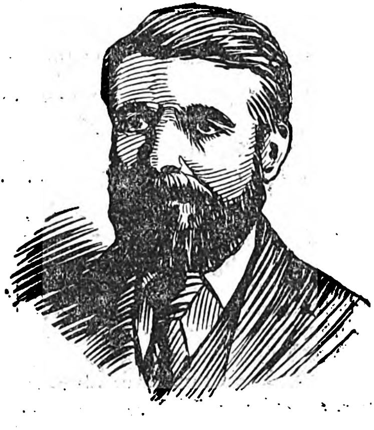


No. 15.

KING'S EVIDENCE.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEED AND THE WITNESS.

"WELL, old chap, it's a bargain, then? You'll come out and join me as soon as you've got things fixed up a bit."

"Yes, in a month or so. But it's 'everybody for the shore' now. So long, Ewart! Be a good boy!"

"Here! one moment, Heath! Oonah! has she told you?"

"Oonah!—told me!—what?"

"Why, that she's promised to marry me!"

Masterman Heath stopped short at the top of the gangway, which sloped at an acute angle from the *Icelandic's* side to the quay, and down which he had made to move, in response to the hoarse warnings of ships' quartermasters and dock officials.

"I'll write you about it—what she says, I mean," he said at last, slowly, and in a peculiar, half-preoccupied way.

"Then you don't object, old fellow?" cried Eric, seeing that the other was moving down the incline.

"Why should I?" replied Heath, with a curiously set smile upon his always white face. "It will be all right! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

The gangways were unshipped and run back on to the quay; the *Icelandic* slid away from the granite kerb, and Eric Ewart, with a last energetic hand-wave to his friend on the outer fringe of the shore crowd, fairly faced, in the teeth of a strong head breeze blowing up the Mersey from the sea, a new life, with all its new and as yet unknown experiences.

* * * * *

"Massee Elic gone away—allee same ullee side?"

Masterman Heath started, and turned sharply, to find a grinning Chinaman at his elbow. There was nothing presumptious about this Celestial; sleek, suave, and, perhaps sly, he stood, his shoulders drawn up almost to his ears, his head trifle bent, a smile of peculiar meaning playing about the corners of his thin-lipped mouth.

"What the devil are you doing here? Didn't I tell you to wait for me at the hotel?"

"Me come—lookee after you. See Massee Elic go away Melica."

"Well, and now you have seen, what the wiser or the better are you—eh?"

"Me allee-light. Ming-Ho know something."

The crowd was still dense, watching the trail of black smoke from the funnels of the *Icelandic*, as it grew ever fainter and still more faint.

Heath signed to his companion to follow him out of the throng. The Chinaman, valet, and general factotum to the man who, some years before, had, in the city of Pekin, rescued him from the *cangur*—from a fate perhaps even worse—submissively obeyed.

Outside the dock gate Heath paused a moment, and bade the other take a note and a small packet which he gave him to a certain address in one of the branch streets on the Everton Road.

"Velly glood. What Felime you wantee me back?"

"As soon as you can get your errand done, you lazy rascal!"

To see the cringing attitude of the man, it might quite naturally have been supposed that Ming-Ho was perfectly under control; that his very soul, in fact, was not his own; but a glance caught of his wicked little almond eyes, half-veiled, watchful, would tell a different tale.

"Me goee velly quick," he said, slinking away.

A couple of hours afterwards, when his master arrived at the hotel, Ming-Ho was waiting, self-satisfied, smiling.

"You delivered the note?"

"You gave it into Miss Oona's own hand?"

"Yes."

"Has she sent any message?"

"No."

"D——n!"

"You hearder gleat news, Massee Heath?"

"No! and don't want to hear it!—get out!"

"Big news—big lobbely—lite-hair soildier-man—ab 'im thloat clut."

Like a tiger, Masterman Heath, his features contorted and working convulsively, seized the Chinaman by the throat.

"You lying hound! Carry your big news elsewhere," he cried, shaking the man, till his teeth rattled again, and then flinging him from him with a force that sent him spinning across the room, to fall in a heap by the door.

At that moment, up through the open window from the street, sounded the raucous voice of an evening paper-boy.

"Murder!—General Ewart robbed and killed by burglars!—Murder!—Second extry—Murder!"

Ming-Ho, spite his bruises and his sore bones, watched the tall, elegantly-dressed figure by the window.

Heath seemed to be fascinated with the street-boy's cry. His fingers clutched the curtains. His face was whiter than Ming-Ho had ever seen it.

"What—what," he said at length, as if pulling himself together, "what did my sister do with the packet I sent her?"

"She gavee me it back."

"Where is it?"

Ming-Ho slowly, and apparently reluctantly, produced from his long, voluminous blue sleeve the packet in question. He extended it to Heath, who snatched it, and thrust it into his pocket.

More £25 notes to be given away. See page 466.

"Now, go!" he said savagely. "Be here in an hour's time—an hour—do you hear?"

"Me hear—but—Massee Heath, me wantee tell you one little thing."

"Well."

"Day say—one piecy lite paper pollis man foun'—and and——".

"Well."

"Too—one piecy hankchief—foun'."

Mechanically Heath's hand *went up to the breast pocket of his coat.*

Half-an-hour later Ming-Ho might have been seen in the close, reeking atmosphere of a tumble-down opium shop in the seafaring quarter of the town. He was in—for a Chinaman—eager talk with an old compatriot, the proprietor of the den.

It was not easy to hear what they said, they spoke so low, and with their heads so locked together across the dirty table, but in Ming-Ho's hand was something which evidently had intimate reference to the matter under discussion.

It was a *white cambric pocket handkerchief, with, in one corner, the initials* M. H. *worked in crimson silk.*

CHAPTER II.

Craft and Subtlety.

Masterman Heath was a man who, from his first entry into life had been selfish, extravagant, reckless. Possessing originally a fair fortune he had dissipated it in living, riotous beyond the average.

From pecuniary embarrassment to Shylock's office was the inevitable short step. Deep in the moneylender's books, threatened with bankruptcy or even worse, there came a day when he stood pantingly at bay. Turn which way he would, disgraceful liabilities, debts of honour (so-called), and writs without end, hedged him in on every side.

Although most men suspected, and, in course of time, fought shy of him, strange to say, two people—a man and a woman—believed him, loved him even.

His friend, Eric Ewart, the son of an old and distinguished Indian General, was one of those splendid fellows one sees but once or twice in a lifetime.

Associated as he had been with Masterman Heath in many of his mere gaieties, he had absolutely taken no part in the latter's more vicious amusements, and this because of Heath's secretive system in this particular, his companions in debauch being of his own kidney, and alike to him in inclination.

Yet was Eric Ewart no milksop; no apron-string, sawney-brain, but a fine, healthy-minded, athletic young giant, whom it would be well-nigh impossible to pass in the street without envying and admiring. Loyalty was as the breath of his nostrils; and to his friend he was loyal as Jonathan of old.

Oonah Heath was the only living creature of his own blood left to the untameable sprendthrift.

Beauty might be denied her, and, perhaps with justice, but the sparkle and intelligent expression in eye and mouth were undoubtedly hers in rare abundance, making a more than beautiful woman of her. Her loveableness was on a par with Eric's loyalty; in fact, the two attributes were manifestly interchangeable; her love being loyal, and his loyalty having about it the true essence of tender appreciation.

Oonah's affection for her brother was, in its motherly protectiveness, the very sweetest thing about her. He played upon this feeling, utterly ignoring the sacredness of it, and making her to believe in him even as an "angel of light."

On the morning of the day before Eric sailed for the "West" in quest of fortune, Masterman Heath had had a somewhat unpleasant interview with Shylock, otherwise Mr. Isaac Hyman, financial agent, of Sackville Street, Piccadilly.

Heath, who was really staying with the Ewarts at their country place near Chester, had run up to town the night before on pressing business. He hoped to be able to return to Combe Court by the midday following, but was ,owing to an accident, unable to do so.

Eric had already left his home two days previously, and to avoid unnecessary pain to both sides, was going on straight to Liverpool, where Heath was to meet him at the Adelphi.

Out towards Everton Oonah lived, as companion to a wealthy old maid, who simply worshipped the girl. Eric, before Heath's arrival, had run out to the Cedars to whisper his "farewells." He had also been successful, as has been said, in getting from her an avowal of her love for him. They had known one another nearly as long as he had known her brother; the first occasion of their meeting having been the "bumping" festival on the Isis. That was a long while ago now; when the two young men were freshmen of "Corpus," but neither Eric nor Oonah ever forgot that "birth-time of love."

Masterman Heath's experience the morning which saw the leave-taking by Eric of his sweetheart, was not so enviable, or so pleasant.

On reaching his chambers he found, to his rage and mortification, a man in possession at Mr. Hyman's suit.

Hurrying round to that gentleman's office, he endeavoured but vainly, to soften, and to conciliate him. But the time had now come for the cutting-up of the quarry—the day of grace was passed.

"I shall have some money in a week or ten days, and will then redeem the securities."

"Won't do—won't do. I've lost a lot lately, and must realise, sir—realise. Besides, I'm inclined to put but very little faith in that 'money next week' of yours."

"What do you mean?—you—you——"

"Steady on, my good Mr. Heath; steady on. No hard words, please. The distress must remain in. If you can pay it out within, say, a week from to-day, good—if not, good again—for me."

"You're a swindling old rascal! and——"

"May I ask what you are, Mr. Masterman Heath? These securities you speak of, and which I hold, I have strong reasons for believing to be—well, not quite genuine. More fool me, perhaps, for being so ready to take and lend on them. Anyway, I'm having them examined to-day by an expert, so that—we shall see—we shall see."

"Oh, you want to frighten me, do you? Well you can't, and won't."

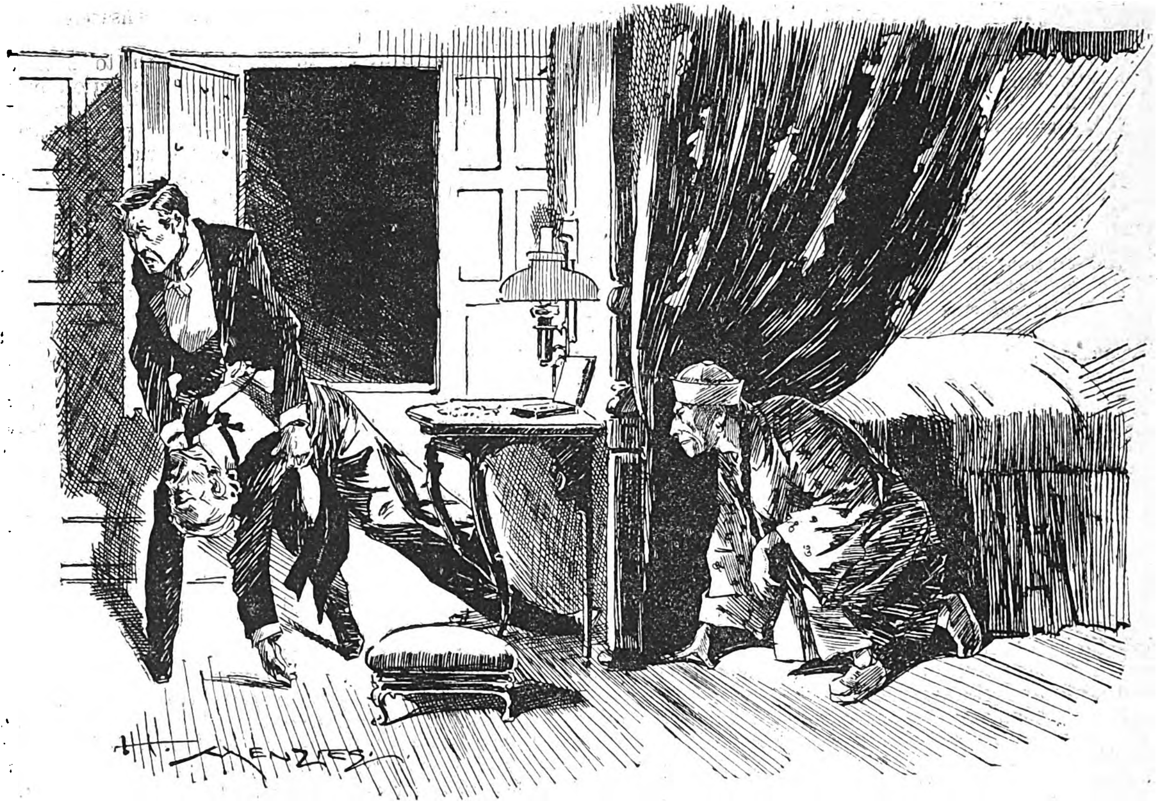
"That's as it may be," calmly, and even smilingly, observed the moneylender. "If you know they're all right, why, you've nothing to be afraid of."

"Rot! Who said I was frightened? What I want to know is, what the devil this man is in possession for? Your claim is liberally covered by the—the securities."

"'Um! How about the nearly twelve months' arrears of interest?"

"Well—you will have to withdraw your man."

Surely that's your photo on page 466?



Again that echo of a sound—this time it was like to a rustle of silken garments.

"I shall do nothing of the kind; and what is more, I should advise you, Mr. Masterman Heath, to look very carefully to yourself, for, unless I much mistake me, other folk will soon be looking anxiously after you."

Heath then left Sackville Street and proceeded to his own rooms. Here he put together some papers, and a few extra clothes, packing them pell-mell in a large portmanteau.

The bailiff's man dared him to remove anything, but, tipping the law's representative a sovereign, Heath walked out with the spoil, got into a hansom, and was driven to Euston.

When he arrived at Combe Court they were just sitting down to dinner. There was no one present beyond the old General, his daughter Margaret, and a young fellow to whom the latter was engaged to be married.

Dinner over, Heath, who when Eric had been there, had invariably sought the billiard-room, sat moody and silent, scarce vouchsafing even barely courteous replies to his host's genial remarks.

General Ewart could not but notice this, and, in the spirit of sympathy, ventured a word or two in kind inquiry as to his guest's health, for he certainly looked to be either physically or mentally upset.

In the course of conversation the elder man incidentally referred to the fact that, in the house, just returned from the London jewellers after resetting, were the famous Ewart diamonds.

"When I go up to bed, Heath, you shall see them if you like, and will come with me up to my room. It's a big responsibility, you know, to have a hundred and fifty thousand pounds' worth of crystallised carbon on the premises, though I don't think there is much danger of losing them, when all my precautions are considered."

Heath quite agreed with him, assuring him also that he would much like to see the stones.

They were in a way historic, a certain necklet in the collection having once belonged—so ran the story—to the notorious Countess of Essex; the slayer of Sir Thomas Overbury in the time of the first James, and an ancestral connection of the Ewart family.

It was nearing midnight when the two men stood by the table in General Ewart's room, inspecting, by the light of a reading lamp, the wondrous Ewart heirlooms. The old gentleman, who was marvellously independent and resourceful for his age, had no personal attendant, and was never disturbed by any one after once retiring.

Heath, in view of an early departure the next morning—he was to leave before five—had dismissed his Chinese servant for the night.

It was a peaceful household, it seemed to Heath, as, the large case containing the gems in one hand, he fingered the scintillating ornaments with the other.

"Dead to the World" begins next week.

A devilish idea took possession of his brain, the consequences were nothing to him, he could not realise them.

His one thought was that he was ruined, completely and irretrievably ruined, and that—Faugh!—It was madness!

Then he fancied that he could detect a sound, but, save for his companion's somewhat sleepy comments, all was silent as death almost.

He must have been mistaken.

By the side of the huge, old-fashioned four-poster, there was a safe, or iron-lined closet rather, in the wall panelling. In this, papers, jewels, plate, and other valuables were in the habit of being stored for safety.

It was a foolish practice, but the master of the house had venerable notions on most matters, and in this preferred to be his own custodian of the family treasures.

As midnight chimed from the clock on the mantelpiece; and, as Heath, laying down the case upon the table looked strangely down upon the bent head of the old man, who proceeded to close the lid, the door of the safe stood wide open; the black, forbidding recess appearings uggestively grim in the semi-darkness of the room.

Again that echo of a sound—this time it was like to a rustle of silken garments.

A quarter past twelve!

The safe door *closed;* the table, save for a couple of books, bare as one's naked hand—and—the room was *empty!*

On the floor, by the table-leg is a half sheet of white paper, once folded, with, scrawled upon it in a woman's handwriting:

"Dear Boy,—Rehearsal will be over by two-thirty to-morrow; fetch me, and we'll go to Richmond. Ever yours, Angela."

"Eric Ewart, Esq."

Also on the floor is a man's white cambric handkerchief—but before the half hour strikes—*it is gone.*

CHAPTER III.

"Mine own Familiar Friend."

Not a little public excitement was caused by the newspaper announcement—two days after the murder at Combe Court—that an extradition warrant for the apprehension of Eric Ewart had been applied for and granted.

It certainly seemed a slight thread upon which to hang a charge of parricide; a letter dropped and found on the scene of the crime.

But people remembered the old proverb concerning "great issues," and "little causes" and were, on the whole, disposed to believe that the son might have killed his father for the sake of the diamonds, which had disappeared.

That ninety-nine folks out of a hundred did not know the man sufficiently well to be absolutely sure that he could *not* have done this thing, was no argument in his favour with the general public. With the usual outsider's way of taking, and looking at things, the large majority were inclined to let the pros unduly weigh down the cons in the case.

Then it was whispered that a material witness for the prosecution was to be produced in the person of the intimate personal friend of the accused man's. What he would say, was, of course, only conjecture, but that it would be something startlingly sensational people were convinced.

What influenced Masterman Heath to proffer his testimony it is hard to say. That his action brought contumely and scorn upon him is certain, and by no means unnatural, for even a callous public hates an informer, be he gilt-edged, or fustian clad.

It was a letter, however, he received from his sister, that first made him to see himself as he really was. Not that he repented the step he was about to take, his own safety demanded it, for, as a matter of fact, Oonah's words but hardened him the more.

"You say," she said, "that you have proof of Eric's guilt; and that, in the interests of justice you intend proclaiming it in open court. At least one woman does not believe you—your own sister; the daughter of *your* mother, tells you that you lie; that, for your own purposes—your own wicked purposes—you are seeking by a false and perjured statement to sink your friend in order that you may swim. Should you do this; should one hair of Eric Ewart's head be hurt by any word of yours, from that moment I renounce you. Forgettng that we once lay upon the same breast, and drew the same milk, I will give you over to other mercy—for mine will be dead."

The letter was not signed, but it needed not Oonah's name at its foot to stamp its origin.

His inclination was to burn it, but a power which he could not resist, compelled him to retain it in his possession.

Within the fortnight, Eric Ewart arrived at Liverpool in charge of a "Yard" inspector. As he stepped, unironed, on to the same quay from which he had so recently embarked, Oonah, tear-eyed, but with a brave smile illuminating her face, pressed up to him. Officialism mildly protested, but gave way on the condition that the interview lasted but a moment.

In the shelter of the Customs shed he stood, with her hands holding his.

"My darling! this is good of you, but you must not stay here—you must not in any way be mixed up in this dreadful business. Of course you do not credit this cruelly absurd charge?"

"Credit it! No!—no!—no!—and a thousand times—no!—"

"Then all will be well! Mr. Saville!" (to the inspector) "will you so far oblige me as to let one of your men see Miss Heath safely on her road home."

The inspector would, and did. The trip from New York had awakened doubts in his mind, though as yet he could not formulate or explain them.

"Good-bye, then, dear! I shall be in London nearly as soon as you are."

"You must not, Oonah! You must not! You must leave me to bear this alone."

"And *you* must leave me to do—as I cannot but do. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

* * * * *

The preliminary examination did not occupy much time. Two formal remands, and the unhappy young man was committed for trial.

The prosecution did not call their principal witness, Masterman Heath, during the magisterial proceedings; they simply proved the finding of the body in the safe; the way in which death had been inflicted, and the finding of the incriminating letter.

H. T. Johnson's new serial begins next week.

The letter was read; Eric's protest that it was not his; had never been written to, or received by him, and that he was altogether unacquainted with anyone of the name of Angela, being duly recorded. He was, however, advised to reserve any such defensive statements for the day of his trial.

* * * * *

On the day of committal, in a disreputable haunt of Chinese seamen, situate in one of the narrow streets round about the Home for Asiatics, in the West India Dock Road, Ming-Ho, Masterman Heath's quondam body-servant, who had been utterly lost sight of ever since the night of the murder, might have been seen calmly lying on a bunk-bed, smoking, and thinking profoundly.

In one hand he held a cambric handkerchief, which every now and again he would survey with intense satisfaction.

It was noticeable that every time any one passed him, he shot his unoccupied hand under his pillow. On one such occasion he drew forth a packet wrapped in a dirty piece of linen. It was not very large, being about six to eight inches in length, by two inches in depth and breadth. It was tied round with strands of spun-yarn, such as sailors use.

By the loving way in which he looked at and stroked it, there was evidently something of value in the package.

Satisfied as to its present safety he returned it to its place under the pillow, and resumed his contemplation of the handkerchief.

"Ah! Massee Heath; you allee same clever man, but Ming-Ho, he beat you! he lick you—he makee you sweat."

Muttering this with variations, over and over again, he got tired of his occupation and rose up.

Taking the package from under the pillow, hiding it carefully in the breast of his jacket, and giving the wretched-looking Chinese proprietor of the place a small coin, he went out, setting his face westward.

* * * * *

In the dock of the old court at the Old Bailey, stands Eric Ewart, indicted for the murder of his father, General Ewart.

It was remarked by those in court, professional and others, that a man looking less like a parricide it would be hard to find.

Upright, honest-eyed, he faced his judge, who with the experience of a long lifetime spent in reading human derelicts, hesitated before placing this man in the category.

The procedure of a criminal trial is generally monotonous, and reported in somewhat dreary reading. The chief events in connection with this particular case, therefore, will be all that it is needful to transcribe.

The evidence taken before the magistrate having been recapitulated, the name of Masterman Heath was called.

As he stepped into the box, he kept his eyes turned away from the prisoner.

But the counsel for the prosecution's first question compelled him to look round.

"Do you know the prisoner at the bar?"

Slowly lifting his eyes to a level with Eric's, he strove to speak. But it was as the convulsive moving of the lips of a dumb man. Not a sound came.

"Witness," said the judge, "you hear the question: answer it."

Still Eric's eyes looked searchingly into his, paralysing the power in him of speech and connected thought.

White to ghastliness, his lips refused to utter the elaborate lie which he had come there to speak.

"My lord," said the prisoner's counsel, springing to his feet. "As the prosecution can make nothing of their witness, I wish, with your consent, to put a man into the box who has, within the last hour been arrested within the precincts of this court as an accessory before the fact in this case."

A five minutes consultation with the Treasury solicitor and the judge speaks.

"Stand down, witness; see that Masterman Heath does not leave the court. Now, Mr. Smith, call your King's Evidence."

Escorted by two policemen, Ming-Ho gets into the box. The saucer is broken, according to the Chinese custom of swearing a witness.

"You know the prisoner?"

"Yes, me know him."

"Where were you at twelve o'clock on the night of the 23rd of October?"

"In soldier man's room, allee same sleepy place."

"In the house where your master, Mr. Masterman Heath was staying—eh?"

"Yes."

"What were you doing in that room?"

"Me lookee round like—Me see what Massee Heath do."

"And what did he do?"

"Massee Heath, he lookee at dlimons with ol' soldier man."

"Well!"

"Then, Massee Heath, he knock old soldier man down; club 'im thloat."

"Well!"

"Then he take 'im body; puttee in wall, put bittee plaper on floor, an' go away."

"And you, what did you do?"

"Before the case proceeds further secure the person of Masterman Heath," said the judge.

"And you, what did you do?"

"Me pickee up hanklechief."

"This is it, my lord, and it bears the initials M.H."

* * * * *

That night, when released, Eric Ewart sits in a room in a quiet hotel near the river, with, as his companions, his sister Margaret, and the girl whose love for him will ever be tinged with a great sorrow; he realises for the first time the depth out of which he has come.

There are not many words between these three, for the thankfulness they each feel is too deep for words.

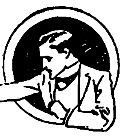
* * * * *

Masterman Heath never recovered the shock of his terrible but righteous exposure. He died before even the completion of the preparations for his trial.

* * * * *

Ming-Ho, King's Evidence, was returned to his native land as an undesirable addition to the population of this country, but he left behind him the little dirty packet containing the Ewart diamonds. He had rung the changes when carrying the letter and parcel from Heath to his sister. The dastardly attempt to shift suspicion and risk by getting Oonah to take temporary care of his spoil, failed as we know. Oonah never can quite explain why she returned the packet, for *then* she knew nothing. It was an inspiration, and both Eric and she are to-day heartily thankful that it was born and acted upon.

More £5 notes to be given away See page 466.



The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

CHAPTER XLIII. *(continued).*

OTTO HARE gnashed his teeth. "Curse you!" he said; "why do you remind me of Esther Carew when I am leaving her, perhaps for ever? You promised to be my fairy god-father; I told you you would prove an evil demon. Why did I ever meet you, why did I ever espouse your fiendish science!"

"Ha-ha," laughed Kraft, as he descended, "I was destined to play Mephistopheles to your Faust, my friend. And lo, I vanish, like my prototype, ha-ha!"

With a second rumble of sardonic laughter he went down the steps and they heard him grope into the corridor below. As he did so Michael Brasher and the two constables sprang from the upper section of the spiral staircase to the concrete floor and darted towards the Golden Dwarf.

"I arrest you, Otto Hare," said the Inspector, "on the charge—" he hesitated; on what accusation was he to apprehend the strange person before him? It would have taken a better lawyer than Mr. Brasher to formulate the exact offence Otto Hare's and Joseph Kraft's ghastly researches amounted to. Doubtless it would have been sufficient to accuse him of harbouring Brian Dering, knowing the child to have been stolen. But Felix Dering had frankly asserted that neither Kraft nor Hare was acquainted with the identity of their victim!

In the midst of the Inspector's perplexity, Felix Dering strode forward. "On the charge of being concerned," he supplemented, "with one Joseph Kraft, in compassing the death of Sir Christopher Dering. I accuse him, Inspector, and I demand that he be arrested on that charge and on no other."

A shrill cry broke from the Golden Dwarf's lips and his sallow skin blanched with fear.

"*That!*" he shrieked; "never, never!—I will not be taken I tell you. You shall not take me—I will die as he died!"

Otto Hare, trembling and unnerved, doubled back, leapt to the purring dynamos, and dropped his hands on the copper brushes that were picking up the tremendous current required for more than half a score of arc lamps. His tiny body was thrown into the deadly circuit, the huge voltage passed through brain and muscle, and, with a convulsive shudder, the Golden Dwarf terminated his existence. The corpse remained a stiff and galvanised shape, upright beside the dynamos. The on-lookers were paralysed with astonishment.

While they stood, lost in horror, the silky tones of Joseph Kraft made themselves audible. He was singing a snatch of his favourite song—the song of Mynheer Jacob van Artevelde.

"'We all must ride outlandt,'"

rolled the smooth bass,

"'And drive our way to Bruges town,
Or Brussels in Brabant.'"

The song halted, the door of the corridor below was bolted sharply, and the German's voice called up the trap a guttural sentence in his own tongue.

When the words fell on the ear of his countryman Zorn, that gentleman took one leap in the direction of the outer exit.

"A thousand fiends," he whispered back; "the doctor has been connecting his mines. He has half a dozen laid in readiness for such an emergency. Fool that I was to forget. Out of this, all of you, if you would not be blown to the stars."

Michael Brasher was brave, but he ran, Archibald Geddes was no coward, yet he hurried. As for the two constables, they were already crossing the threshold, apparently pursuing Zorn, in reality fleeing for their lives.

Felix Dering followed—more leisurely. He judged himself safe while Kraft tarried. From the inner doorway he saw the German rise from the trap, push the staircase into position, and turn about to reach his cage of birds.

"Now, Otto," he exclaimed, "we will be off."

The phrase failed on his lips—he was glaring at the body of the Golden Dwarf. "Sakerment!" he cried; "Otto, what have you done?"

He was answered in a ringing voice—the voice of Felix Dering. "Cheated the gallows," Kraft was told, "but you shall not."

Felix flung himself upon Kraft, and young, athletic, resolute, forced the giant German out into the open air. The night was cool and quiet—the yellow glow from the tower portal swept across it like a band of sunshine.

Joseph Kraft realised his strength as he was thrust down the hill. With a colossal effort he flung off his captor's grip.

"My birds!" he cried; "my birds—I have forgot them; they will be killed."

He dashed back and re-entered the tower. Suddenly there came a sullen roar, a blinding flash of flame, the ground felt as if it had split beneath the feet of Felix Dering, and the entire observatory of the Golden Dwarf shot skyward in a hurtling mass. Joseph Kraft's mines, for some mysterious reason, had exploded prematurely.

The shock projected Felix down the green slope into some underwood, and he pitched upon a soft yet bulky object—the form of Michael Brasher.

"Got him," gasped the Inspector and hung on like a vice.

Surely that's your photo on page 466?

"Am I to be rearrested, then?" queried Felix, imperturbably. Brasher groaned.

"I thought you were Zorn," said the Inspector, struggling to breathe; "the beggar has escaped. What's become of Kraft?"

Felix caught a glimpse of the last fragments of the shattered tower and the secret laboratory as they rained back into the abyss carved by the unknown explosive of Joseph Kraft.

"He has expiated his crimes," was Felix Dering's answer; "or, rather, to be honest, he has fallen a victim to his one virtue!"

Michael Brasher stared, as he summoned his men to prosecute the search for the missing Prussian. The echoes of the explosion were still vibrating about them.

CHAPTER XLIV.

The Last Chapter.

"And you have known that all this time, Mr. Dering! But why not have acted on it. Surely you could have done something."

Felix Dering shook his head gravely as he took the scrap of paper which Archibald Geddes had been studying and laid it down on the library table beside the scratched riding-whip that had belonged to the dead Sir Christopher.

"It was not a proof," he said, "apart from confirmatory evidence. For that I was seeking. But not for a moment did the real explanation of the mystery enter my head."

The chemist's assistant reached to the slip again and scanned it thoughtfully by the wan radiance of the fading day. It was covered with some seven or eight short lines of capital letters divided by brackets. They read:

> [DON'T] EXPECT TO GET OUT OF [THIS
> PLACE] ALIVE. IF NOT, [MY] DEATH IS
> DUE TO [KRAFT. HARE] HANGS BACK
> BUT [KRAFT SAYS] OATH [OF SECRECY]
> OR DEATH. I WILL NE[VER BE A PARTY
> TO THEIR] VILE [PRACTICES.]

"The letters in brackets," added Felix, were at first illegible. The words they form fell, on the whip-handle, generally under one another, and had suffered from being ground into some gravelly substance. But, by the aid of your glass, I deciphered them. Originally I had thought that the K in the former occurrence of the name Kraft was an F, and directed my suspicions towards the man Foley."

"Sir Christopher must have become cognisant of the experiments being carried on at Wyresdale Park," commented Geddes, relinquishing the copy of the scratched lettering; "that accounts for their disposing of him. But why was Spencer kidnapped from the cell at the police-station. He was aware of nothing."

"He had said," observed Felix, "that he had seen a man like Sir Christopher on a led horse, that night near the cross-roads. Kraft must have feared that he might be able to identify the leader—doubtless Kraft himself."

"Then there only remains one question," pursued the Scotchman, "since your experiences in London solve the problem of Sir Brian's appearance at Wyresdale Park—and that is the manner of Sir Christopher's death. You noticed, of course, Mr. Hare's strange cry, 'I will die as he died.'"

"Yes," answered Felix; "it conjures up innumerable horrors, but it tells us nothing. Has Brasher any news of Zorn? He is probably the sole living repository of the dreadful secret."

"No," said Archibald Geddes; "the country has been scoured from end to end but without result. You have heard, I suppose, that Miss Garland has been released."

"By order of the Treasury, yes," was the reply. "Everything is believed against her, but my evidence of her confession to me goes for nothing in the absence of Neal, her brother, whose villainous epistle to Brasher contrived to implicate, so adroitly, me, the innocent, and her, the guilty. She is in the house now, I understand, packing her belongings. Lady Dering, who will neither judge nor acquit her, has refused to see her."

Geddes lifted his hat from a chair. "How is Sir Brian this evening?" he asked sympathetically.

"Failing fast," said Felix, and choked over the response. "He is dying of no particular affection. Confinement, cocaine, depression, and that cursed light."

The chemist's assistant ground his teeth. "It is horrible to think of," he muttered; "but I am sure Kraft was mad—he died to save those birds he meant to take away with him, yet he could torture little children."

"Science digs grim pitfalls for its votaries," rejoined Felix, heavily, and shook hands with his visitor.

Geddes coughed. "They're saying in the village," he ventured, "that Miss Carew and you are to be married quietly next spring. Mrs. Carew is putting it about in her own fashion. If it's not too melancholy a season on account of Sir Brian, I should like to congratulate you. Time was when I musunderstood you; now I think you're worthy of her, worthy of one another."

Felix smiled sadly. "She has come through much for my sake," he replied; "I am to make her mine at last. You and Miss Forester, I hear, are to become man and wife at an earlier date. I hope you will be happy."

The Scotchman wrinkled his brows. "If old Forester will either sign the pledge or drink himself to death in three months," he said morosely, "we'll be happy enough. Not otherwise. Good night to you, sir."

Felix rang, and Mr. Geddes was escorted out, a rather disconsolate Benedict-to-be. As the door closed behind him, Felix crossed to the further side of the room to look out at the waning afternoon—the autumn day had been stormy and was setting in a sullen calm. He opened the French window and stepped on to the terrace, lighting, as he did so, a cigar—that masculine comfort in griefs both large and small. Brian Dering was dying, and the heart of his cousin was sore, though the death of the child baronet meant to him rank and wealth.

He paced this way and that, lost in sorrowful reverie. Suddenly, as he neared the extremity of the terrace, a dark form rose from a clump of rhododendrons.

"Don't be alarmed, sir," it begged; "I want a word with you—for a good object. You'll be well advised to hear me out."

Felix stared—excited, yet incredulous. The figure before him was that of the Prussian, Johann Zorn, the colleague of Joseph Kraft in his infamous researches and the man whom the Derbyshire police-force had been hunting for a week or more. He was ragged, dirty, dishevelled, yet withal cool and self-possessed.

"If you summon help," said the Prussian; "you can only get me a term of imprisonment, for what your law would describe as 'cruelty to children.' Nothing else can be proved against me. Yet, if you will promise to aid me to get abroad, Mr. Dering, I will enable you to vindicate yourself against the slander which Dr. Kraft and Mr. Hare helped to circulate. I will tell you how your uncle died—by some singlar means, I gathered on that exciting evening, you had learned the identity of his murderers. Only I can inform you how he came by his end."

"What do you wish me to do?' asked Felix, perplexedly.

"I want money," said the other; "fifteen or twenty pounds will get me out of England. I have cheated

H. T. Johnson's new serial begins next week.

your police so far and I will cheat them the rest. But I must wait till the pursuit has weakened, I must disguise myself, and bribe—a trifle. For these I must have money. I have tried to catch you alone for days, and now, when I had abandoned hope you appeared spontaneously before me."

Felix pondered. "Your explanation will be no use to me," he demurred; "it would not be evidence, except as a sworn confession from your supposed death-bed, or from your lips in court. The former is impossible, the latter would mean your arrest!"

Zorn wrung his hands. "Curse your law," he snarled; "then give me a sovereign or two and I will take my chance. Only, in return, you shall know how Sir Christopher Dering died. If you refuse I must fight you for my life."

Counting out half a dozen gold pieces on the stone balustrade of the terrace, Felix Dering indicated them with a gesture. "There they lie," he answered; "tell me your story and they are yours."

The Prussian stretched out a hungry palm, but withdrew it slowly, to begin his rapid narrative.

"Sir Christopher," he said, "being late that evening, rode across the park for a short cut and, doing so, came upon Dr. Kraft and I. We—we were burying one of the dwarfs—the original occupant of the blue cell in which Mr. Geddes found Sir Brian. He saw too much, was curious, and we took him into the tower, to discuss the situation the better, and sent for Mr. Hare from the house."

Zorn stopped. "I've been without food for twenty-four hours," he declared huskily; "give me a cigar."

Felix obeyed—with a feeling of profound revulsion. But he dare not lose the chance of probing the mystery that had so shadowed his happiness. The Prussian lit the Havana and sucked at it greedily.

"Your uncle," he proceeded; "would not hear reason—though Mr. Hare showed him all and explained the probable value to mankind of the researches the Doctor was making. He threatened to denounce us the moment he was free. As he knew not only of the experiments but that one of our subjects had succumbed we should be indicted for constructive murder—at least, so Dr. Kraft said. The Doctor decided that he must die. You will not believe that I tried to save him but I did. In vain. Dr. Kraft and Mr. Hare chloroformed him by force, and killed him—as an experiment—by an electric shock. Hence your post-mortem revealed nothing—the appearances of a skilful execution by electricity are those of suffocation; we German medical jurisconsults know that."

Zorn paused—to enjoy the flavour of his Havana; Felix wrestled with a violent inclination to strangle him.

"To lend colour to the idea of suffocation," went on the Prussian; "a handkerchief was tied over his mouth and nostrils and his skull was fractured by Dr. Kraft, as part of a suggestion of highway robbery. For this purpose his watch and jewellery, as well as his purse, were taken, and he himself, stiff in the early rigor of an electrical death, was mounted on his horse and conveyed to the cross-roads. The rest you know—it was because we feared that Spencer might have seen more than even rumour stated that we kidnapped him, Dr. Kraft and I, late one night, with the assistance of a borrowed ladder and a crowbar. I entered the cell, injected morphia, and passed him up to the Doctor outside."

The Prussian broke off in his whispering. A white figure showed itself at one of the French windows of the library, and a soft voice called into the dusk.

"Felix," it said: "is that your cigar-end I see?"

There was a tinkle of shifted coins, a crackle in the rhododendrons. Johann Zorn had gone and Esther Carew was advancing nervously along the terrace. Felix stepped forward—under the kindly shelter of the dusk—to clasp her in his arms. A moment they embraced silently, for it was not often they found themselves alone, and then Esther delivered a murmured message.

A Woman with a Bad Heart.

Miss Annie Spencer, of Highland Farm, Broadholme, near Saxilby, Lincolnshire, has told a sensational story to a *Retford and Gainsboro' Times* reporter. Here are the main facts as she related them, and from their perusal the wonderful effects of Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness in all cases of debility, palpitation, and heart weakness will be gathered. Said Miss Spencer: "Just over five years ago I had an attack of brain fever. I got over it, however, but never got back my old health. Instead of feeling bright and well I felt heavy and depressed. Then I began to suffer from indigestion, palpitation, and general debility. My blood seemed to get out of order, and spots broke out on my face and forehead, as well as on my arms and breast. I consulted two of the best doctors in the district, and was told that my ailment was extreme debility as well as indigestion. No matter what I took to eat the effect was the same. Not only did it do me no good but it caused me terrible pain. Occasionally I had a sort of false appetite and took a violent fancy to some article of food. Yet when I had eaten it my suffering was terrible. The palpitation and heart trouble also caused me great pain and anxiety. So violent was it sometimes that I could hardly breathe, and I got very much afraid. In the end I became so weak that I was scarcely able to see anyone who visited me it put me so much about; and I was so fearfully debilitated that I had to take hold of the table to prevent myself from falling when I walked across the room. The doctor said he could not do anything more for me, and I gave myself up in despair. Somebody mentioned Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness to me, and in the hope that they would do me a little good—for I really never expected them to cure me—I had some purchased. I had not taken the first box, however, before I found that I could eat better and with less pain afterwards. Of course having experienced that, I persevered with them, and the second box made a wonderful difference in me. Every day I got better and better, and when I had taken a few boxes I was entirely cured. Indigestion is now unknown to me, and I can eat and enjoy any food whatever. The heart trouble has gone also, and I can even run up the stairs without the slightest fear. The spots and pimples have quite disappeared, I have recovered my former strength, and instead of crawling about the house, of no assistance to anybody and a burden to myself, I can do any kind of work which falls to my share. All this I owe to Chas. Forde's Bile Beans, and I felt I must give a testimonial."

The above is no isolated example of the power of Charles Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness. They are superior to all known medicines for cases of heart weakness, palpitation, indigestion, liver and kidney disorders, constipation, headache, debility, nervousness, anæmia, summer-end "fag" and "that tired feeling," female ailments, the after effects of influenza, pimples, face sores, and all blood impurities. All chemists stock them, or you may obtain them from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 London Wall, E.C., by sending prices, one and three half-pence or two and nine.

"Brian is asking for you," she said; "can you come—at once?"

"At once!" repeated her lover, anxiously; "is there any change?"

"He—he is growing weaker every hour," faltered Esther. "Oh, Felix," she added, with a burst of tears, "how ever will Lady Dering bear it!"

Felix held the weeping girl to him as they went down the terrace. "You have conceived a strange attachment for Lady Dering," he remarked, trying to change the subject; "yet you have merely known her a few days—since she begged me to make her acquainted with you."

Esther dried her eyes. "She has suffered so," was her gentle answer; "first her husband and now her child. And she is quite young, not much older than I am; she told me this morning we must be sisters."

"And so you shall!" said Felix, as he led her in through the open window across the library and the hall, and thread the wide staircase, dim with the autumn evening. Side by side the two lovers went, forgetting their own new-found happiness in the grief of another woman and the pain of a dying child.

At a screened door they paused and entered. The apartment was Lady Dering's boudoir. Its high casements were ajar to the night air, a shaded lamp burned on the table by the bed—a lamp that a nurse, in the cool, picturesque costume of her clothes, was trimming deftly. Among the snowy linen of the couch lay Brian Dering, frail, wasted, the ghost of his former self. Over him leaned Stella Dering, her mouth set and an anguished gleam in her dark eyes.

"Is it Cousin Felix?" inquired the child, faintly.

"Yes, Brian," replied Felix: "you wanted me, so Miss Carew came to fetch me."

Brian held out one transparent hand. "I want you to make mother laugh again, Cousin Felix," he quavered; "she used to before father went away and came back—dead. You used to make her laugh a lot when it was a good day with her nerves, Cousin Felix. Get her to stop crying now and laugh instead. Father always said it was bad for her to cry so much. I have asked her to laugh a little, for me, but she won't."

He spoke slowly and with long pauses for breath between the words. Felix Dering turned away, overcome. But Stella Dering nerved herself with desperate resolution.

"I—I did laugh, darling, last night," she said, gathering the child into her arms; "I dreamt you were not a boy any longer, Brian, but a tiny rosy cloud floating up in the sky. And while I watched it it got thinner and thinner and then vanished. And I laughed to think how silly it all was!"

The laughter that Brian had asked for broke from her lips—a ripple of clear laughter, silver and bright as a chime of fairy bells. Esther clung to Felix, awed by that final triumph of mother-love over a nature usually so weak and hysterical.

Brian glanced up at his mother. "What a funny dream!" he murmured; "but I'm glad it made you laugh—you do laugh so prettily, mother."

He closed his eyes and lay against her. For a while he seemed to sleep, and the watchers stood silently about him. Minutes passed away—in the hall below a cuckoo clock marked the hour in a series of gay calls. Suddenly Brian started up.

"Not the blue light again!" he shrieked. "please, please, not the blue light!" He fell among his pillows, panting—his pale cheeks grew florid, his delicate nostrils dilated, he clutched convulsively at his throat. The nurse snatched a glass from the table and put it to his lips; the brandy only wetted the childish mouth. The head dropped back—the little heart had failed. Brian Dering was dead.

Stella Dering flung herself upon the body, white and tearless. Esther would have stolen to her, but the nurse checked the motion. "Let her be," she whispered; "words are cruel now."

Felix made a silent gesture of assent, and side by side Esther and he moved from the room. For long afterwards they could conjure up once more its tragic lights and shadows; the dead child, the stricken mother, the gleaming lamp, the open windows, and beyond, the sullen, yet magnificent, sky of passing storm.

As they stepped into the corridor without, a dark form went by—the cloaked figure of Judith Garland. They shrank from her, but she heard their footfalls and turned upon them a lowering countenance, cruel, vindictive, beautiful.

From the high oak gallery of the great staircase they saw her cross the hall, and, escorted by a disdainful maid, slink into the waiting brougham. A rattle of wheels and the sound of a closing door marked her final disappearance from Dering House.

* * * * *

So did Judith Garland—in the moment that her worst deed found its terrible and unlooked-for consummation—bid adieu to Wyresdale. Nor was she ever known to set foot in the quiet village where her ill-fated and unscrupulous passion had played so disastrous a part. Had she revisited the place a few years later—instead, as rumour had it, of joining her brother, his disreputable partner, and a certain Johann Zorn, on the Continent—she would have discovered how rapidly time can heal even the breaches made by violence and treachery.

She would have seen Sir Felix Dering, no longer an object of suspicion to his neighbours, but liked and esteemed by half a county. She would have seen Esther Carew, now Lady Dering, a girl no more, but a woman, and the graceful sharer of her husband's political ambitions. She would have seen Stella, Lady Dering, absorbed in the education of a new Brian, the first-born of Esther and Felix, and almost believing it her own.

She would have seen a reformed Caleb Forester, a melancholy Mrs. Carew, a resigned Michael Brasher.

She would have seen Archibald Geddes and his wife thriving in the Wyresdale Pharmacy, Ted Spencer and Barbara prospering on the Dering estate. She would have seen a new maid at Dering House, one Louisa, who is learning not to drop her aspirates or the heels of her slippers, but to be smart and merry and to blush at the appearance of Inspector Brasher, who returns the compliment with interest.

She would have seen a new branch of the Hares at Wyresdale Park—a branch that is simple and hospitable, though immensely rich. She would have seen the hill, where once stood the observatory with its subterranean annex, planted with firs. Had she penetrated to the centre of this green grove she would have seen a granite monolith, engraved with initials and a date. The initials are those of Otto Hare's name; the date that of his death. On another facet of the monument is the inscription "Also J. K." Beneath lie the dismembered remains of the German physician and his strange ally, the Golden Dwarf.

THE END.

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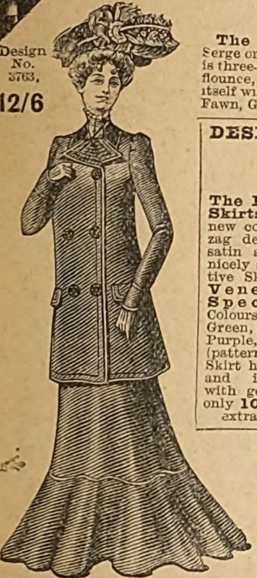

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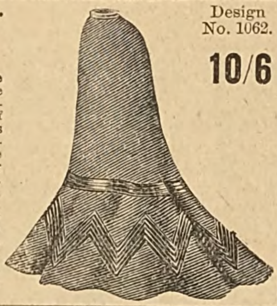

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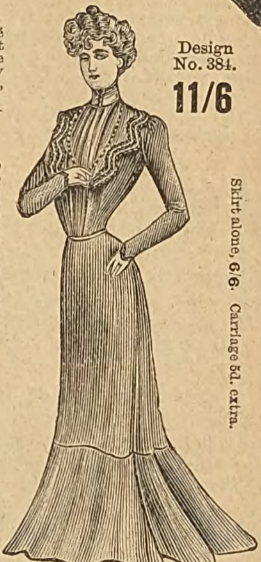

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Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a *P.W.* penknife to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, October 14th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Mr. J. R. Trinder, of 14 Coleshill Street, Birmingham, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

At a late election in a country parish a cart might have been seen perambulating the district. On one side of a huge board were the words, "Vote for Thomas Jones"; on the other ran the legend, "Poll Early." A villager was asked by his vicar whom he intended to vote for. "Wol, sir," deliberately observed the old man, who had apparently only read one side of the cart, "I allays goes for the ladies, so I shall vote for 'Poll Early.'"

A train on one of our Southern railways, whilst proceeding between two country stations, came to a standstill. The guard went up to the driver and asked him what was the matter. "Cow on the line," he replied. The cow was removed and the train went on its journey. After proceeding some distance, it again stopped. The guard, who was by this time getting impatient, rushed up once more and asked what caused the delay. "Cow on the line," the driver said. "What! Another cow?" "No. Same cow."

*He went into a Birmingham hotel, and ordered soup. He looked just the kind of man who would be difficult to please, and it was with fear and trembling that the waiter placed the dish of really delicious soup before him. "I can't eat this soup!" said the customer a few moments later. The waiter took it away, and brought soup of another kind. "I can't eat this!" snarled the customer. The waiter hurriedly brought a third dish. "I cannot possibly eat this soup!" exclaimed the customer, in an aggravatingly loud tone, which could be heard by everyone in the room. The waiter, by this time quite furious, called the proprietor, and explained the case. "Why can't you eat this soup, sir?" demanded the proprietor angrily. "Because," quietly responded the customer, "I have no spoon."

A young mill-hand, having lost his sweetheart through his own hot-headed folly, first threatened to commit suicide, and then became vulgarly insistent in his demands for the return of the presents he had given her. "What good will they be to you if you're goin' to drown yourself in t' mill-pond?" she scoffed. "Never you mind, I want them back," he said evasively. "Very well, I'll see that you have them," the girl reluctantly agreed. But five days passed, and the young man still bemoaned the loss of the forfeited trinkets. Once more he requested their return. "Oh, lad, I wish you'd stop worryin' me," sighed the girl, anxious by now for a reconciliation. "I've given t' presents up long since. They're waiting for you at t' bottom o' t' mill-pond, tied up in a red handkerchief; you can't miss but see 'em when you jump in." Then the humble young man apologised, and the quarrel was patched up in the old sweet way.

A little girl, aged nine, called her father to her bedside the other evening. "Papa," said the little diplomat, "I want to ask your advice." "Well, my dear, what is it about?" "What do you think it will be best to give me on my birthday?"

Mr. Kirkland: "And why do you think, Mr. Dunley, that the world is better now and more beautiful than it was thirty-five years ago?" Mr. Dunley (who is after his sweet daughter): "Because—because you were not in it then." Papa Kirkland's objections to the young man have been overridden.

A young lady was teaching her class of girls in the Sunday school, and striving to impress upon them the beauty and desirability of the great Christian virtues. "Yes," she said, "Truth, and Faith, and Meekness, are all good, but what is the one thing we must all especially strive after, the one great thing necessary for our welfare and happiness?" "'Usbands, miss," answered a little girl promptly.

"I hear," said the reporter to the manager of a railway noted for the unpunctuality of its trains, "there was an accident on your line last night." "Oh, do you?" was the sarcastic reply. "Yes." "Do you know anything about it?" "Only that it happened to the train which was due here at 8.15." "That train came in to the minute, sir." "Are you sure of that?" "Of course!" "That must have been the accident referred to." And the reporter dodged out safely.

A schoolboy's essay on water is quoted by a contemporary. One or two of the writer's ideas upon the subject are strikingly novel. For instance, he divides all water into four sub-headings—rain water, soda water, holy water, and brine. "Water," he continues, "is used for a good many things. Sailors use water to go to sea on. Water is a good thing to fire at boys with a squirt gun, and to catch fishes in." But the strangest of all uses for water is this: "Nobody," he says, "could be saved from drowning if there wasn't water to pull them out of."

While a certain battalion was marching from the camping ground to the railway station, *en route* for home, last summer, a rather corpulent sergeant, who wore an exceedingly large helmet, was much disgusted by several ragged urchins, who kept darting between the ranks and compelling him to "break step." At last, losing all patience, he sharply boxed one little sinner's ears, and shouted, "Take that, you young demon, and clear off!" "Garn, yer fat old buster, an' mind who yer hittin'!" yelled the youngster in reply, adding, as he pointed to our stout comrade's very ample headgear: "Look hear, old red tub, if yer hits me again, I'll report yer to th' War Office for runnin' away with a tent!"

Lady: "Is this celery fresh?" Dealer: "Yes'm." "Real fresh?" "Yes'm." "Just in?" "Yes'm." "Is it crisp?" "Yes'm." "Are you sure it is all right?" "Yes'm." "Where did you get it?" "From a market gardner, mum." "To-day?" "Yes'm." "This morning?" "Yes'm." "How much is it?" "Sixpence a bundle." "Isn't that rather high?" "Not at this season." "I've got it here lately for less." "That was small and rather green." "Can you send it up?" "Yes'm." "In time for dinner?" "Oh, yes'm." "Just break off a piece and let me try it." "Yes'm. Here is some." "Humph! It isn't nice at all. It's withered." "Well, mum, it's a good while since you asked if it was fresh"

DO YOU GOLF?

If you do, there is an article in the October number of THE LADY'S MAGAZINE entitled "Women on the Links," which will interest you considerably.

IF YOU DON'T GOLF

Perhaps you know someone who does, and they will thank you for drawing their attention to this article on the "Ancient and Royal Game." It is illustrated with photographs of many notable players.

THIS IS NOT ALL.

In addition to this there are numberless other attractive features in THE LADY'S MAGAZINE for October. Under the title of "Painting Puppies" there is an article giving many anecdotes of Mr. Cecil Aldin, the eminent caricaturist, and his puppy models. It is profusely illustrated from original oil paintings and sketches.

STATUES TO WOMEN

Are somewhat rare, but those in the United Kingdom form the subject of an attractive article, fully illustrated with photographs.

"CHILD CRIMINALS,"

By Annesley Kenealy, is a most interesting account of Bedford Prison, where the young Hooligan is taught to become a law-abiding citizen.

A large instalment of Mrs. B. M. Croker's serial . . . . . .

"THE CAT'S PAW,"

In addition to a number of stories and storyettes, will be found in this number.

THE LADY'S MAGAZINE—PUBLISHED OCT. 10.

PUBLISHED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD.

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

Has your photo appeared yet? Is it on page 466? Better look, hadn't you? In *case*, you know. For to miss a five-pound note would be a pity, wouldn't it? You might regret it for years. It might even keep you from sleeping o' nights. So in order to avert all such eventualities turn at once to page 466, and satisfy yourself. If your photo is there, why drop us a postcard, in accordance with the conditions, and then any morning you may wake up and find yourself the possessor of five pounds more than you had the previous day. And even if your portrait isn't in this number, don't despair, for it may be in next week or the week after.

⁂

Once again I want to draw your attention to the fact that next week's number will contain the opening chapters of Mr. Henry T. Johnson's New Serial Story, entitled

"Dead to the World."

If you enjoy a good, healthy, thrilling story, fascinating from the first line to the last, here is your chance.

⁂

Advice to Readers on Various Matters.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

You ask me, "Anxious," if I can tell you of a hair dye that will dye your red-brown hair a light brown, as you are going into business after Christmas, and want to change the colour if you can.

As far as I know, there is no really reliable hair-dye in the market which will answer the purpose you require. Take my advice and leave your hair as it is; there is no such beautiful hair as a real red-brown. Surely it cannot interfere with your business. I am glad you like *Short Stories.*

"A. Z." is astonished to find such a number of careless people in the world. He has recently come across some statistics dealing with property left in railway carriages, and he sends them to me. "In the course of a single month 13,848 railway travellers part company with their boxes, 10,136 lose sight of their bags and portmanteaux, 13,380 leave behind their umbrellas and sticks, 10,217 involuntarily deprive themselves of articles of clothing, 1,333 forget their hat-cases, 2,914 their hampers, 3,344 their purses, jewellery, and books, and 3,750 their parcels. These articles, together with 8,391 entered as sundries, raise the number of waifs and strays upon our railways to 67,313 a month."

It is curious to note that this last item of "sundries" includes a number of "babies." Fancy a woman forgetting her baby!—but there, I expect it was the brute of a husband who was responsible. Men are so careless, especially when babies are concerned.

C. T. asks if it is true that some of our pleasantest perfumes are derived from substances which in themselves possess most disagreeable odours?

This is so. Musk is obtained chiefly from the musk-deer, and is contained in a fleshy bag about the size of a hen's egg. The dried musk in each bag averages about one-third of an ounce, and is worth a sovereign in the market. The odour of new musk is so powerful that the dealers are forced to cover their nostrils with thick cloths while inspecting the bags or "pods." This extraordinary perfume is said to retain its pungency after exposure to the air for a hundred years. Ambergris is a morbid secretion of the sperm whale. It imparts a delicate odour to perfumes, but its smell is very offensive when in its crude state. The oil of pine-apples is elaborated from sugar and putrid cheese; and the loathsome fluid produced during the manufacture of whisky, and known as fusel oil, is by one particular mode of treatment made to yield the fragrant oil of pears, by another process oil of apples, and by other carefully-devised methods the essential oil of grapes and oil of cognac.

In answer to "Player," I certainly think that chess may be entitled to the distinction of being the most ancient game extant. It appears to have been invented in China or Hindostan, whence it found its way into Persia. The Arabians were very partial to it; and, according to some authorities, the Crusaders learnt it of them, and thus introduced it into England. But others date the time chess was known in this country to a much earlier period. Bishop Etteric relates that when he obtained admission to Canute the Great, about midnight, upon some urgent business, he found the King and his courtiers engaged at play, some at dice and others at chess. Another author supposes the game to have been known at the Conquest, from the circumstance of the Court of Exchequer—so called from its having a chequered cloth on the table of the same design as a chess-board—being then established. As a proof that a knowledge of this game was formerly considered a valuable accomplishment, it may be mentioned that there are no fewer than twenty-six English families which have chess-boards and chess-rooks emblazoned on their arms.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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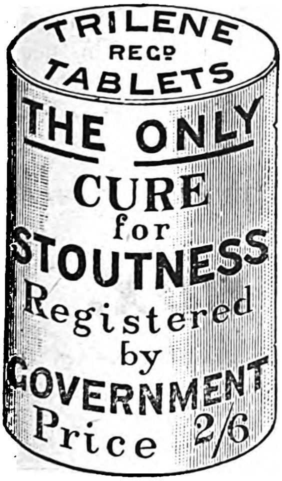

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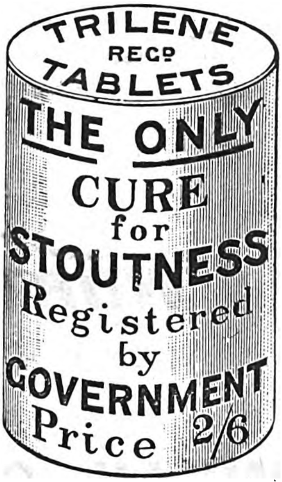

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

Mrs. DARNLEY SMITH, Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, writes: "Trilene Tablets have reduced my weight very much. I am so much lighter in every way, and better in health."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.

"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 21lb. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me.

"Yours sincerely, M. A. HEYWOOD."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mr. WALKER, 236 London Road, Hazelgrove, Stockport, says: "I have used one box and am 14lb. lighter. Send another soon as possible."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. E. ALEXANDER, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They have reduced me quite 2 stone, and I am now quite cured."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Mrs. TAYLOR-ROBINSON, of Tweed Green House, Whalley Range, Manchester, says: "I feel so much lighter and better since taking your Tablets, and am so much thinner that I hardly recognise myself."

Miss A. LONG, of 9 South Parade, Waterford, writes: "Your Tablets have reduced me 14lb."

Miss A. DAWSON, 62 Orchard Street, Weston-super-Mare, says: "Glad to say the Tablets have sufficiently reduced me. I shall always recommend them."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

Mrs. DREW, of 1 Bellevue Gardens, The Nursery, Devizes, writes: "I took Tablets some years ago; they soon reduced me and I have not got stout since. Send me a box for my mother."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

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FOR FEMALES of all ages these Pills are simply invaluable, as a few doses will restore free and regular conditions, and effectually remove the causes of much suffering to the sex. For a

WEAK STOMACH,

IMPAIRED DIGESTION,

DISORDERED LIVER,

BEECHAM'S PILLS act like "MAGIC," and a few doses will be found to work wonders on the most important organs in the human economy. They brace up the nervous and muscular systems, revive the long lost complexion, bring back the keen edge of appetite, and arouse into action the, too often, slumbering energies of mind and body. As a blood-purifier it is not too much to say that THEY HAVE NO EQUAL.

One of the best guarantees that can be offered to the nervous and debilitated is that BEECHAM'S PILLS have by far the largest sale of any Patent Medicine in the World, being Over Six Million Boxes per Annum.

This has been achieved **Without the Publication of Testimonials**; the convincing fact is that BEECHAM'S PILLS RECOMMEND THEMSELVES.

Prepared only by the Proprietor, THOMAS BEECHAM, St. Helens, Lancashire, and sold by Druggists and Patent Medicine Dealers everywhere.

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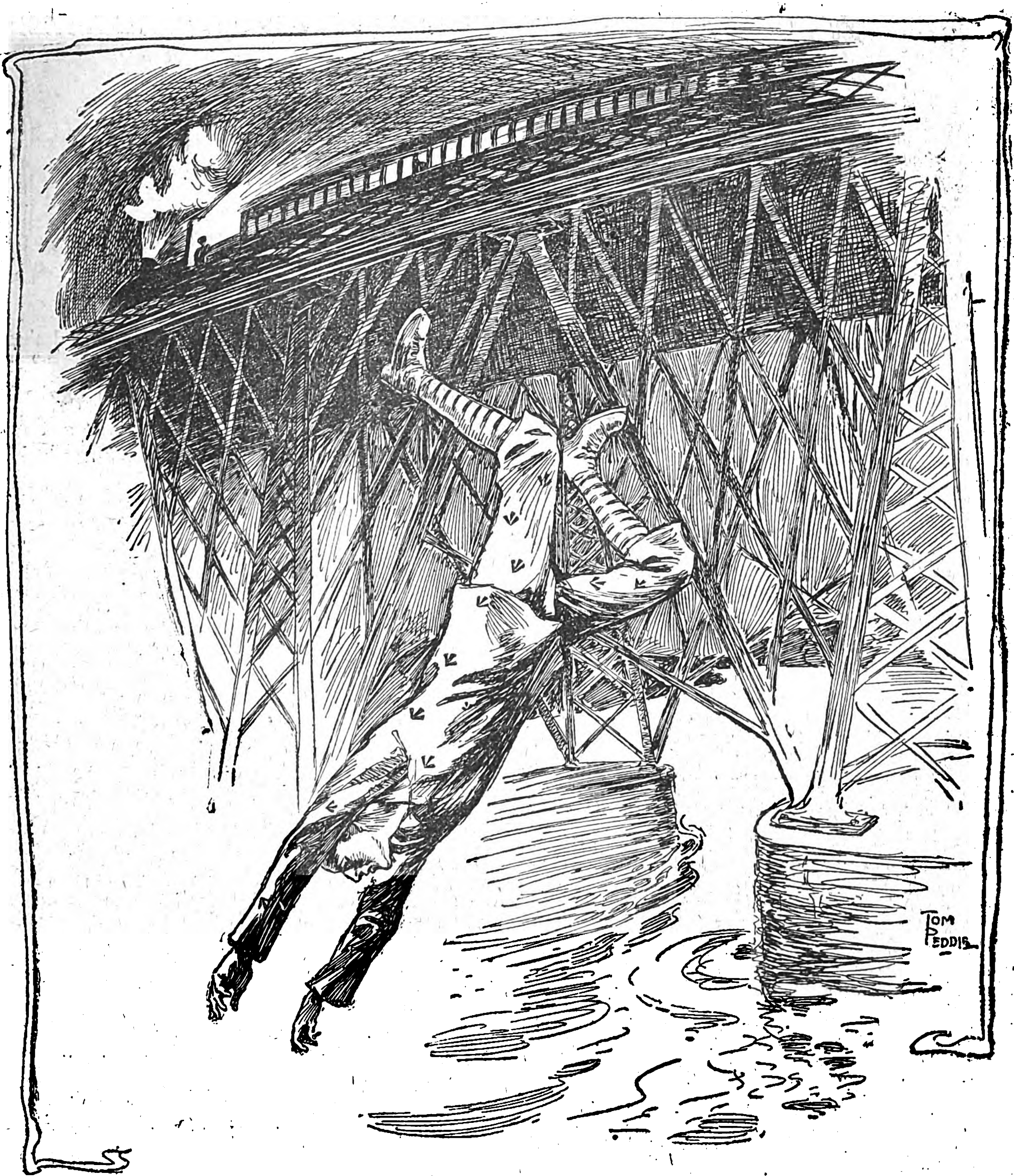
SHORT STORIES.

No. 638.] For the Week Ending October 19th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

DEAD TO THE WORLD.



There is a splash down there below! Then he springs back on to the footboard, back into the carriage. (*See the new serial on next page.*)

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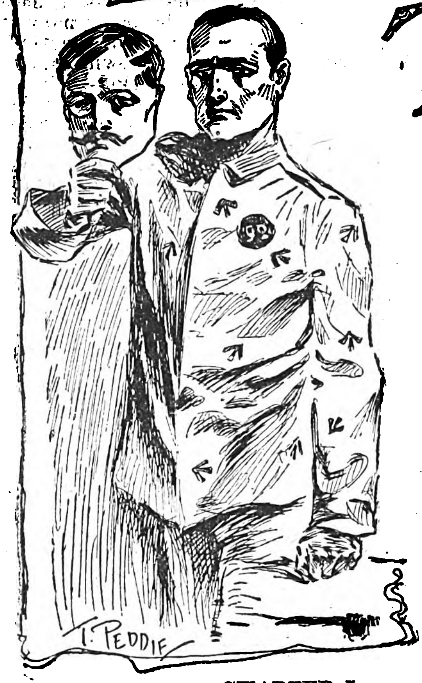
New Serial Begins To-day.

DEAD TO THE WORLD



By

Henry T. Johnson.

Author of "Cruce Vincit," "The Pride of the Ring," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN HUNT.

"WE'VE got him now! Stand or I'll fire!" shouts the warder first in the flight of the man hunted.

But the figure in drab presses on, panting, distressed, done up as he is.

"Stand!" another warder calls, but the quarry staggers on through the wet long grass.

"There's the railway—he'll be getting on to the line, then Lord knows what might happen!"

"Let him have it then!"

Bang! The mists quiver, shaken by the rifle shot. The man who is making so desperate a dash for freedom staggers three more paces, then falls.

"Got him!" growls the warder, ejecting the cartridge, "His own fault!" Then, themselves a trifle blown and weary, they ease up a bit.

Which is a mistake. For a miss is as good as a mile, and though the bullet whistled within an inch of the prison-breaker's ear, it is exhaustion, not the bullet, that sends him down. He lies there in the long grass panting like a hard-pressed hare, listening to the shouts behind him nearer and nearer—terribly near.

Raising his head, he scans the landscape.

And something catches his eye. A speck that grows into a gleam. There in front of him, and, like the shouts behind him, drawing nearer—nearer.

And more quickly even than the shouts—on it comes swerving round the curve of the line.

Suddenly the hunted man springs up and dashes on again, and a startled shout goes up from the man-hunters.

There he goes straight for the dip on to the line, reaches the grassy bank, lies breathless a moment at the foot of the rails amid a clump of furze and scrub. Steadily that disc of light draws nearer—nearer, though the train slows down at this bend to half speed, the engine clanks and rattles past. Concentrating all his remaining strength into one desperate final effort, the hunted man clambers up the wooden rails, a frantic leap, he has clutched the bar of an open carriage window, hangs on to it like grim death as the train carries him along. For a moment he dangles helpless, then his toes find the footboard—a little later he fumbles for the carriage door handle.

The rest is easy. The train quickens up, swirls round the bend, the man-hunters come panting up—too late.

"I'll swear I hit him!" the warder who fired declares, more to console his vanity than for any other purpose.

"Wonder if he got across the line!" exclaims another.

"No," says a third emphatically, "he couldn't have got across in front of that train. Let's go down and look if he's been under it."

Meantime, the quarry who has so far baffled them, lifting up the arm rests, stretches himself on the luxurious cushions of the first-class carriage into which he has scrambled, for a while dead to the world, caring nothing, if, indeed, he knows anything beyond that he is as done up as a man need be. At last, however, the shrill scream of the engine whistle reminds him that, if for the moment free, he is by no means scot free. How is he to rid himself of his broad arrow branded garb, he vaguely wonders? But for the present this is a secondary matter, a more immediate crisis has to be faced.

They are nearing a station—who knows what may be awaiting him there—though his pursuers will hardly have had enough time to get back to the previous station and wire his escape, even if they knew the exact manner of it.

Anyway, out of abundance of caution, he dives under the seat just as the train dashes by the Claverton Junction signal-box, and, lying there in hiding, awaits events.

"Ding—ding—ding! Fast train for Euston!" But what a while they seem to be taking their seats; will the doors never cease banging, porters and guards never cease shouting, luggage trollies never cease rumbling—is the train ever going to start for that London they

Begin "Dead to the World" to-day.

proclaim as its destination? So the escaped convict wonders lying there under the seat holding his breath, trying to hush the very beating of his heart.

At last the rumbling, the trundling, and the banging die away—the shouting changes to "Take your seats," then to "Stand aside there," as the guard's whistle trills.

Thank the stars! at last—at last the train is moving and they have left this carriage and the prison-breaker lying under its seat alone.

Then that shout, "Stand back!" rings out louder than before.

"I tell you I must catch it," a voice exclaims; "confound you! I will catch it!"

The handle clicks, the door swings open, the convict hears the sound of a scramble, then a substantial form flings itself on the seat above him.

CHAPTER II.

Exchange This Time Is Robbery.

"Phew! that was a close shave, mustn't do that again, not worth it—lots of trains—only one life."

Long afterwards the prison-breaker remembered that —"Only one life."

The newcomer sits back perspiring freely and panting heavily.

"Fool I was—to run like that—down the platform—after what Doctor Hall told me too—nuisance having to change—phew!"

He is so intent on mopping his shiny forehead, unbuttoning his coat and waistcoat, and fanning himself that he is oblivious of that set, determined face looking up at him from under the seat, of the dark eyes fixed on him with baleful concentration.

The man peering from under the seat is taking stock of him. Out of condition clearly—weak heart probably —he notes the substantial though not ostentatious jewellery—the fine linen—the good well-cut clothes. What would that long light overcoat not be worth to him now, and that soft felt hat? Fellow passenger is evidently a new arrival from abroad, passenger from Liverpool no doubt, changing at Claverton to catch the express.

He is badly blown, he'd be an easy handful to tackle —the sooner he's tackled the easier. Suddenly, swiftly a dark shadow stands between the newcomer and the light of the carriage window.

His breath comes and goes quicker than ever.

"Who are you—what's your game? Ah, I see—you're a convict; you've broken prison!"

He makes a dash for the communicator, but the other is too quick, has him by the throat, forces him back upon the seat.

With a rattle and a clatter the train plunges into a tunnel—as it were into the bowels of the earth—and now the prison-breaker has two hands at his victim's throat!

After a while the rattle ceases as though the train were a live thing and content to be again out under God's sky and in His open air.

The convict is looking at something lying down there against the opposite door—lying there quite still. He has got his heart's desire—that long, light overcoat rests on his shoulders now; the substantial jewellery besides a purse, a pocket book, and other things are in his pocket, the pockets of the garments he has stripped from the murdered man.

He has done his work very thoroughly, desperately, and deliberately—with that attention to detail which stamps the master of his craft. For instance, the inert leaden arms have been forced into the sleeves of the broad arrow-marked tunic, the exchange has been carried out even to the boots, which he has just finished lacing on the stiffening feet, so that only an insignificant bundle of surplus apparel remains there on the cushions.

Glancing through the window he sees his chance. The train has pulled up on the viaduct spanning the wide river Dass—only a low parapet with an iron rail, and there beyond stretches the silvery bosom of the river, now beginning to reflect the stars.

The convict opens the carriage door—lifts the inert form lying there so still. He is used to handling his fellow creatures, and a man of giant strength as many have known to their cost. Exerting all that strength, he lifts the inert, unconscious form down on to the parapet, gives it a swing—there is a splash down there below! Then he springs back on to the footboard, back into the carriage, pitches the bundle of remaining clothes over the parapet, and, opening his victim's handbag, ransacks its contents as the train swirls on.

Searches also the contents of that pocket-book, so that long before Euston is reached he has learned his victim's name, something of his history, his destination, and full particulars of his luggage.

And when the train at last pulls up, punctual to the half minute, at Euston, the man, who two hours ago was almost hunted down, secures that luggage, has it piled on a four-wheeled cab, in which he drives to the hotel mentioned in the correspondence he discovered in the handbag.

Furthermore, he is deferentially ushered to the rooms engaged by the victim whose clothes he is wearing.

Also whose name he has assumed.

Yes, for this is his plan. Cyril Roylance has come into his own!

And Richard Seldon, alias Tiger Dick, is from henceforth dead to the world. He has thought it out—he will work it out.

CHAPTER III.

The Course of True Love Never Did Run Smooth.

"Now, Jack, dear, you must go!"

"No, no, not yet, a few more moments, Doris!" And Jack Branscombe looks so appealingly down into the grey eyes of the girl, whose dimpled hands he holds, that she finds it harder than ever to be imperious.

For it is not for nothing that throughout the countryside folks call him Handsome Jack, and his face is tender and his eyes just now are soft with the lovelight of two or three and twenty.

"But Jack, Jack, it is getting so late. Listen how impatiently your horse is stamping and pawing, and consider, too, how impatiently my father will be fuming and wondering at my absence."

"Now, dearest little girl, you know as well as anybody that your stern parent always takes his forty winks over his crusted port and choice Havana after dinner."

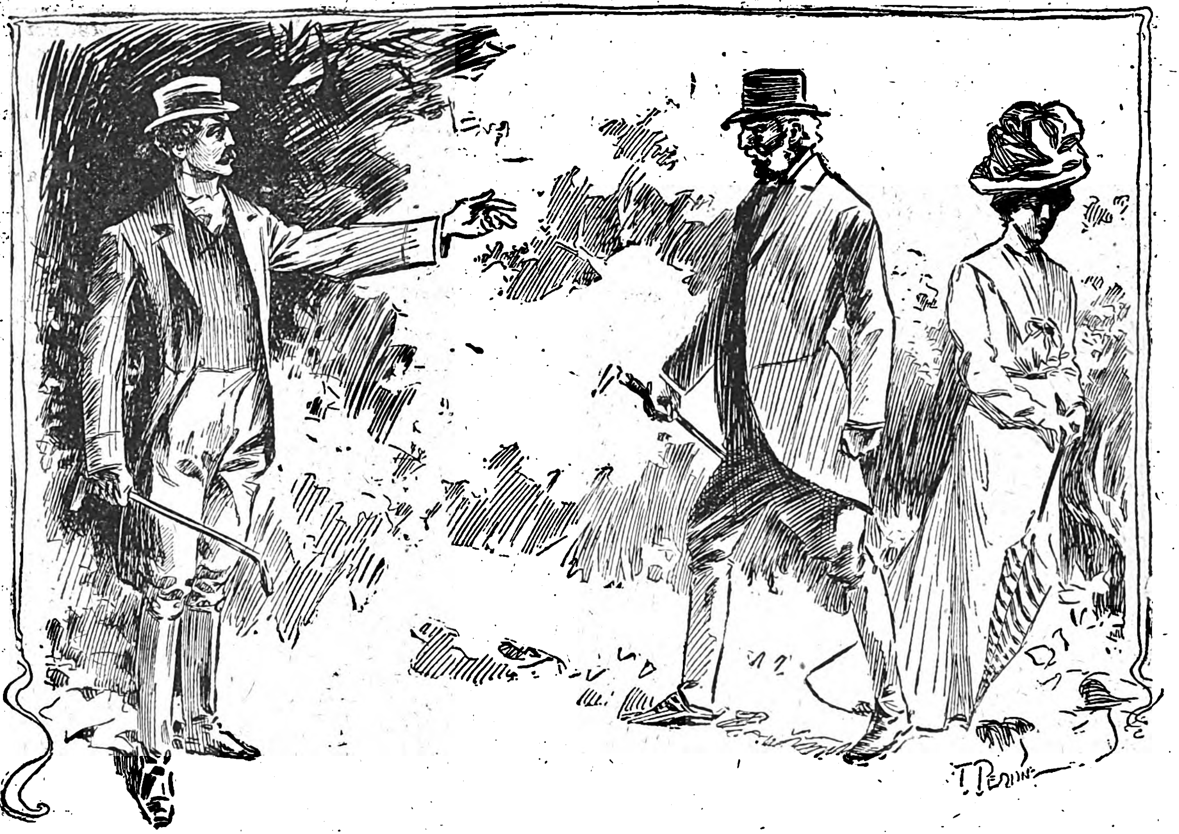
"And then wakes up, fuming and fretful till I go to the piano and play and sing him back into geniality, and I'm sure he's awake and fuming now, and if I don't go back directly he'll get into a dreadful temper and he'll stamp and shout and very likely bring his gout on again."

"And oh!" she went on, a grave look shadowing her pretty face, "if he only knew that I was here at the lych gate keeping tryst with you and that I'd made my way here through that very panel and passage where the Sir Harry Harcourt Dale of 1650 hid King Charles II., he'd be so angry that—that something terrible would happen. Jack, dear, I don't think we ought to meet again; what's the good of it?"

"The good of it! Why this, dear, that I love you and I can't live without you, and you know that you love me a little." And he looks down into the dove-like eyes that cannot deny the impeachment, nor can those rosy lips, for he seals them into consenting silence with a kiss.

And at that moment a heavy footstep crashes through the crackling bracken, and out of the shadow of the nut-bushes strides Harcourt Dale, the Squire of Dalehurst,

Turn to page 482 at once.



"No one in the world shall ever cry shame or blame on her. I love your daughter, sir!"

his iron-grey whiskers bristling and his face flaming redder than ever with fury.

"You here!" he exclaims angrily to his daughter, and then with tenfold wrath to her companion, "and you. I've been suspecting something of this kind, only that I couldn't believe my child capable of deceit."

"But father," pleaded Doris, "Jack's way lies along the lane and—and—"

"And you," thundered the Squire, "made your way along the coppice. Shame on you, Doris Dale!"

"No, no!" cried Jack Branscombe, "no one in the world shall cry shame or blame on her. It is true I begged her, implored her, to meet me at the lych gate, vowed that if not here I would seek her elsewhere. I love your daughter, sir, with a love as pure and constant as a man ever cherished for a maid. It is well that the truth should be told."

"You love my daughter, you—Jack Branscombe, a mere yeoman farmer."

"A yeoman farmer," said the other proudly, "and my calling is my pride."

"Well then, once for all, let this folly cease. I forbid you to approach my daughter; I absolutely interdict any communication between you. Doris, return to the house; and you, sir, leave my premises, and remember, if you are found trespassing again upon them I will have you dealt with accordingly."

"Father!" the girl cried pitifully; then to the other, "Jack! Jack!" and the yearning tender tone she spoke in fell upon his heart like balm, soothing the angry passion the other's words had awakened, so that he forgot taunt and insult, remembering only that it was her father who stood before him.

"I will leave your premises," he said proudly, "but I tell you once again that I love your daughter, she loves me, and not all the fathers on earth, nor all the forces of earth shall stand twixt her and me. I know you scorn my pretensions. You, the landed squire, look down on me, the yeoman farmer whose ancestors have for years paid rent and fine for copyhold to yours. But I tell you that the day shall be when you shall repent your angry words, and you, who order me to leave your lands, shall call me across your threshold. Good-bye, Doris, and remember I love you and I trust you always."

Turning on his heel, he vaulted the lych gate, strode along towards where his horse awaited him, flung himself into the saddle, and soon, at a pelting trot, was speeding along the lanes to his farmhouse home.

He had spoken wildly, at random. He could not have given authority or foundation for his words, and yet, somehow, in his heart of hearts he felt confident that in due time his prophecy would be fulfilled.

Doris followed her father without a word through the nut coppice leading to the shrubberies, and so on across the level sward to the Grange. Once within doors her emotion overmastered her and she burst into tears. When the passion of her outburst was over, her father, with a quiet sternness unusual to him, said deliberately:

"Now understand me, this nonsense is at an end, once for all."

"But, father," she cried, "I love him, I shall never love anyone else."

An impatient exclamation broke from him, then in a somewhat kindlier tone he said:

"Listen to me, Doris. Romance affects people at your age and his, just as measles at an earlier period. A girl in your station of life has to consider other matters besides her inclination, property has its responsibilities as well as its privileges. And, by the bye, I have news for you. Cyril Roylance has returned to England and is expected at the Hall at any moment."

Doris instinctively felt an unaccountable chill as these words fell, not only upon her ears, but, as it seemed, upon her heart. They brought to mind an old tale she had heard from the servants and the village gossips. Of how her father and Rupert Roylance, the late master of the Hall, sitting over their wine after dinner, had, some said in jest, others in earnest, made a bargain, that the seven-year-old heir to the Hall should, in years to come, espouse the baby heiress of the Grange.

Since then many things had happened. Rupert Roylance had entered into many vast and rash speculations, ruin had been the result: the estate, which was entailed, was mortgaged to the hilt as far as lay in his power. Taking his little lad, then a fragile, weedy ten-year-old, he had sailed for foreign lands, no one, not even himself, being certain of his destination. The rents of the estate had been for years collected by receivers for the mortgagees, the Hall itself being let to strangers.

Years later news had arrived of Rupert Roylance, who had literally and metaphorically "struck oil," and together with the news came heavy remittances, reducing the mortgages on the estate; then more remittances, until at last the estates were cleared and Morgan Chandler went on managing them, not as receiver for the mortgagees, but as duly appointed steward and factotum for Rupert Roylance.

Later still, came news of Rupert Roylance's death, then a little while later intelligence that his son and heir, Cyril Roylance, was on his way to England to take up his abode in his ancestral home, the tenancy of which happened to have some months previously expired.

And on hearing this news Squire Harcourt Dale had bethought himself of the bargain and the betrothal made by himself and his old friend and neighbour, perhaps in jest, perhaps in earnest. But many a true word was spoken in jest, and from every point of view what an admirable alliance it would be. Doris was just on twenty, Cyril would be a man of twenty-seven; the estates ran together, and, amalgamated, would form the finest in the county; certain intricate questions as to rights of way and other easements, such as will occur between large and contiguous estates, would be set at rest. Oh! the match would be most eligible. As to the inclinations of the parties principally concerned Harcourt Dale declined to take such unimportant matters into consideration. It was a bargain. There were times, as, for instance, when Rupert Roylance had gone forth from his ancestral home practically penniless, when Harcourt Dale had affected to treat that bargain as one begun and to be ended in idle jesting, now he looked upon it as one to be regarded, and, if possible, to be carried out in earnest.

CHAPTER IV.

The New Squire.

Fallowfield village was a-quiver with excitement, for within the hour the new master of Fallowfield Hall was expected to drive through, *en route* for the home of his ancestors. And, as the old gossips declared, the place would seem itself again with a Roylance ruling at the Hall. And no little proportion of the enthusiasm was due to the reflection that the reign, or, rather, the regency of Morgan Chandler was rapidly approaching its close, a regency long to be bitterly remembered by reason of many an act of spiteful, petty tyranny; the newcomer might turn out to be a harsh master, a hard landlord, he could scarcely prove harder or harsher than Morgan Chandler.

Meantime, up there at the Hall itself the individual in question sat in one of the apartments of the steward's offices brooding over a number of account books.

"It's all over at last," he soliloquised. "Well, I've made a pretty good thing out of it, and I can't grumble. I should have feathered my nest pretty snugly if I'd been content to let well and the Stock Echange alone."

"But suppose the new chap's very clever at figures? Well, it'll take him time enough and it'll give him work enough to find out anything from these," he chuckled grimly, turning over the pages of one of the ledgers. "They've passed the lawyers, and I fancy they'll get by him. Hallo! what do you want?"

This last remark was addressed to a man, who, after respectfully knocking, had shambled into the room and stood there dangling his hat with one hand, while with the other he tugged deferentially at his forelock.

"Axin' pardon, Measter Chandler," he said hesitatingly, "I made so bold as to coom to ax if I canna stay in t'owd cottage a bit longer."

"Not a minute after your time's up, Ned Fletcher, and that's Saturday. I'll have no poachers on the estate. I know all about you, you're sly enough not to be caught, but I know who sets wires in the plantations and nightlines in the Park Water, and out you go, bag and baggage."

"It's 'ard lines on a man, sir, to be turned out of house and home, all for suspicion."

"Suspicion be hanged! Everybody knows you're a poacher, though nobody's been quite sharp enough to catch you redhanded. Don't waste my time—get out!"

And the abashed, unsuccessful appellant shuffled out of the room muttering protests against being turned on the roadside for perhaps once in a while picking up a stray rabbit.

A little later, lusty shouts at the Hall gates heralded the approach of the carriage bearing the new master of the old mansion home. A few minutes more and Morgan Chandler stood before him in the Hall's huge portico with a totally different expression of manner and feature to that which he had displayed towards the poacher, the new arrival eyeing him meantime, steadily, taking the measure of his man, the man most likely to make or mar his game.

Later in the day they were closeted together a considerable time over books and schedules, Morgan Chandler rendering an account of his stewardship. The new master of Fallowfield Hall went carefully through every detail of account, putting from time to time questions which his agent found somewhat difficult to answer. And when the conference was over, and the master of the Hall sat alone in his library still poring over books and vouchers, he sprang suddenly from his seat, took a cigar from the box and lighting it deliberately, muttered in an undertone:

"You're a liar, Mr. Morgan Chandler, and you're a hypocrite; of that I was certain immediately I clapped eyes on you, but I think you're something else. I'm pretty certain, Mr. Chandler, you're a thief. So much the better for my game. Hullo, what's the matter?"

A manservant, entering, announced that the man Fletcher had returned to the Hall and begged for a few minutes audience with the new Squire.

"What does he want?" asked the other sharply.

"I expect, sir, he's on the same errand as this morning, asking to be allowed to stop in his cottage. Mr. Chandler means to clear him out for poaching."

Is your photo on page 502?

"Ask him in," said the other, and in a few minutes Fletcher, again dangling his hat and tugging at his forelock, stood in the presence of the new squire, making his appeal.

"So you thought you'd come direct to Cæsar?" said the latter, eyeing him steadily. "I've heard of your case from Chandler."

"He's always had his knife in me," said the man sullenly.

"Probably," said the other; "men who have got to take care of property generally have their knives in folks of your sort. Now, listen to me. It's abundantly clear, my friend, that you're an inveterate and a desperate poacher. You'd think no more of knocking over a hare than you would of smoking a pipe, and if one of my men interrupted you, if he were alone, you'd think no more of knocking him over than the hare. You're a bit of a drunkard and you're a quarrelsome bully. Don't tell lies, I tell you you are"—for the man had begun to mutter a protest.

"Now," the Squire went on, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to keep you on in the cottage and I'm going to give you a job as a sort of night watchman and under-keeper."

The man started, astounded, scarce able to believe his ears.

"Now clear out," the Squire went on, "and, remember, I'm the man here now, you've got to work for me. Work for me thoroughly, discreetly, and quietly. I'll make it worth your while; deceive me, play me false, and you'll wish you'd never been born," and the man quailed before the sudden gleam in his new master's eye.

He shuffled out of the room muttering protestations of eternal fidelity, and the new Squire of Fallowfield, puffing meditatively at his cigar, remarked sententiously:

"That's the man for me; set a thief to catch a thief," then with a chuckle, "by Jingo! they haven't caught me," and once again he scanned the morning paper containing an account of the mysterious discovery of a dead body floating in the Dass, clad in convict garb, and believed to be identical with one Richard Seldon, commonly known as "Tiger Dick," who had some ten days previously effected an escape from Brimington Convict Prison, though the features of the man found in the Dass were unrecognisable.

CHAPTER V.

FAVOURS.

THE Fallowfield Agricultural Show was in full swing. The population of the country side, male and female, rich and poor, gentle and simple, flocked within its enclosure to inspect broad and mossy backed sheep, prize oxen, champion swedes and turnips, to watch ploughing matches, to gaze upon the glories of feminine attire as well as on much personal feminine loveliness, and to listen to the sweet sound discoursed by a smart regimental band. Spick and span turn-outs abounded, one of the smartest, the splendidly-horsed dogcart driven by Doris, who, nattily attired in a smart tailor-made tweeds and a driving coat, with a straw hat, attracted the admiring glances of all beholders. Of one especially, this one a man with dark, flashing eyes and a black moustache shadowing a somewhat hard mouth, riding a somewhat showy thoroughbred, and riding him well.

Doris for a moment drooped her eyes before the bold flash of the unknown dark ones. A moment or two later her father was standing beside her wheel, leading that showy thoroughbred.

"Doris, dear, this is Mr. Cyril Roylance. Cyril, though you may remember her, you wouldn't have recognised her, eh?"

"Hardly," said the other, raising his hat, "seeing that when I left England Miss Dale was a charming child, and I return to find a still more charming, grown up, young lady."

At that moment Jack Branscombe rode by. Ignoring her father's haughty stare, he, saluting Doris, darted at her a look which spoke worlds, and she answered it with another equally eloquent, and her new acquaintance noted the exchange of glances with a tightening of the hard mouth.

"Isn't it rather strange for you," she asked, "returning to England after living practically all your life down under?"

"It is a trifle strange," he said, "but very pleasant. It's the fulfilment of a dream cherished for years this return from exile." Then he went on: "And only to think that you were once the tiny baby girl riding in a basket pannier, whose pony I used to lead along the lanes. What a dear little mite you were!"

Cyril Roylance and Doris had been children together; the children of old friends and neighbours, the children, aye, the children and great grandchildren of old friends and neighbours. It was not surprising, therefore, that Doris should, after that first strange thrill, greet the new arrival on his return to his home and homeland with unaffected cordiality.

But poor Jack Branscombe, with love's pain in his heart, watched her with a jealous shadow in his eyes.

"Ah! now I see," he muttered bitterly, "why her father wanted the coast left clear. It's a long time since the Israelites sojourned in the wilderness, but the worship of the golden calf hasn't gone out of fashion yet."

Then, putting spurs into his horse, he galloped him into the open space reserved for the jumping competition, for he was showing him.

A clapping of hands rattled round the enclosure as, having cleared two or three hurdles in his horse's stride, Jack put him straight at the wall of wooden bricks, clearing it like a bird, and an enthusiastic "Bravo!" went up as he negotiated cleverly a tricky "in and out" jump, and when finally, with a shake of the reins, he rode him at the water jump, a spontaneous cheer told him that the good horse had cleared.

The other competitors ruefully noted the approving glances and significant nods of the judges there in the centre, and a murmur went round, "Handsome Jack's got the red rosette—just his luck!"

But there was one more competitor still remained, and a hearty cheer arose as the new Squire of Fallowfield rode into the enclosure. He, too, took his jumps beautifully cleanly, and the sleek, graceful animal he rode, charmed every lover of horseflesh as a perfect picture of a thoroughbred.

"By Jove!" said one young farmer, "it's going to be a near thing; Jack might get only the blue after all."

He came at the water jump at a rush, and then—oh! fatal mischance—just at the take-off he slightly slipped on a patch of broken ground cut up by previous competitors, jumped short, and landed up to his hind fetlocks in the water.

As it was he got the blue rosette, but he muttered an oath as he watched one of the judges attach the red on to Jack Branscombe's bridle, for, his dark eyes scanning the arena, he noted one dainty handkerchief fluttering in what seemed to him the daintiest, nattiest gloved hand in the world.

Jack Branscombe had not only won the red rosette, but he was first favourite for another prize, a prize the new Squire of Fallowfield meant if he could to win, namely, the love of Doris Dale.

There are black sheep in every fold, and even among the simple country folk gathered round that arena there lurched a couple of individuals who had been drawn to the show less by any desire to "speed the plough" or any interest in agricultural affairs generally, than a desire to form a collection of purses and other unconsidered trifles which might happen to lurk in the pockets of the unwary.

And one of these leaning on the rails observed to the other: "D'year, cully? pipe that toff as too second prize. D'ye notice anythin'?"

"Dunno what you're drivin' at, Josh."

"That's because you put away too many pints to-day. Why, when that chap come riding past here and that look come into 'is face when 'is 'orse slipped, I says to myself, if I hadn't seen Tiger Dick put away for a stretch, and read only the other day of 'is being drownded arter breakin' out, I should say that's 'im riding the brown 'orse with the white blaze."

A great shout greeted Jack Branscombe as he rode the winner of the first prize out of the enclosure, and from the equipages parked at the entrance many a fair face smiled radiantly, and many a pair of bright eyes, black, brown, or blue, beamed tenderly upon the handsome yeoman farmer, the beau ideal of a healthful, sporting Englishman, and many a sigh fluttered many a gentle heart, for Handsome Jack seemed impervious to all love's arrows.

But only seemed. Presently, walking his horse past the Dale's dogcart once again, his eyes met those of Doris—those dear eyes beaming in the shade of that dainty straw hat like two stars aglow to guide his soul. Her father was looking at her, stern and cold, near her sat the Squire of Fallowfield, with a strange look in his face that aroused partly her wonder, partly her indignation, and many of the stately county dames were regarding her critically, for she was too bright and breezy, too radiant and dainty not to awaken a certain amount of feminine envy. But Doris forgot all these, forgot for the moment all the world except Handsome Jack.

"Oh! well ridden, indeed!" broke from her.

Gallantly, smartly, he turned his horse's head, reined alongside, detached the red rosette of premier place from his horse's bridle, pressed it in the palm of that dainty, buckskin gauntleted hand, then walked his horse away amid the cries of the delighted crowd.

"Well done, Handsome Jack! He's won another favour now!"

An angry oath escaped the Squire of Fallowfield *sotto voce*, then he sneered:

"Very effective—very theatrical, and just a little bit impertinent."

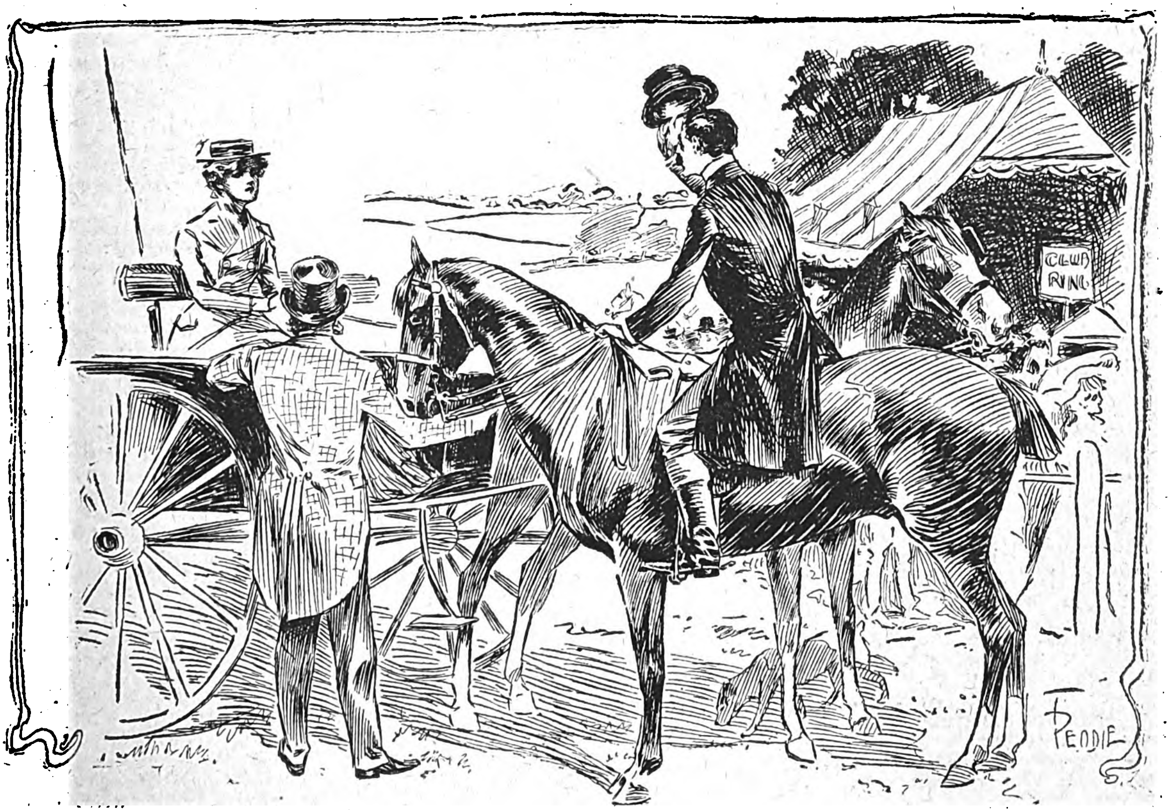
Handsome Jack looked him full and boldly in the face.

"My friend," he said with a mocking smile, "if you've lost the first favour, try not to lose your temper."

He rode on, and, watching him, the new Squire swore in his heart that he would hesitate at nothing, however dark or desperate, to remove from his path the man who had won, not only that rosette, but the heart of Doris Dale.

"Now, Cyril," said Harcourt Dale in his most genial manner, "you'll ride over to the Grange and dine with us, won't you?"

Not much pressure was needed to induce the new neighbour to accept the invitation, for which, indeed, he had been hoping.



"Doris, dear, this is Mr. Cyril Roylance."

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And thus it came to pass that a few hours later he lingered at Harcourt Dale's dinner table praising his choice cigars, his rare old vintages, praising most of all his dainty daughter.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Harcourt Dale, "time hasn't weakened your attachments. Don't you remember when you were a little chap you used to call Doris your little sweetheart?"

"I remember," said the other, with a laugh, quickly.

"Begging your pardon, sir, it wasn't 'little sweetheart,' it was 'little Doris dearie.'"

The guest looked up with a quick frown at the old butler, who from long habit had been wont to avail himself of the privilege of an old retainer.

"Ah, that was it," said the Squire. "Barker's right; wonderful memory Barker."

An uneasy light glittered for a moment in the guest's eyes. He took in the situation in a moment, and with a somewhat forced smile turned to the old retainer.

"Yes, yes, of course I remember. And would you have recognised me, Barker?"

"Can't say as I should, sir," said the old servant with characteristic candour. "I seem to remember you as being inclined to be fair as a boy."

"Ah, that's the Australian sun."

"Maybe, sir, but you seemed inclined more to make flesh. I never looked on you as a little chap as 'ud grow up as lean as a wolfhound."

Later on they joined Doris in the drawing-room, and Harcourt Dale, watching his guest lingering by the piano at his daughter's side, thought how capitally events were shaping.

"Confound it! How late it is getting. Time flies so swiftly when the hours are so pleasant," said the guest.

"Well, then you must spend more of them here. Remember the Grange is always open house to the son of my old friend," said the host.

But the parting hour, however long postponed, arrives at last. Doris had retired some hours before, and her father and his guest had smoked many more cigars and emptied many glasses of the rare old port before the latter mounted his horse and rode away from the Grange.

The night had turned dark, cold, cloudy, and cheerless.

"By Jove!" he muttered, "I've played some desperate games in my time, but this is the riskiest of all. But then, the stakes are the biggest I've ever gone for. Only to think of it, a country mansion, a rent-roll many a nobleman would sigh for, horses, servants, carriages, and all won by a coup! Ah, but there's something else to win—Doris, you're the prize I want, and I'll win you if I have to play ten times the desperate game I've dared already. Hullo there! Who the devil are you, and what are you doing?"

A hand was on his bridle, and his horse was plunging.

"Quick, Josh, fetch him down!" a hoarse voice shouted, and the horseman received a heavy blow upon the shoulder with some weapon from the other side.

But he was no easy man to tackle, as his assailants found. Reining round his horse, he clubbed his whip and struck out savagely. One of the men went down with a groan. Then, turning in the saddle, he gripped the other by the collar. Just then the moon sailed up from behind a bank of cloud, and in its cold, blue light he looked down on a brutal, baleful face. And the man he held looked up into his and gurgled:

"Josh was right! It's Tiger Dick, as sure as I'm alive!"

CHAPTER VI.

The New Squire Meets Old Acquaintances.

"Hush—hush!" exclaimed the horseman in a half-whisper, as though fearful that the very leaves and boughs should hear.

Meantime, the other man, half dazed, had scrambled to his feet, and, attracted by his companion's excited ejaculation, staggered round to his side.

"That's right!" he chuckled hoarsely. "I spotted him at the Show, only I couldn't believe my eyes; but it's 'im, by thunder! And only to think as it was 'im who downed me!"

The Squire of Fallowfield instinctively clapped his hand to the hip pocket where in the old days he invariably carried a pistol. A curse escaped him as he reflected that he had of late neglected the custom that at times had proved so useful.

"It's all a mistake!" he exclaimed hastily, "you fellows have taken me for someone else; let go my horse's head!"

But the man addressed as Barney answered, "No fear, Tiger, it's such a long time since we had the honour of your company, and we thought it was going to be such a long time afore we had ever had it agin' we can't part with you just yet awhile. So it wasn't you as was found in the river?"

"I really don't understand you."

"Chuck it, Tiger! What's the use of shamming soft with us? Who could it 'ave been as was wearing your clothes—the suit with the broad arrow pattern?"

"Hush, Barney!" then the new Squire bit his lip and the man with whom he was expostulating chuckled at the recognition he had let slip.

But the other remarked sententiously: "Don't be rerdicklous, Barney, it ain't to be supposed as 'ow Tiger Dick's going to give the show away by taking us to Fallowfield Hall this time o' night—that's the wust of you, you ain't got no ideas of what's etiquette and proper," this last with a grin.

"I don't mind giving you fellows a few sovereigns to get rid of you, but I don't see the necessity for meeting you."

"Yer don't, don't yer, but we do," grinned Josh. Then, adopting a more truculent tone, he continued: "Now no more hanky, Tiger. I could look over your downin' me, not knowing who I was, but when it comes to givin' old pals the go-bye, don't you think we'll stand that, not us—we know too much."

"But it wouldn't pay you to tell exactly all you know."

"Dunno," said Josh stubbornly, "you know we 'ave 'eard of parties chancing being put away and doing time. Yes, sometimes of going back to Portland for another stretch absolute cheerful, rather than let one as they've worked with wipe his feet on 'em. You ain't one of that sort, Tiger, you ain't goin' to play that game, eh? But if you was I'd nark, yes I'd nark on yer if it meant——" To complete the sentence he gave a significant jerk with his left thumb under his left ear.

"What Josh says is right," concurred the other; "yer can't 'ave all yer own way all the time, just as this afternoon you had to be satisfied with only the blue rosette, 'cause there's other folks in the world as well as you, you ain't the only pebble on the beach."

Then, swiftly the new Squire remembered Handsome Jack, felt once again the hate and anger leaping to his heart, reflecting that Jack had won first place and prize in yet another rivalry, and then he reflected that his old acquaintances might be useful and that it might be prudent to appease them, not for old acquaintance sake, but for, to him, more important reasons. And so he answered: "That's all right, boys, I was only playing possum to see how you'd take it. Here's a bit to be going on with, and I'll meet you here at two o'clock to-morrow to talk over business."

"What! Is there any on the board, Tiger?"

"There's good business on the board, Barney, and you are the very men I want to work the oracle."

(To be continued.)

New serial starts to-day.

A COMEDY IN CLIFFORD'S INN.

I.

"HAS Miss Madge come in yet, Adams?" asked Mr. Merriman gruffly, as he glared alternately at his watch and the clock.

"No, sir," responded Adams, the smart parlour-maid, for the fourth time in the last half hour.

Mr. Merriman grunted, and his small, keen, grey eyes got red and angry. He turned to Adams.

"Dinner!" he snapped.

Mr. Merriman hated waiting for his dinner after a long and tiring day in the city, but he equally hated sitting down to that meal without the bright face of his only daughter, Madge, at the other end of the table. Madge had kept house for her widower-father for three years, when this unpretending chronicle begins. She had also driven to distraction all the youth of Holland Road and the adjacent parts of Kensington, but that is a mere detail, and has nothing to do with the story.

Alone in the big, sombre dining-room, Mr. Merriman ate his dinner as if he had a grudge against it, and occasionally compared the fat repeater with the clock on the mantelpiece. His little eyes grew redder and angrier, till suddenly the storm burst.

"What's that?" he roared, pointing to the dish before him with a hand that quivered with passion.

"Mutton, sir," murmured the trembling Adams.

"Then why is it sent up to me raw? Yes, raw!" shouted the master of the house. "Take it away! Good Heavens, this is how one's servants rob one. Thirty good pounds a year do I pay to that incompetent savage downstairs, and she gives me raw mutton to eat! It's shameful! It's wicked!"

And, clasping his bald head with his hands, the outraged man arose and pranced savagely in the dining-room.

His paroxysm of grief was cut short by the apparition of his daughter, flushed and breathless with hurry, and in the act of tucking a couple of pink carnations into her waistbelt.

"Why, father!" she cried, in her fresh young voice: "What is the matter? Why, you're so cross that the top of your dear bald head is quite pink. I'm as hungry as I can be! Is dinner ready?"

"The loathsome mess that my cook is pleased to call dinner," replied the sire in a tragic voice, "has been ready for some time. I have been obliged to send the mutton away. I am not a Central African savage, and cannot dine off raw meat. Adams, bring some soup and fish for Miss Madge."

And Mr. Merriman, with a heavy sigh, sank into his favourite seat, and took up a pink-hued evening paper.

"I am sorry to be late," remarked Miss Madge, attacking her soup, "but really Peter Robinson's was so fascinating I could scarcely tear myself away."

"How did you come home?" demanded her father.

"Tube from Oxford Circus to Shepherd's Bush," said the girl promptly. Then she went on with some hesitation: "I had quite an adventure at the station."

It might have been the crimson lamp-shade that made her look as if she were blushing, and—it might not.

"Ho!" shouted Mr. Merriman. "In my young days well-bred girls did not have 'adventures'—at stations or anywhere else."

"Well, it was like this," said Madge, fidgetting with her serviette-ring. "Er—I spent all my money shopping, and when I wanted to take a ticket, I found I hadn't even the harmless, necessary twopence for my fare. So"—she was bending her head over her plate, and speaking very fast—"there was a man—a very nice man, just behind me, and he saw how upset I was—so—he—insisted on lending me the money to get home with."

Mr. Merriman arose, and began to tramp heavily up and down the room. He was crimson in the face, and the veins on his forehead stood out.

"Upon my soul!" he burst out presently, "I believe I'm the most miserable man on this earth. Business is rotten, my servants rob me and give me raw meat to eat, and my only daughter scrapes acquaintance with strange men at railway stations! I wish I was dead—I do, indeed!"

Madge said nothing. She knew her father's peculiar ways, and that a calm would succeed the storm.

"Some fortune hunter, no doubt," said Mr. Merriman, "been dogging you for weeks—months, I shouldn't wonder. Oh, yes! The only daughter of Merriman and Co. is worth knowing." He laughed sarcastically.

"He was a gentleman," cried Madge indignantly.

"I'll thrash the blackguard within an inch of his life," roared her father. "And as for you, my lady, off you go to—your aunt in the country. I'll just give her a hint of the games you've been up to, and she'll discipline you well, I can promise you that!"

This terrible threat having been launched at her head on a average three times a week for the past six years, Madge received it with some calm, and was mentally deciding which of the fascinating blouses at Peter Robinson's she should exact as the price of peace.

"I couldn't help it—you don't expect me to walk all the way from Oxford Circus here?" expostulated the wily young woman.

"You could have taken a cab, I suppose," growled her father. "By careful searching you might have found enough money in the house to pay the fare."

Then he sank back into the chair, lit a cigar, and between the puffs feebly reiterated that he was the most miserable man on earth, and he wished he was dead. Madge poured herself a glass of claret, and drank it with apparent enjoyment. As has been said, she was accustomed to these scenes, and knew their exact value in the scheme of things.

II.

Mr. Merriman left his office in Idol Lane, E.C., and, climbing heavily into a hansom, told the driver "Clifford's Inn." It was a blazing day, in honour of which the horse wore a straw hat and the driver a cummerbund and a rose in his buttonhole. The attire of Mr. Merriman was likewise suitable to the season. His waistcoat was the whitest, his shepherd's-plaid trousers, the lightest to be beheld that day in the city of London. But the brow of Mr. Merriman was clouded with anger, and he grasped his gold-headed Malacca as a Roman warrior his glaive.

As everybody knows, Clifford's Inn has two entrances, one in Fleet Street, and one through old Sergeant's Inn, in Chancery Lane. It was at the Fleet Street entrance that Mr. Merriman pulled up, and bade his charioteer wait.

He soon found the particular set of chambers of which he was in search, and dealt a resonant blow on the door.

"Come in!" called a cheery voice.

A fair haired young man with bright blue eyes, and a particularly cheery smile was engaged in throwing a miscellaneous collection of things into a Gladstone bag. He looked up.

"Mr. Morse?" inquired the visitor.

"I'm him," said the fair haired young man, regardless of grammar. "Don't mind me going on packing, do you? I've got a train to catch." And he hurled a pair of tennis shoes into the yawning depths of the bag.

"Cool," thought Mr. Merriman. Then aloud he said:

"I will not detain you long, Mr.—ah—Morse. I just wish to know if you are the young man who insulted my daughter at the Oxford Circus tube station last night." With that the angry father grasped his cane in a menacing manner and snorted.

The young man dropped the articles in his hand and stood up quickly.

"I'm not in the habit of insulting people's daughters," said he. "Hadn't you better go?"

"I tell you," cried Mr. Merriman, raising his voice, "that I won't have my daughter insulted by any well-dressed loafer."

"This," said Morse, apparently to the opposite wall, "one can only attribute to the intense heat. Or else drink."

"What!" shrieked the merchant, crimson with fury. "How dare you—you impudent young puppy—insinuate that I—" he choked.

The imperturbed occupant of the chambers resumed his packing, humming as he did so a snatch of "Tell me, pretty maiden."

"Look here," said Mr. Merriman, "you had the impudence to pay my daughter's fare last night. Here it is." He carefully placed two pennies on the table. "If I were a younger man, you should suffer severely," he resumed, glaring at Morse, and trembling with passion.

Morse took up the pennies, looked at them carefully, and dropped them into his trousers pocket.

"Like a receipt?" he asked carelessly.

Mr. Merriman made an inarticulate sound, which aptly expressed mingled anger and contempt, and banged the door behind him. As he descended the stairs he had an uneasy feeling that he had got the worst of it. The scene had not turned out as he had planned it. He, John Merriman, of Idol Lane and Holland Road, Kensington, was not accustomed to be laughed at. He was absorbed in these unpleasant thoughts as he strode angrily into Chancery Lane.

It has been remarked that there are two ways of leaving Clifford's Inn. At the Fleet Street one the cab was waiting. Or, at least, it had been waiting till the driver, learned in the way of bilkers, and remembering the other exit from the inn, loitered casually into Chancery Lane. He soon espied Mr. Merriman, oblivious of all but his late interview with the imperturbable young man of Clifford's Inn.

"Hi, guv'nor!" he cried in a harsh, unpleasant voice. His late fare looked up with a start.

"By Jove, cabby, I nearly forgot you," remarked the latter.

"Did yer, now?" said the driver waggishly. "Well, what a lucky thing I didn't forgit you, ain't it?"

Mr. Merriman frowned. He was not accustomed to familiarity from cab drivers, and he could not know the dark view which had been taken of his absence of mind. He dived into his pocket. It was empty. He then remembered the donning of the shepherds' plaid trousers that morning, and became uneasy. He searched his other pockets. There remained not a single coin.

"Look here," he said to the cabby, "I haven't any money on me. Just drive me back to my office in Idol Lane, and I'll pay you."

"No, yer don't, Kroojer," cried the cabman in a loud, threatening way. "Fink I didn't see yer tryin' to do a guy out o' the other entrance? Bow Street's your mark."

A small crowd, attracted by the altercation, began to gather. Mr. Merriman looked round in agony. The cabby was signalling with his whip to a distant policeman.

"Wicked ole man!" squeaked a young imp of an errand boy. "Why don't you pay the pore feller?" reproachfully asked a navvy.

The policeman approached, and to him the driver explained that he with the whiskers had left him in Fleet Street, and then deceitfully attempted to depart by Chancery Lane; that he (the cabby) was a respectable man, and had drove a cab for fourteen year, and he wished for nothing but justice.

Things certainly looked very black. Mr. Merriman feebly attempted to explain.

"Yes, I know all about that," interrupted the constable. "You come along."

And he grasped Mr. Merriman by the arm. Tears—actual salt tears—gathered in the merchant's eyes. In its way, the thing was a tragedy.

"There's a mistake here, constable," said a cheery voice, suddenly. "I know this gentleman very well." The owner of the voice carried a Gladstone bag, and was, in fact, Mr. Guy Morse. There was a short consultation, the cabman drove off whistling, and the policeman resumed his walk with a thoughtful air.

"How can I ever thank you?" said Mr. Merriman, with emotion, as he grasped his rescuer's hand. "Come and dine with me when you return from your holiday, and I'll introduce you to my daughter."

And Mr. Morse said he would.

Now Mr. Merriman as he watches the two young people at the piano after dinner, wonders what he will do without Madge.

Begin "Dead to the World" to-day.

A THRILLING INSTALMENT.

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

XI.—By a Hair's Breadth.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

"WELL, if this is a sample of Portsmouth weather, all I can say is——. Perhaps on second thoughts I'd better leave it unsaid," ejaculated Raymond Venables, as *The Good Samaritan* Theatrical Company drew up inside the station at Portsmouth.

It was five o'clock on Thursday afternoon. A cold, autumn drizzle was driving remorselessly through the quiet streets of the town. The members of the company were all more or less in a bad temper, enhanced by the prospects of securing apartments amidst such unpalatable climatic surroundings.

Jenny Lovelace bore off Hazel Harlow. The former was an old hand on the road, knew where good lodgings were to be found.

"After last week's terrible adventure, Hazel," she said in a low voice, "I shan't let you out of my sight if I can help it. I promised Eric Monteith I'd look after you until he was well enough to help me, and I shall keep my word."

Hazel smiled rather mournfully. She missed Eric more than she cared to admit, even to herself. The sad accident that had befallen him at Birmingham ordained that it would be some time before he would be able to join the company. Venables had found a substitute, and he was to rejoin *The Good Samaritan* as soon as his medical adviser would permit.

The rooms that Jenny had coveted were luckily vacant. It was not long before the two girls were sitting before the fire and discussing a fragrant cup of tea.

"What a pity the summer's over," Jenny said: "It is jolly here in fine weather. Southsea is great fun. We could have had a bathe and done all sorts of things. Ah, well, we mustn't expect too much," her voice grew suddenly grave, "and we can only hope and trust that we shall get through the week without a repetition of the catastrophe at Bristol."

A slight shudder ran through Hazel's frame. "Sometimes," she said gently, "I feel as though fate means me to give up a theatrical life. I seem to be under a ban. And yet what could I do even if I were to emancipate myself from the stage. The danger that lies over me would be here still. What a terrible man Horace Caldecott is! He drove me from my home, and made my own father turn against me, and even that is not enough for him. His wealth and his powerful resources make him all the more dangerous."

Jenny balled her little fist and shook it fiercely in the imaginative countenance of the man whom she had learnt to hate with all the intensity of her fervent soul. "I wish I could do something to hurt him," she said vindictively, "but, black-hearted villain that he is, he's as slippery as an eel. His day must come some time. In the meanwhile, keep up your pecker, Hazel dear. You've got allies as well as he. We'll best him between us, never fear. And now let's talk of something more cheerful. Let me tell you what Raymond Venables told me a day or so back. He said that when this tour was over he was going to try and get hold of a London theatre; for what object, do you suppose? In order to give the jaded Londoners a chance of going mad over a new star, Miss Hazel Harlow, the famous actress."

A flush of pardonable pride suffused Hazel's face. "Did he really say that?" she cried. "Oh, I should like to come out in London. And did he promise you a part, Jenny?"

"Oh, I saw to that," answered the other, serenely. "Whatever happens to the rest of the crowd, I think I'm all right. And then Venables isn't like some managers I've travelled with. He's got his faults, but he doesn't try to take advantage of one. But then you see he's in love. Oh, yes, he is, Hazel. It's not your fault, but you know perfectly well he'd marry you to-morrow if he could."

"One soon gets used to proposals of marriage on the stage," answered Hazel somewhat bitterly. "It really is amazing how haphazard actors and actresses are as regards matrimony. A man meets a woman, they go on tour together, and he proposes after he's known her three weeks. Then they get married and they——"

"Drift into the Divorce Court, or don't trouble to go so far, but just mutually separate," broke in the other. "Oh, yes, there are precious few happy marriages contracted amongst actors and actresses, I suppose one only hears of the unhappy ones. Well, heaven keep me from becoming the wife of an ordinary actor. Now, if Mr. Eric Monteith were to offer me his hand and heart——"

Jenny stole a roguish glance at her friend, who blushed at the sally, and answered: "Your mind is always running on the same thing, Jenny. I don't want to get married before I've done something in my profession."

Jenny sighed. Yet she determined to say no more on the subject. It was only her great affection for Hazel that made her long for the day when the beautiful young

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actress would be able to snap her fingers in the faces of those who sought to encompass her downfall, safe beneath the protecting eyes of such a husband as Eric Monteith.

Hazel awoke the next morning with a raging headache. On learning this Jenny at once ordered her companion to stay in bed and volunteered to go to a chemist's and purchase some phenacetin. She accordingly sallied forth, with strict injunctions to Hazel on no account to get up until she returned.

Against a lamp-post in the street, a lad was lounging, who looked quickly at Jenny as she issued from the house.

The next moment he had strolled up to her and said in a low voice. "Are you Miss Harlow?"

Jenny gazed at him with suspicion. "And what's that to you?" she asked sharply.

"It's not much to me, but a good deal to you," came the quick answer.

In a moment all the actress's instincts leapt up to quicker action. Some new danger menaced Hazel.

"What do you mean?" she said, after a moment's pause.

"Can I have ten minutes' conversation with you?" went on the lad.

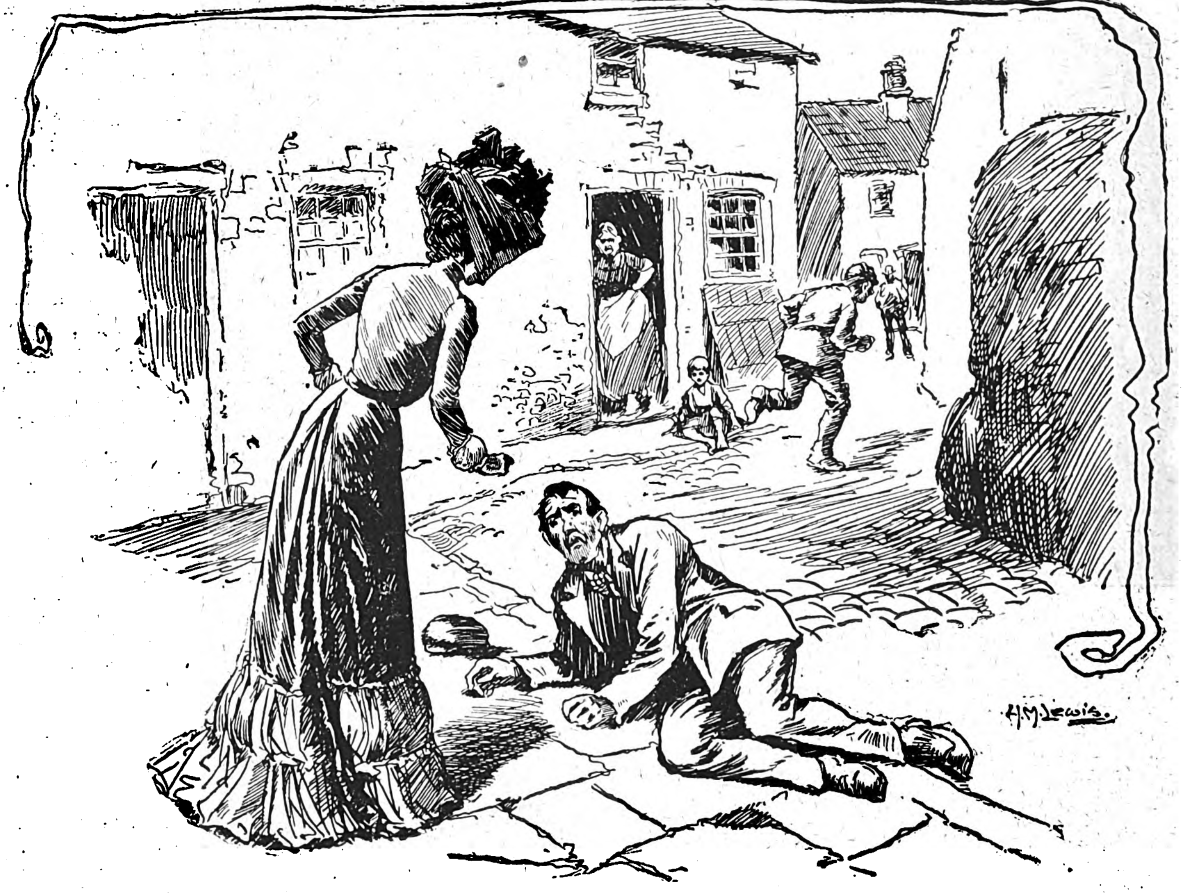
Jenny hesitated. Then she threw open the door of the house from which she had just issued. "Go inside—the first door on the left, and wait till I come back," was the answer, "I shan't be gone more than five minutes."

The strange youth obeyed her without further comment. Beset by a thousand doubts and fears, the girl hurried off on her errand. What was this mystery that had risen up to confront the hapless Hazel almost at the very moment when she had first set foot in Portsmouth?

Jenny lost no time in making her purchase at the chemist's. She flew back with the medicine and up to Hazel's room. "Take this," she said excitedly. "I've told the landlady to bring your breakfast up to you in bed. You're on no consideration to move from here until I tell you. You're in my hands, remember"; and before Hazel had had time to inquire the meaning of this somewhat cavalier command Jenny had disappeared again.

The lad was sitting quietly upon a horsehair sofa in the parlour of the lodging-house when Jenny burst in upon him.

He rose as she entered. "I've been thinking it over," he said quietly. "And you're not Miss Harlow, you're Miss Lovelace."



"Are you hurt," my poor fellow?" said the lady gently.

New serial starts to-day.

Jenny stared at him in well-merited amazement.

"You seem to be wonderfully well informed," she almost gasped. "Who on earth are you, and what is the meaning of your mysterious behaviour?"

"I want to be your friend," came the ready answer, "and though I'm only a boy, I think I can be of service to you. Danger threatens you and Miss Harlow, and unless you are put upon your guard, there's no knowing what may happen."

The lad spoke with impressive seriousness, remarkable in one who could have been little more than sixteen. The actress felt a sudden thrill of apprehension run through her.

"For goodness' sake speak out," she cried. "Don't keep me any longer in suspense. Who are you?"

"My father is a publican," came the ready answer, "and keeps the Three Jolly Sailor Boys in Wilson Street, down by the dockyard. Last evening three men came into the inn, and asked for a private sitting-room. The room my father showed them into was one with a bay window, across which heavy curtains were drawn. In the recess thus formed between the window and the curtain I had gone to sleep, not thinking that anyone would use the room that night. I was awakened by hearing voices.

"My first impulse was to spring up and declare myself. A sentence I heard, however, made me remain where I was. As a consequence I kept still and heard the unfolding of a black scheme that has the ruin of Miss Harlow as its end.

"Suddenly, after they had finished talking, one of the men rose. 'There's a window here,' he said, 'let's see what sort of a night it is.'

"In a moment I realised I should be discovered. There was nothing for it but to feign sleep. I shut my eyes and lay still. The next moment the curtains were pulled aside, and I knew that a man was looking down upon me. He uttered a horrible oath. 'What's this?' he cried. 'We've been betrayed.'

"The other two men hurried to his side. As though I had just been awakened, I sprang up and rubbed my eyes. 'What is the matter?' I cried.

"'What are you doing here?' said the man who had first found me, roughly.

"As well as I could I explained that I had come in here and fallen asleep. I protested that I had heard nothing, and at last they believed me. 'It's wonderful how a kid will sleep,' they said.

"So I was allowed to depart, and I determined I would come here first thing and tell you all I had heard."

"Yes, tell me quickly," cried Jenny breathlessly.

Thus adjured, the lad told his story. Needless to say, the actress drank in every word with avidity.

CHAPTER II.

It so happened that on the morning after their arrival at Portsmouth two letters arrived for Hazel and Jenny. That to the former was from Venables, asking her to come round to the Theatre Royal about midday, as he wanted to see her as regards some details of the evening's performance, the one for Jenny was from a lady in Southsea, requesting her to go thither for a friendly call, the writer stating that a mutual friend of the two women had inspired the invitation.

The way to the theatre from the lodgings lay through a rather poor quarter of the town. At about half past eleven the door of the house that was to be the two actresses' domicile during their sojourn in Portsmouth opened, and a woman, heavily veiled, issued forth.

She was well-dressed, and a wealth of red-gold hair was massed coquettishly beneath the big picture-hat that crowned her head. The dress was one that Hazel had had made only a few weeks before.

She walked quickly forward, looking neither to the right, nor to the left, with the air of one who knew her way well. This was all the more remarkable, inasmuch as Hazel was a stranger to Portsmouth.

At last she turned down a narrow street, evidently *en route* for the theatre, which was now only a few minutes' distant.

Suddenly her attention was arrested by two poorly-clad men on the pavement in front of her. The one was a burly, thick-set man, the other a much poorer specimen of humanity. They were evidenly quarrelling. Just as the girl drew alongside them the bigger man turned ferociously upon his companion and dealt him a cruel kick upon the shin. The man dropped with a groan, whereupon his cowardly assailant made off at the top of his speed.

The woman stopped almost instinctively. The man lay moaning on the ground. He gazed piteously up at the veiled lady before him. The bystanders, evidently accustomed to such scenes, showed but languid interest.

"Are you hurt, my poor fellow?" said the lady gently.

"I think my leg's broken, miss," the man moaned.

"Let me help you up!" The girl bent down, and, by the aid of her slim, firm hand, the injured one, wincing with pain, dragged himself to his feet.

"Where do you live?" asked his fair helper.

"Up a court not far from here, miss," he groaned.

"Can I help you there?"

"Heaven bless you if you would."

The girl was evidently a real Samaritan. The man leant heavily on her arm, yet she walked firmly forward, regardless of the curious glances and comments that came from the rough people amongst whom she now found herself. The man's pain seemed to increase at every forward step. It was evident from his gestures that he had received no slight injury.

"I'm glad it ain't far," he muttered hoarsely. The girl made no answer. Gradually they moved onward, until at length the fellow indicated that she was to turn down a narrow court.

"The fourth door on the left, miss," he said, "and then up a flight of stone steps to a door on the first landing. My word, how it do hurt," and he leant harder than ever upon the arm of his fair upholder, who found his weight becoming almost more than she could support.

But he was in such evident agony, she must have felt it would have been heartless in the extreme to leave him to crawl home as best he might.

Painfully, and with extreme difficulty, he was got up the flight of stairs.

"Open the door, please, miss," he said, in a strained voice.

The girl threw open the door, the man hanging on to her more tenaciously than ever. It was a gloomy, dingy apartment. Inside it was a man, well dressed, well groomed, strangely out of keeping with his surroundings.

Then a strange thing happened. The injured man, a moment before scarcely able to drag one foot after another, sprang up as though the sight of the stranger had endowed him with health and strength once more. The next instant, before the amazed girl could properly realise what had happened, he had darted away and out of the chamber, slamming the door behind him in his exit.

The stranger and the girl were alone. With a faint cry she sank in a huddled-up heap on the floor.

For a few seconds silence reigned, then the man found his voice.

"It's a long game of hide and seek we've been playing, Hazel," he said, almost mockingly, "and it's sad to think how much labour I've had to employ to gain what should have been mine without an effort. You've been in my grasp before now, only to have escaped because luck was against me, and all your so-called friends were around you. But now I think you must admit that the game is mine. Your protector, Eric Monteith, is *hors de combat*, Miss Jenny Lovelace has been called off to Southsea on a fool's errand, and you are alone here and in my power. Shall we come to terms, or must I make my own. That's the worst of having a soft heart. It may prove your undoing in the end. Don't stay in that huddled-up position. After all, you're in the presence of your husband"—he made a step forward and put out his hand in order to raise the girl to her feet.

This action seemed to suddenly galvanise her into renewed life. She sprang to her feet, and threw back her veil. Her hand went to her bosom.

"Not so fast, Mr. Horace Caldecott," she said in a firm voice. "It's loaded! Look out for yourself!"

"It" was a particularly ugly-looking little revolver with a gleaming barrel. Caldecott recoiled, as well he might.

But it was not the sight of the pistol directed point-blank at his head that was altogether responsible for the terrible look of baffled rage and fear that transformed his features.

For it was not Hazel Harlow at whom he gazed. Hair and dress were as hers were. *The face was that of Jenny Lovelace*—Jenny, who had taken this desperate step to save the woman she loved so whole-heartedly.

In a moment the reason for the thick black veil became apparent, while the wig that covered Jenny's raven tresses only set off the pale, resolute face with startling distinctness. Small wonder that a sudden fear filled Horace Caldecott's black heart

"To such sordid depths have you sunk," went on Jenny in a biting voice, still levelling the weapon at his head, "that you can conceive so base a trick to entrap a woman as pure and as unsullied as Hazel Harlow, a woman whose only misfortune it is ever to have met a scoundrel like you. What has she done that you should persecute her so, that you should thrust your loathsome attentions upon her? But the game's not so one-sided as you imagined, is it? You do well to match your strength with women's. Sometimes it happens that the battle is not always to the strong. And I don't think you bargained for your present position."

Caldecott writhed in impotent fury. It was only a slip of a girl who stood before him, yet with that insidious little weapon in her hand she was more than his match and he knew it. Vainly he cast about him for some means of escape.

He moistened his dry lips with his tongue. With an effort he found his voice. It was with the worst possible grace he said:

"I suppose, according to your ethics, I am the biggest villain imaginable, yet you seem to forget the old adage that 'all's fair in love or war.' My action is from the point of view of the lover, yours, also a piece of trickery, the reverse of the shield. I couldn't win Hazel by fair means"—he shrugged his shoulders—"there was no other course open to me."

Jenny's lip curled in scorn.

"And that is your explanation," she said, "of as cowardly and merciless a persecution as ever was conceived by man. When you knew that Hazel had, and never could have, any love for you, you still persisted in your horrible attentions, ay, and tried to drag down not only her, but those who had championed her. I myself have suffered at your cowardly hands before to-day."

"You don't understand," answered the other sullenly, "I love Hazel with all my heart and soul. She was promised to me long ago. I have sacrificed too much now to give her up. I have sworn I will let nothing stand in my path, and but for the most cursed luck that ever dogged a man, she would have been mine long ago."

"Love from your lips is a profanation of the word," answered the girl sturdily. "I did not come here and risk so much without due preparation. Were I to act as my heart tells me, I should pull the trigger of this pistol and make you answer here, at this very moment, for your sins; but I will not become a wilful murderess, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"You give me some substantial gage that from this moment Hazel Harlow is free of your attentions for ever."

"And if I refuse."

"I will sacrifice myself that Hazel may live in peace from any further fear of what you can do. I will forestall the gallows of their rightful victim."

Jenny spoke with amazing vigour and directness. Notwithstanding his position, her attitude compelled Caldecott's admiration. With all his faults he was no coward. He could at least appreciate a woman's strength of mind, even though he was the unwilling victim. The girl read his reluctant admiration in his eyes.

"Come, decide," she said sharply; "which will you choose, life and a substantial proof that Hazel has nothing more to fear from you, or death. I am desperately in earnest."

"Will you tell me first how you came to discover the plot to bring Hazel here?"

"I will tell you nothing. It is no use your trying to temporise. The matter must be settled now and for always."

Caldecott saw that the sands of her patience were running low.

"What proof must I give you?" he asked in a low voice, eyeing the weapon that was still levelled at his head.

"The only proof worth anything when dealing with a gentleman of your morals," was the cool retort; "one that will not only be binding, but will lay you by the heels should you try to escape from it—a signed attestation in the presence of a magistrate."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I must sacrifice myself for the best woman in the world and put a bullet through you." Caldecott laughed, but there was little mirth in his laugh.

"Spoken like one of the heroines whose character you must often assume upon the boards," he said sneeringly.

Jenny stamped her little foot upon the floor.

"I can waste no more time and patience," she said. "Your answer! Yes, or no!"

Caldecott shrugged his shoulders with would-be nonchalance. "I suppose I must submit to your ladyship," he said, with a glare of hatred. "May I ask if you are going to accompany me into the street holding that revolver at my head in so correct an attitude. Surely such a course of procedure would attract attention."

"There is a police-station round the corner," answered Jenny. "My idea is that you should walk on first. I will follow behind you, and remember, if you attempt to run away I shall fire. I'm desperate, remember," and the girl's appearance did not belie her remark.

"First of all let me give you a word of advice," said Caldecott sharply. "Put down your pistol and return the way you came. You are a woman, and can be pardoned for your hysterical action. But I warn you you little know into what danger you will be running if you proceed with this mad folly of yours."

"You villain!" burst out Jenny, with blazing eyes. "How can you stand there and chide me as if I were in the wrong when you it is who have planned and plotted such diabolical schemes. Do as I bid you, tell your story at the police-station, and let us see if there be any justice there."

"There will be commonsense there," muttered Caldecott, "the woman's mad." Suddenly his expression changed. "I am at your service," he said, with a bow, and preceded her from the room and down the dingy stairs into the reeking street.

Jenny's eyes followed him, and her little hands clutched the revolver convulsively beneath the folds of her cloak.

Without hesitation he led the way to the police-station. "He is only a coward after all," ran Jenny's thoughts. "At last I see a way to save Hazel."

Poor girl! She little knew how bitter was to be her disappointment, or the deep cunning that lay in Horace Caldecott's heart.

Caldecott entered the police-station with the air of a man who knew the place intimately, and entered the superintendent's room, quickly followed by Jenny.

But quick as she was, she could not forestall a move on the part of the man she thought was really in her power at last. He slipped a sovereign into the hand of the blue-coated official in the room, murmuring as he did so: "A madwoman with a pistol! She meant to kill me!"

Low as the words had been Jenny heard them. She sprang forward, and her very action proved her undoing. Her wild gestures and impassioned voice prejudiced the matter-of-fact officer against her, to say nothing of the fact that he was the richer by a golden sovereign.

"It's a lie!" cried the girl. "He's a villain, and he has come here to sign an agreement that is to protect an innocent woman from his wickedness."

"You see," said Caldecott significantly, "her actions betray her!"

Maddened by the villain's callousness, Jenny, overwrought by the events of the last few hours, drew the revolver from her pocket and pointed it at Caldecott's head. Instinctively he ducked down. The police superintendent rushed forward and knocked up the girl's hand. There was a loud report and the bullet buried itself in the wall above Caldecott's head. The next moment the policeman had snatched the weapon out of her hand.

Then reaction came. Jenny burst into tears, and sinking down upon the floor gave herself up to a paroxysm of weeping.

"You see," cried Caldecott, assured now that the victory was won. "The woman's dangerously mad. She's a stranger to me. See to her, or we shall all be killed!"

His words fell with poignant acuteness on Jenny's ears. She realised in a moment that all her efforts had been in vain. She, a weak, ignorant woman—ignorant, that is to say, compared with this villain, and his knowledge of the world—had pitted her puny strength against a far subtler intellect than her own.

Instead of victory had come terrible defeat. Caldecott had played with her all the time as a cat with a mouse.

In the meanwhile the police-superintendent had knelt down, and with one quick motion had fastened a pair of handcuffs round Jenny's slender wrists.

"Good!" cried Caldecott with devilish glee. "I'll run for help!"

He dashed for the door and out into the corridor. A couple of policemen were standing sheepishly outside, undecided as to what course of action they should pursue. They had heard the pistol-shot, and were in readiness to give their aid should it be required.

"Quick!" cried Caldecott, "go inside! You're wanted."

Then, assured that his words would have the desired effect of calling off attention from hinself, he dashed outside and away.

"I'm well out of that," he muttered. "What a fool Miss Jenny is! She's got herself into a fine mess now, and no mistake. A woman's all right in her proper place, but the moment she tries to be original she's bound to come a fall."

With which cynical reflection he disappeared from the neighbourhood of the police-station.

CHAPTER III.

Jenny's behaviour had absolutely mystified Hazel that morning.

She had rushed out to the chemist, and, returning, had disappeared again with strict injunctions to her friend to remain quiet until her own return.

Hazel, suffering from neuralgia as she was, had been only too glad to obey her friend's mandate. And yet Jenny's behaviour had been so mysterious that she felt convinced something unusual had happened.

Towards midday Hazel rose and dressed. Then she found that her new hat and dress had mysteriously disappeared. Where? The mystery was deepening.

At last she could bear the state of uncertainty no longer. Jenny showed no signs of appearing. Hazel's head ache had departed. She determined to go round to the theatre and find out if Jenny had been heard of there.

She issued from the house and determined to ask the nearest way to the theatre. A man with head bent and every appearance of haste was hurrying down the street. She would stop him and inquire if he could direct her.

He drew level with her and raised his head. Her blood seemed to freeze in her veins. There was no mistaking who the man was. *It was Horace Caldecott!* She uttered a faint scream of fear.

He paused for an instant. Then her courage came back to her. She drew herself up and looked boldly at his hated face. His eyes dropped before her

Turn to page 482 at once.

steady gaze. His lips moved convulsively. He tried to speak but no words came. The next moment he had disappeared from sight.

So he was in Portsmouth. What could be the meaning of his hated presence there? Was she never to be free from his loathsome attentions? How she longed for Eric's protection. Never had she felt more helpless than at that moment, when alone and unprotected in a strange city she realised that her hated lover was near her, and probably scheming how he could ensnare her anew.

Was she never to be free of his loathsome addresses. What had she done that she should be persecuted thus? Was this man to be allowed for ever to ride rough-shod over the paths of her life? Was there no way in which she could ensure immunity from his attacks upon her honour?

Then her thoughts turned in natural sequence to Jenny. Could her faithful friend and companion have discovered that Caldecott was in Portsmouth? Had her strange behaviour of the morning any bearing on the fact of her detestable lover's presence? A thousand doubts and fears beset Hazel's heart. Come what would she felt that she must try and discover Jenny's whereabouts. And at the theatre she would be most likely to find an elucidation of the mystery.

A friendly policeman directed her as to the shortest way to reach her goal. In a few minutes she was speeding away through the squalid streets along which Jenny, not so very long before, had proceeded to try and achieve her mad and profitless scheme of bringing Caldecott to book.

Raymond Venables, Hayward Lindsay, and Pendennis, together with Cora Bond, one of the ladies of the company, were at the theatre. None of them had seen Jenny. Venables noticed that something was amiss with Hazel.

"Can I help you in any way?" he asked in a low solicitous voice, drawing her apart from the others.

Hazel hesitated. Yet the manager was her friend. She knew that. He would also have given a good deal to be nearer and dearer. That she knew also. Yet he would not try and take advantage of his position now, whatever he might have done when first she had joined the company.

Hazel was fully aware of that. And now that Eric was not there to give her his help and counsel, she valued his presence all the more. She had long ago confided in him how affairs stood between her and Caldecott. So she did not hesitate.

"I have just seen—Mr. Caldecott!" she said with an effort. "It's unnerved me, and somehow I can't help feeling uneasy about Jenny. I don't know what has become of her."

An exclamation of anger fell from Venables' lips.

"Do you mean to say that cur dares to show his face in Portsmouth after all that has happened?" he muttered hoarsely. "Where is he? He ought to be arrested and locked up."

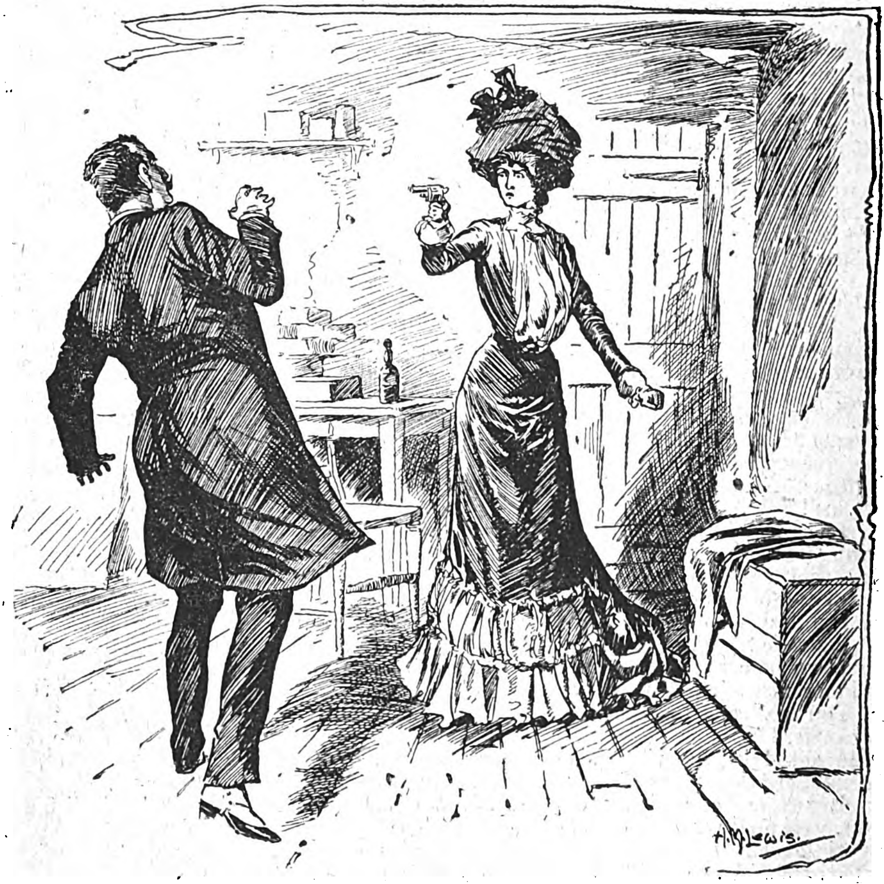
"I don't know where he is now," answered Hazel, who was on the verge of tears. "I saw him for a moment in the street."

Venables ground his teeth together in impotent rage. "I'd like to put a bullet through him!" he muttered vindictively.

But at that moment a message was brought to Venables asking him to go round to the front of the theatre. He hastily complied with the request, to find a policeman awaiting him.

The constable touched his hat respectfully.

"Have you a lady in your company of the name of Lovelace, sir?" he asked.



Caldecott recoiled, as well he might.

New serial starts to-day.

"Yes," answered Venables sharply. "What then?"

"Will you come round to the police-station with me?"

Venables stared at the man in surprise.

"Is Miss Lovelace there?" he cried.

"A young person charged with attempted murder, and giving that name, is, sir."

"Good Heavens!" cried the manager. "One moment, officer."

He rushed off and begged Hazel to come with him. Together they accompanied the policeman to the station.

Here they found the luckless Jenny handcuffed in an inner room.

The indignation of her two colleagues knew no bounds. In broken, almost disconnected words Jenny told her story. How that the publican's son had come to her and revealed the plot that Caldecott had made to entrap Hazel, how she had impersonated her friend, and had hoodwinked Caldecott only to be defeated when victory seemed within her grasp.

But the police-superintendent was not to be thus easily persuaded that he had made a mistake.

"The young lady tried to murder the unknown gentleman," he said obstinately, perhaps mindful of the piece of gold that reposed securely in his pocket, Caldecott's gift. "this story of the publican's lad and what he heard sounds a bit long drawn. Why not find the boy and bring him here. Then, if his story substantiates what this lady says, well, we can see then what's best to be done. I can't afford to run any risks."

"But where's the man who came in here and laid the charge against Miss Lovelace?" cried Venables hotly. "Why don't you produce him?"

The manager's question nettled the professional pride of the superintendent. He was perfectly well aware that Caldecott's defalcation was a more damning piece of evidence against him than anything. This fact made him all the more intolerant as regards Jenny.

"Be that as it may, sir!" he said firmly, "the fact remains that Miss Lovelace rushed in here and fired a pistol at the gentleman's head. There is the case in a nutshell, and she'll have to remain here until the business has been sifted."

"Very well," answered Venables, keeping his temper with an effort, "perhaps you will allow Miss Harlow to remain with her friend till I return with the lad who told Miss Lovelace about the villainous plot he had overheard planned at the Three Jolly Sailor Boys. Then we'll make a sworn deposition before a magistrate and see if we can't lay the villain who is responsible for all this by the heels."

The superintendent could but comply with this request. He knew in his heart of hearts that his prisoner was more sinned against than sinning, and yet—a golden sovereign, as Caldecott had known only too well, is often a powerful factor in determining the upshot of a doubtful point of law.

Accordingly Venables hurried off, bidding the two keep their hearts up. But at the Three Jolly Sailor Boys all was confusion and bustle. The publican's son had not been seen since early that morning. No trace of him was to be found.

"What do you want with my boy?" asked the innkeeper suspiciously. "What's your business with him? Perhaps you know where he is?"

"If I did should I come and ask for him?" cried the perplexed and baffled manager. "The fact of the matter is I particularly wanted him to aid in clearing up a particularly annoying business."

In as few words as possible he told the man what had happened, with the result, as can be readily understood, of only adding to the innkeeper's anxiety.

This new complication had only added to the difficulties of the situation. In the first place, Venables would have to return to the police-station and admit that the lad could not be found; secondly it would mean that Jenny would be kept in confinement until something was forthcoming to clear her from the charge of being a wanton and reckless breaker of the public peace.

Crestfallen and gloomy he returned to the station. "The boy can't be found," he said moodily.

"I thought as much," answered the superintendent, with ill-concealed satisfaction at the way in which his conduct was being justified. "It strikes me as there isn't any boy in the case at all."

Venables' anger blazed forth uncontrollably now. "Confound you!" he cried, "what do you mean to insinuate? I'll get you into trouble for that remark as sure as my name's what it is."

"You will, will you?" was the equally heated rejoinder. "Very well, then, this *lady* can spend the night in the cells. I know my duty without being taught it by a lot of actors and actresses."

It was all Venables could do to restrain himself from flying at the man's throat. Suddenly Hazel spoke.

"Look here, superintendent," she said gently, "you can't surely be in earnest. This lady is innocent of any intent to commit a crime. She only did what she has done in loyalty to myself. I could bring a hundred witnesses to prove that the man you say she tried to murder is a black-hearted villain. You will surely release her on my recognisances to-night? To-morrow we can appear here to vindicate our honour."

The man was somewhat mollified by the girl's sweet voice, and by a beauty that few men could resist. But he was not to be won over entirely from his subservience to outraged officialdom by any amount of blandishments.

"I'm sorry, miss," he said firmly, "but the lady must stay here to-night. She'll be brought up before the magistrates to-morrow morning, and the whole affair will be sifted thoroughly."

Hazel uttered a low cry. It was terrible to think that Jenny would have to spend a night in the police-court, as though she had been a common gaol-bird.

At that instant an event happened so absolutely unexpected to all the actors concerned that each was deprived of all power of further speech or action.

The door of the room opened and three men entered. The police superintendent drew himself up with military precision to the salute. Two of the men were well dressed, elderly gentlemen, the other was—Horace Caldecott!

Hazel uttered a low cry and shrank back against the wall, Venables clenched his fist mechanically, and swore under his breath, Jenny could only gaze with horror in her eyes at the audacious scoundrel who had, with such bare-faced audacity, dared to come back and confront the victims of his villainy.

"Well, Curtis," began one of the two strange gentlemen, "what's the bother? Colonel Derbyshire and myself have come here at the instigation of my friend, Mr. Caldecott here, to see if we can offer any magisterial jurisdiction over this affair. We've got a full enough charge-sheet to-morrow without adding any more to the list."

"Quite so, Sir George," stammered the superintendent; "the fact is——"

"That lady made a little mistake," broke in Caldecott, with a smile. "She's to be let off this time, eh, George?"

"You blackguard!" burst out the fiery Venables, addressing the suave villain with unmistakable directness. "How dare you have the effrontery to come here as if you were the injured party. I'll run the risk of being locked up myself for the pleasure of giving you a thrashing!" And mad with rage, he sprang forward and would have proceeded to try and put his words into effect, with what result it is impossible to say, had not the superintendent sprang forward and dragged him back.

"The fellow thinks he's still on the stage," sneered Caldecott to the magistrate. "That's the worst of these actors. They can't get away from their shop. He evidently imagines that I am responsible for this lady's"—indicating Jenny—"experiments on me with a six-shooter. That's what I call gratitude, when I came round here on purpose to try and get her off."

The magistrate addressed as Sir George looked contemptuously at Venables.

"I'd have you know, sir," he said, "that this gentleman is a personal friend of mine, and that I consider that your remarks are as unjustifiable as they are impertinent."

"And I would have *you* know," retorted Venables, boiling with pardonable fury, "that I consider you are by no means to be congratulated upon the choice of your friends. The misery that man has inflicted upon those who have been unfortunate enough to come under his influence is unutterable. He has done things, one of which would have been enough to have ensured a rope round his neck anywhere else."

The magistrate went purple in the face at this flouting of his pompous person.

But Caldecott, who, with masterly cunning, absolutely ignored Hazel's presence, knew well enough how to play his cards.

"My dear George," he said, "if I don't care what the fellow says why should you trouble. You've known me a good many more years than you have this gentleman minutes. Just authorise that this lady be liberated, and we need waste no more time. As I have explained to you, she must have been labouring under a misapprehension."

"That is a base lie!" suddenly cried Jenny. "Oh, gentlemen," she said, appealing almost tearfully to the two magistrates, "why will you take all this man says for gospel. Ask Miss Hazel Harlow what she knows about him; ask me; ask many another whose name I could give you! I own I shot at him wilfully—I would have killed him. Why not bring us up in court together and let him face the music as I am prepared to do?"

Jenny spoke simply and well. Colonel Derbyshire and Sir George Chetwynd exchanged glances. What could it all mean? Surely that was an extraordinary statement to come from a young girl's lips. Yet Chetwynd and Caldecott had been at Cambridge together. The latter was rich, influential. Nay, more, he had positively asserted that Jenny must have fired at him under a delusion. The garbled version of how she had entrapped him, when coming from lips so well versed in lying as his own, had not fallen on barren ground. Both Sir George and his brother magistrate were prepared to back him up in everything.

Jenny's outspoken words had stung Caldecott to the quick. He shot a stealthy glance at Chetwynd. How would the magistrate act?

The local Rhadamanthus stared at the girl in amazement. He had not expected such a retort. But then, he reflected, the girl was an actress. Coming from a woman in her class of life—Sir George classed all actresses together as women on a different plane to the rest of their sex—the words lost half their force in his ears.

"Don't you think, madam," he said somewhat coldly, "that you are acting somewhat uncharitably towards Mr. Caldecott, who has so chivalrously come forward to save you from an exceedingly awkward predicament? It is permissible, no doubt, upon the stage to level firearms at people's heads, but when it comes to real life such an act is apt to lead to unpleasantnesses. I think you would be better advised to put a bridle upon your tongue, and admit the generosity that wishes to save you in spite of yourself."

The position of the three allies was maddening in the extreme. Yet they were powerless to bring home to the plausible villain before them the proof of his duplicity.

He had indeed played a masterly game throughout. Suave, smiling, self-confident, he looked the embodiment of a debonnair man of the world.

But the comedy was not yet played out. A sudden commotion outside the room caused all to turn round. The next moment the door was flung open, and the lad who had been Jenny's informant of Caldecott's plot, stormed inside the apartment, followed by his father.

"There he is!" cried the lad, pointing at Caldecott. "I should know him anywhere. The others have given me the slip, but I should know him anywhere. Don't you recognise him, father?"

"Ay, ay," cried the innkeeper; "that's he right enough. Collar hold of him, someone. I'll teach him to make my inn a place for hatching vile plots against women!"

The tables were turned with a vengeance. A livid flush overspread Caldecott's face. An oath escaped his lips. Sir George Chetwynd turned to him in bewilderment.

"What on earth does this mean?" he cried.

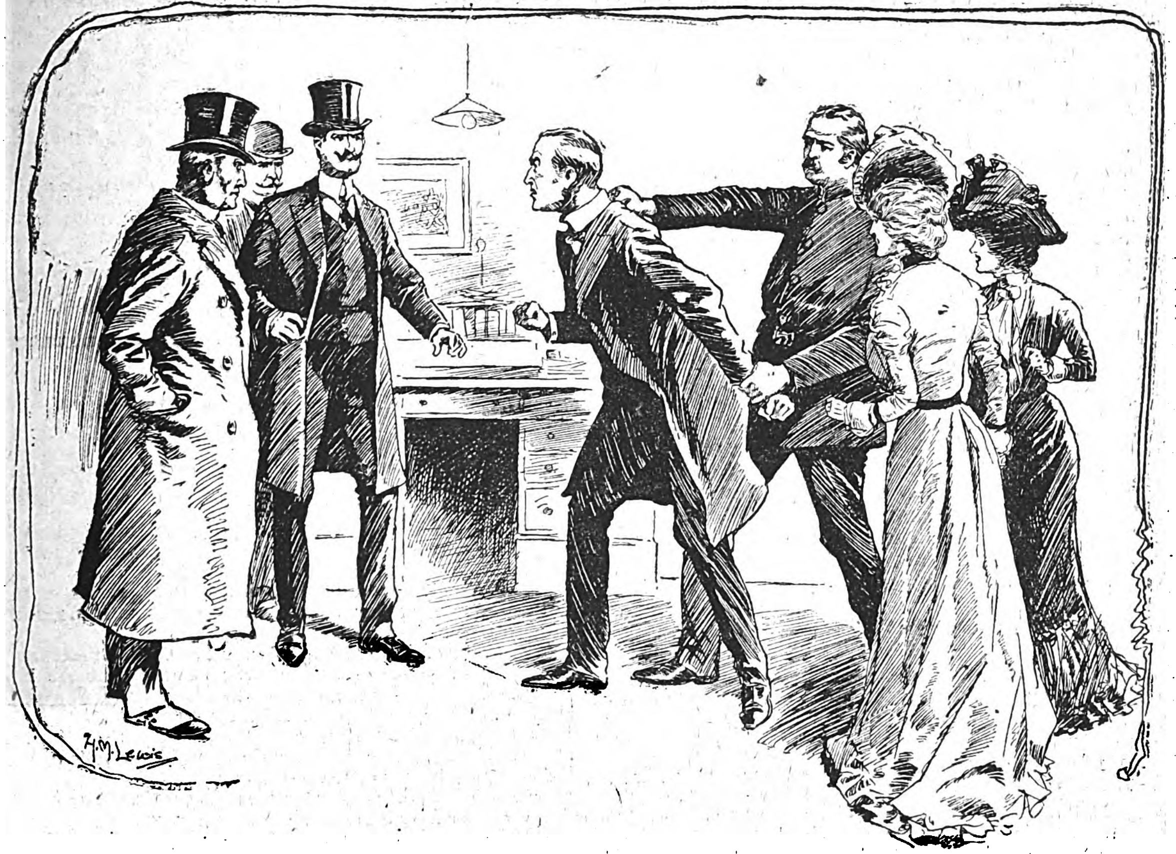
But this was a situation that Caldecott had not bargained for. In a moment he realised that the game was up. Both the innkeeper and his son knew too much. Their evidence, coming on the top of Jenny's accusation, would convince even Sir George, prejudiced as he was in his friend's favour, that there had been villainy afoot.

All this passed through the cornered villain's brain at lightning speed. He determined on flight, and that before the occupants of the room had had time to recover from their surprise.

Before anyone could lay hands upon him he had dashed to the door, overthrowing the landlord with the impetuosity of his movement. The next moment he was out of the room, and out of the building before anyone had had time to raise a finger to stop him.

And when his late friends and adversaries had recovered their senses, it was only to find that he had slipped through their fingers. Venables and the inn

Begin "Dead to the World" to-day.



"You blackguard!" burst out the fiery Venables.

keeper's son dashed off in pursuit. But a glance down the crowded street outside speedily convinced them that their chance of apprehending the slippery scoundrel was remote indeed.

Ruefully they returned to the party inside the building.

"Have I taken leave of my senses?" cried Sir George. "Here, my boy, let's have your version of this affair."

Thus adjured the boy stepped forward and related what he had already told to Jenny early that morning.

"The plot I heard the three men scheming," he said in the course of his narrative, "was as follows: They were to despatch two notes to Miss Harlow and Miss Lovelace, the one to Miss Harlow asking her to step round to the theatre to see Mr. Venables; that to Miss Lovelace from a lady in Southsea, asking her to go there.

"They were then to get Miss Harlow to take pity on a wounded man, and to help him to a house where Mr. Caldecott was to be waiting.

"I told Miss Lovelace this, and she asked me to tell no one what I had said to her. She was going to impersonate Miss Harlow. I saw the accident in the street, just as the man had planned it. I followed one of them, meaning to run him to earth if possible, but I lost sight of him. Then I went back to the scene of the plot, and got on the track of the man who had pretended to be injured. But he recognised me, and I became the hunted one. After a lot of narrow escapes I gave him the slip. I then hurried back home, as I knew they would be anxious about me there. My father told me that Mr. Venables had come to see if he could find me, and we hurried off here. I then heard Mr. Caldecott's voice, and thought we had at last run him to earth. But it appears the whole three were too slippery altogether."

The lad's narrative, sketchy though it was, convinced Sir George Chetwynd and Colonel Derbyshire that they had been supporting the cause of a man who had no right to their good offices. It was impossible, in the face of such overwhelming evidence, to believe that Jenny Lovelace had been actuated by other than exalted motives in her endeavour to bring Caldecott to book.

They accordingly begged her to give them her story. She told them all; how she had cornered the scoundrel and had elicited from him a promise to accompany her to the police-court and make a declaration in the presence of witnesses that he would abstain from further molestation of Hazel Harlow. His own diabolical cunning was answerable for the mad access of rage that caused her to fire the revolver at him.

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The girl told her story well.

"And that man," she said in conclusion, "who has so nearly succeeded in hoodwinking you gentlemen as to his real nature, has escaped again to carry on his schemes against a woman whose only fault is that she will not listen to his detestable suit. I mean Miss Hazel Harlow here. Time after time he has endeavoured to ensnare her into his hateful net. Can you wonder that I made an effort to save her, that I was prepared to go to any lengths to rid her of the persecution of such a monster. Here is a case in point how difficult it is to bring his villainies home to him. He is rich, has an unassailable position in society, possesses amongst his friends gentlemen with the unimpeachable integrity of Sir George Chetwynd and Colonel Derbyshire."

But here the former gentleman interrupted her.

"For my part," he said fervently, "Horace Caldecott is off my visiting-list from this moment. Nay, more, if ever he crosses my path again I'll not spare him." Then he turned to Hazel. "Miss Harlow," he said, "I should like, during your stay in Portsmouth, to ensure you immunity from any chance of further molestation. Will you and Miss Lovelace give my wife and myself the great pleasure of becoming our guests while you are here? I can have you driven to and from the theatre every night in my brougham. Believe me, it would be a great pleasure to me if you would allow me to do this."

There was tears of heartfelt gratitude in Hazel's eyes as she answered—

"Indeed, sir, I should be churlish in the extreme were I to refuse your kind offer. In Miss Lovelace's name and my own, I accept your offer with heartfelt gratitude."

"And I beg to apologise for my remarks just now," cried Venables. "And if you will accept a box at the theatre for to-night and every night this week, if your friends would care to see our performance, I shall be greatly honoured."

Sir George accepted the manager's offer in the same cordial spirit with which it was tendered.

Then he turned to the innkeeper's son.

"I think we ought to send round the hat for this lad," he said, turning to the company. "For, after all, he is responsible for this happy ending to what might have been a most black and tragic business."

His proposition met with a ready response. And the lad, at all events, had no reason to regret the businesss that had brought him into such prominence, and nearly into such an *impasse*.

Among the most interested spectators of *The Good Samaritan* that night were Sir George Chetwynd and his party. Hazel and Jenny were both the recipients of lovely bouquets. And the rest of that week went by for them as happily and as expeditiously as is the lot of few actresses on tour. As the honoured guests of Sir George and Lady Chetwynd their stay in Portsmouth was one that lingered long in their memories.

Next week *The Good Samaritan* Company were due at Leeds. In this thriving manufacturing town Hazel was to meet with an adventure that was to prove to her that there are dangers in the life of an actress that can never be accounted for beforehand. Readers of this series will find the next story in no wise lacking in interest from any of the others that have preceded it. Your friends would surely be delighted if you would mention Hazel Harlow to them.

½D. ANOTHER NEW PEARSON MORNING PAPER. **½D.**

THE

Midland Express

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Tuesday, October 22nd.

On the above date a new halfpenny morning paper, the *Midland Express*, will make its first appearance in the whole of the Midland and Pottery Districts.

Local news will be given very fully. Events happening all over the world will be dealt with in a style never before attempted by any provincial newspaper.

The *Midland Express* will be worked in conjunction with Mr. C. Arthur Pearson's marvelously successful London paper, the *Daily Express*.

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Fashion and other matters of interest to women will be specially treated by the best artists and writers.

Serial stories will be a regular feature, and one page of the *Midland Express* will be profusely illustrated every day.

The combination of the London *Express* with the *Midland Express* will enable expenditure to be made with a lavishness that is impossible in the case of a provincial paper standing alone, and it is only by lavish expenditure that a bright, up-to-date newspaper can be produced.

Its Main Aim is

NEWS TRUE NEWS! NEW NEWS! ALL THE NEWS!

½D. *FIRST ISSUE* **½D.**

Tuesday, Oct. 22.

Order of your newsagent at once to prevent disappointment.

Is your photo on page 502?

Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a *P.W.* penknife to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, October 21st. Post-cards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Mr. A. K. Rawlings, of 4 High Street, Barnes, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

MAUD: "Yes, it's a pretty fan, isn't it? It was given me by my mother on my twenty-first birthday." Mabel: "Really! How well it has worn, dear."

"FIRST you had whooping cough, then you got the bronchitis, then influenza, and now you have jaundice. Seems to me you catch anything in your town," said Wiggles. "Yes," said the suburban dweller, "everything except the train I want."

ETHEL: "It was very embarrassing to-day when I got into the tram and found Mr. Trotter there. I was engaged to him this summer, but hadn't spoken to him since we got back to town." "What did you do?" Ethel: "Well, I made the best of it, and let him pay my fare."

"WHY do you look so sad, my love?" said Mr. Younghusband. "I was thinking of a poor little beggar child that came here this morning," replied Mrs. Y. "Just think, Charles, the poor child was only eight years old, and her father was killed in the Crimean War, and her mother died of sorrow within a year afterwards."

THEY had tried all the penny-in-the-slot machines on the pier, until at last they came to one that did not respond to the magic bronze. "Look here, my man," said Crumbles to the pier attendant, "that machine is to try your weight, the next your height, the next your strength, then your sight; and now I've put a penny in this thing, but I didn't see what it's for." "That, sir," replied the pierman. "Oh, that one's to try your temper."

A GENTLEMAN on a visit to a coal mine, thinking to take a rise out of the foreman, an Irishman, asked him the following question: "I say, Pat, how do you get the men up out of the pit?" Pat, seeing through the joke, answered: "Oh, we pull them up with the hair of the head." The gentleman looked at him a second or so, and then said, with a smile on his face: "Ha! but what about those with bald heads?" "Oh," says Pat. "we use suckers for them."

*THE farmers of Cape Colony are notoriously hard to move, but rarely have we come across a more sluggish specimen than that furnished by a lazy man, whose farm lies outside Worcester, C.C., and who called at a neighbour's house sometime ago. "Sit down, sit down!" exclaimed the neighbour. "I don't know as I ought," said the farmer, nevertheless he sat down. After half an hour's talk about the crops, and the value of an adjoining piece of ground, the farmer said slowly: "I don't know as I ought to be sitting here, I came over to see if I could get a ladder; our house is on fire."

CHARLEY: "Your eyes always remind me of the sea, Cis." Cis: "Because they are so blue?" Charley: "No. They are so watery!"

"WHAT are your hopes for the future?" asked the solemn man. "I have none at present," replied the youth. "To-morrow is my girl's birthday, and I am worrying about the present."

OLD BOY: "Thomas, if my wife asks you where I am, tell her I have gone to the office." Servant: "Certainly, sir! But where are you really going, in case anyone else should want to know?"

COAL MERCHANT: "I say, Premium, I want to insure my coal yard against fire. What's the cost of a policy for £10,000?" Insurance Agent: "What coal is it, same kind as you sent me last?" Merchant: "Yes, it is." Agent: "Oh! I wouldn't insure it if I were you. It won't burn."

MR. HARDCASH: "Well, sir, what induced you to imagine that I would give my consent to my daughter's marrying you?" De Gall: "Pardon me, my dear sir, I wasn't so foolish as to imagine anything of the kind. I merely asked for it as a matter of form. If you refuse, we shall marry without it, that's all."

A YOUNG lady was driven by her brother lately to West Muddleham Junction, where he was to see her off by train. They were rather late and had to hurry. The porter rapidly pushed her portmanteau under the seat first, and she sprang in, but first in her hurry and confusion she kissed the porter, and gave her brother twopence.

QUITE recently the authorities of a town in Yorkshire were engaged in a discussion as to the Sunday closing of public-houses. During the proceedings a prominent town councillor, not particularly renowned for his erudition, asked timidly what the difference was between a bona-fide traveller and a real traveller. He thought they were the same thing. "Not at all," came the reply from a fellow councillor. "A real traveller is thirsty because he travels, but a bona-fide traveller travels because he is thirsty."

DURING a football match between two village clubs near Lancaster recently, the referee gave a decision which was unappreciated by one of the linesmen. A rather lively discussion took place between the two as to the rules, the linesman finishing up by shouting at the official: "Go on wi' thee; thou can't referee for nuts!" "Can't I?" replied the referee. "But I can tell thee I refereed before ever thau wor born!" "That may be," replied the wily linesman, "but has thau ever refereed since?"

THE cannibalistic advertisement for a servant who could "cook and dress children" brings to mind one or two other misrepresentations of a similar kind. "Dine here and you will never dine anywhere else," is a startling, though doubtless meant to be alluring, statement which appeared in gigantic letters in the window of a cheap restaurant. "Wanted a room by two gentlemen about thirty feet long and twenty feet broad," suggests anatomical monstrosities, and there is something terribly sinister in this advertisement of a furrier, "Mr. Butcher begs to announce that he is willing to make up capes, jackets, etc., for ladies out of their own skins."

(Continued on page 503.)

New serial starts to-day.

DO YOU WANT A £5 NOTE?

Five Crisp £5 Notes to be Given to Readers Every Week. £25 per Week if you will ask for it.

HERE IS THE SCHEME.

We have in our possession a considerable number of photographs of men, women, and children of all grades of society secured for us by our agents, who have scoured the United Kingdom for this special purpose.

Each week we shall publish five of these portraits, and to each of the persons thus represented we shall dispatch the sum of £5, on his or her claiming same on a postcard addressed to

PORTRAIT DEPARTMENT, "SHORT STORIES,"
Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Although the persons whose portraits will appear in this competition are quite unknown to us personally, we have their names and addresses in our possession, and, therefore, a claim can be settled at once, without risk of fraud.

We may say that our agents are still at work all over the country. It is, therefore, possible that your portrait may appear without your knowing it at any moment. So you should watch SHORT STORIES.

HERE ARE FIVE PORTRAITS.

Is your portrait here? If so, drop us a post-card, and get £5. Five more portraits will appear next week.

All claims in connection with the portraits below must reach the address already given above by Tuesday next, October 22nd.

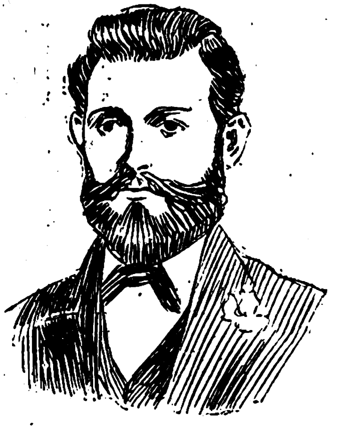
Full names and addresses of the correct claimants will appear in succeeding numbers.

HOW TO MAKE A CLAIM FOR A £5 NOTE.

Simply write on a postcard these words:

> *The Portrait No.......... (here put number of portrait) in the current number of SHORT STORIES is mine. Please forward a £5 note.*
>
> *(Name and full address.)*

Persons represented must claim for themselves. Claims made by other people on their behalf will be ignored.



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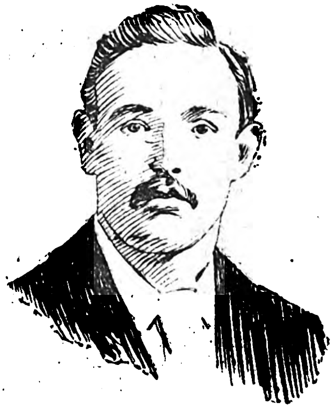


No. 17.

"**WOULD** you oblige me," said the reporter, who gets novel interviews, "by telling me what book has helped you most in life?" And after a thoughtful pause the great man answered: "My bank-book."

"**WONDERFULLY** active old fellow that man Binks," said Cuffs. "He told me that his legs were so pliable he could kick himself in the back. I couldn't do that, and I'm not half his age." "You don't need to," said Hawkins. "Almost anybody would be glad to do it for you."

MISS COYGIRL: "Jack Softleigh told me last night that I ought to accept him because he was willing to prove his love for me." Her Friend: "What did you say?" Miss Coygirl: "I said I couldn't see it in that light." Her Friend: "Then what did he say?" Miss Coygirl: "Nothing. He just turned the light out."

A PASSER-BY stopped to look at a shop-window. "Walk in, sir," said the proprietor; "you will find anything you want inside." "I never buy at shops where the goods are not labelled." To which the shopkeeper (an old hand) replied: "We never label our articles, sir. Our prices are so low that people might think the goods were second-hand."

MR. SHARP: "I can make sixpence into ninepence." Bore: "How?" Mr. Sharp: "Give me sixpence, I'll show you." (The money changes hands.) Mr. Sharp: "Waiter! A threepenny cigar." (It is brought, and also the change, which Mr. Sharp hands to the Bore, who exclaims, "What's this?") Mr. Sharp: "You've got threepence, I've got threepence" (exhibiting cigar), "and the landlord's got threepence. That's ninepence, isn't it? Good day."

"**MY** dear friend," said a long-haired man to the manager of a travelling show, "is that unfortunate being really a cannibal?" and he indicated a South Sea Islander from Cork who was sitting on a divan. "Yes, sir; that great living curiosity was captured while in the act of roasting a Presbyterian minister over a slow fire." "Great Heavens!" gasped the countryman. "Can't you convert him?" "Convert him?" said the showman, with disgust. "Do you suppose the great British public would pay threepence a head to see a Christian."

"**MY** husband is very nice, but he has a temper. Has yours?" "Oh, yes, but he is always losing it!"

HE: "How is one to tell that a love is only platonic?" She: "Oh, well, when it develops into the other kind you can look back and see the difference."

MRS. BROWN: "Men are not what they used to be, if there is any truth in the old stories. Men used to think so much of women that they would die for them." Brown: "That's nothing. Didn't I think enough of you, dear, to live with you?"

HE: "Only one, just a little one." She: "Oh, no! I have no wish to be added to the list of girls you have kissed." He: "I have never kissed a girl in my life." She: "Oh! Then I'm not going to let you serve your apprenticeship on me."

SYMS: "Ah! my boy, you are to be envied. An artist's life is an ideal one. The affairs of everyday life do not engross you." Daubers (whose pictures do not sell): "Not a bit. Why we sometimes entirely overlook such prosaic matters as breakfast and dinner."

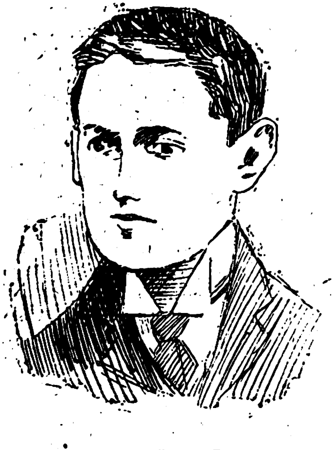
BINGO: "While I was matching that ribbon for you to-day a man came in and threw down a bomb. There was a terrible explosion, several people were killed, and I barely escaped with my life." Mrs. Bingo (anxiously): "You didn't lose that piece of ribbon, did you?"

Two Five Pound Notes Captured.

OF the first five portraits published two correct claims have been received. The names and addresses of the correct claimants are:

Mr. HENRY R. PEAD (No. 2),
58 Newington Green N.;
and
Mr. R. H. ROBINSON (No. 4),
Post Office,
Queen's Square,
Bowness-on-Windermere

We have to congratulate heartily the two prize-winners, to whom £5 notes have been despatched, and to bid other readers keep a sharp look-out for similar good fortune.



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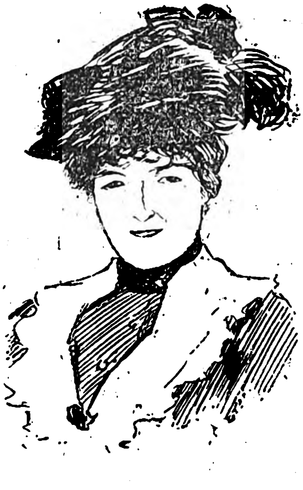

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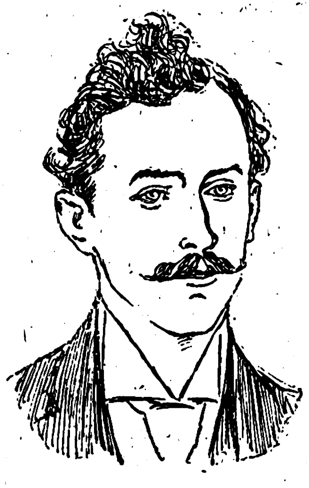

No. 20.

IN THE SERVICE OF THE TSAR.

The room was dingy and but poorly lighted. Around the long table in its centre were gathered the conspirators—the men who had sworn to kill the Tsar. A strange-looking appearance they made in the flickering candle-light; some with fierce faces marked with the bitter lines of hunger and of hate; some with the enthusiastic and wrapt expression of dreamers; others with the cold impassivity of great generals. One of the last-mentioned, colder, more impassive than the rest, sat at the foot of the table, facing the President. His manner showed not the slightest nervousness, not the slightest exhilaration. Yet in an hour he meant to betray the men who sat about him to the horrors of a living death on the bleak plains of Siberia, gaining thereby the lasting favour of his Imperial master. The blow that would ruin his comrades would make him.

The clock struck eight as the President rose to speak.

"Brothers," he began, "brothers, we have all sworn the same sacred vows, we have all stood the severe tests of our order—we can all be trusted. It becomes my duty, therefore, to speak out. Our days of plotting are passed; the time for action has come. At last we shall strike a decisive blow for liberty."

He paused, but no one spoke. There was not a sound in the room. Some breathed a little more quickly—that was all. Pointing to a powder-keg in a corner, the President continued:

"Our materials are at hand—our opportunity also. The Tsar visits Krasmoe-Selo on Thursday——"

The noise of a scuffle in the hall outside the door interrupted him. Several of the men who sat about the table sprang to their feet, the door burst open, and an officer followed by a squad of soldiers, rushed into the room. In an instant every one of the conspirators was covered by a rifle.

"You are my prisoners!" said the officer curtly.

"By what right?" exclaimed the President. He alone seemed cool; the rest stood as though paralysed. Ignoring the President, the officers glanced at the others.

"Line up against the wall," he ordered.

Silently they obeyed him—powerless to resist. The officer turned to his men and gave a sharp order. The soldiers raised their guns and aimed them at the defenceless breasts of the prisoners.

Again the President spoke:

"What do you mean to do?" he cried.

"To execute you at once," returned the officer coldly. Then to the soldiers: "Take aim. Fi——"

"Stop!"

The cry rang out loud and clear in the deadly stillness of the room, and the spy sprang forward from where he stood against the wall.

"Stop!" he cried.

"Get back," said the officer sternly; but the spy continued to advance. His coldness, his impassiveness, had disappeared; his face was yellow with fear; his teeth chattered; great drops of sweat stood on his forehead.

"No—no—you must not shoot me!" he shrieked. "I am of yourselves—I am an agent of the Third Section. It was I who informed against these men. If you kill me it will be murder—murder—murder!" He grovelled on the floor at the officer's feet.

The doomed men looked at the miserable wretch with bitter contempt, while in the President's eyes there was something that looked like triumph.

"An agent of the police," said the officer doubtfully. "You have your credentials?"

"Yes—yes!" screamed the wretch, tearing a piece of paper from his pocket and handing it to the officer. "It is there—it is there. Ah! my God!"

This last exclamation was one of renewed terror, for the soldiers, dropping their rifles, had sprung upon him, and were binding him hand and foot.

The President stepped forward with a smile.

"Brothers," said he to the amazed men, who still stood against the wall, "brothers, in a great cause like ours we cannot be too careful. This little scene was devised to discover what traitors we had amongst us. It has succeeded. You, who have proved faithful, are quite safe."

The men looked at him as though they could scarcely credit their senses. Then one or two began to sob, and one man laughed.

"And this spy?" he questioned.

A fierce murmur ran round the room. The men, with one accord, started towards the corner where the man lay bound.

"Kill him! kill him!" they shouted.

The President raised his hand.

"Stop!" cried he; "the man is mine—mine to punish as I see fit. Leave him to me. You will accompany our brother Vassoloff," indicating the pseudo officer, "to a place of refuge. From our friend's admission we are no longer safe here."

"But——"

"I have spoken," said the President sternly.

The conspirators turned and silently went out. As the man who had laughed passed the spy, he kicked him in the face, and laughed again.

Then the President was alone with the spy. He stood looking at him for a moment, with a cruel smile on his white-bearded face. Presently he took from his pocket a long fuse, placed one end in the powder-keg, and wound the other about one of the tallow candles, an inch from the burning wick. Then he placed the candle in front of the spy's face, where he could almost touch it, and, turning, went to the door. At the threshold he paused.

"Your fate will be a lesson to your fellow spies," he said, and was gone. The spy heard his steps as he went down the passage; he counted them till they died away in the awful silence of the night. Then he looked at the candle. How long would it take an inch of tallow to burn? The police would not come till nine. Would it last till then? He looked at the clock. Twenty minutes past eight. Would that inch of tallow last forty minutes If it should not, would being blown up be so painful?

He looked at the candle again. It seemed to melt away before his eager gaze. He tried to shriek, but could not. The bruise on his face where the man had kicked him hurt fearfully; he became unconscious. He dreamed of his mother, dead years before. He thought that he was a child again, and that she had taken him on her lap, and was telling him the old stories that he loved. It was summer, and he could hear the reapers singing. . . . He laughed with happiness.

New serial starts to day.

He opened his eyes. The darkness of the room frightened him, and he tried to call his mother. The gag was still in his mouth, and like a flash the whole dreadful sickening truth came back to him. The hands of the clock pointed to twenty minutes before nine, and the candle was more than half burned. He shook like a leaf; a dreadful nausea sickened him.

Again he looked at the clock. Ten minutes to nine. The candle seemed to burn slower. Was there still hope? Would the police come on time—would they come on time? He strained his ears to hear their coming, but there was no sound. Good God! would they be late?

It was five minutes to nine. He tried to pray. He was lost. No! At last he could hear the soldiers approaching; but the clock was striking nine. A knock on the door, and the flame had touched the fuse. He watched the spark as it crept like a snake across the floor, nearer, nearer, nearer to the keg. He tried to scream . . . The sound of a door being broken open. . . . The footsteps of men on the passage outside the door, but the spark had reached the keg! A flash——

* * * * *

A second later, when the soldiers entered, they saw a sight that frightened even them, used to fearful sights as they were. A dead man, bound and gagged lay upon the floor. His face was green with terror, his hair snow-white, and his eyes red, staring, and protruding.

On the floor was the black mark where the fuse had burned, and in one corner was a powder-keg— empty!

BY THE BALTIC.

"Lieschen, child, I must say adieu. I know not when I shall see thee again."

"Adieu, then, Gustav. A pleasant journey to you! If you didn't come back for fifty years you would find me still here, milking the cows and attending to the household. Life here is much the same year by year."

"And thou would'st not fret, Lieschen, if I did not come for fifty years?"

He spoke as though he scarcely knew whether to jest or be in earnest, and stood watching her with a wistful, doubtful smile. She was making buttermilk cheeses at the dresser by the scullery window, and he was leaning in over the window-sill, with a pipe smouldering in one hand, while the other kept breaking off little twigs and leaves of the roses that clambered all round the window, and made a pretty frame to his sunburnt face and broad shoulders.

Lieschen laughed at his question, as she shaped the little white cheeses all speckled over with carraway-seeds, and did not look up.

"You would be about a hundred years old then, Gustav, I should think," was the only remark she made.

"No, come, Lieschen, that is cruel of you. I am only thirty-eight—more than twice your age, it is true, but not nearly fifty. And it is something to have a fine farm and a good new house. and the only carriage on Rugen, even if your husband *is* old enough to know white from black."

"Yes, I know," said Lieschen, indifferently, "but there is plenty of time yet."

Gustav Baier bit his lip and frowned uneasily as he looked at her.

"Thou dost not care, Lieschen, 'tis plain to see," he said bitterly. "I think thou hast no heart at all, for all thine eyes are so sweet and thy ways so gentle. Thou'rt some mermaiden from the sea here, and one day wilt vanish like the foam. Is it not so?"

"I didn't make myself," retorted the girl, petulantly, "and I never asked you to come and fall in love with me. If you're not satisfied"—she drew the gold betrothal ring from her finger—"here's your ring. Give it to somebody that has a heart for you."

He left the window abruptly, and she glanced up flushed and frightened, not knowing what he meant to do. The next minute he came in at the door from the yard, and went up to the table where she stood with the ring in her open hand.

"Come, come, we mustn't quarrel," he said, peaceably, replacing the ring, and drawing her on his knee as he sat on the dresser. "I shall not be satisfied till that ring is on the other hand, and you come away home with me. Give me a kiss now, and say you love me."

Lieschen hung her head, and her big brown eyes filled with tears.

"What, crying!" he remonstrated, taking her chin in his great rough hand, and turning her unwilling face round towards him. "Thunder and lightning, why, so she is! You spoil those eyes, my pretty one. What's it all about? Art not happy, Lieschen?"

"Yes, quite," she said with a gulp, "if you would let me alone, Gustav. I am yours now—what more do you want? You say I have no heart; I can't give you what I haven't got."

"Why, that's true. Give me kisses instead, then," said he magnanimously—"enough for fifty years, in case I do not see thee again."

"Stupid old Gustav!" cried the girl laughing and struggling. "There, that will do! Put me down, Gustav."

"*Ach!* See, now, these lovers, these lovers!" cried an old shrill voice in the doorway. "Tears and smiles and kisses, kisses and smiles and tears! So runs the world away, and the old folk are forgotten."

"Lieschen counts me one of the old folk, nurse," remarked Gustav, pausing to speak, but holding his prisoner helpless the while in his great strong arms.

"Tut, tut, child! Not many maidens of sixteen can boast such a fine, brave lover as thine, with his broad farm and his grand new house and steading, and everything heart can desire. Not but what thou canst bring him linen enough to stock the house, were it twice the size it is; but he had no need to seek out a simple child like thee to be his bride."

"So I tell him, nurse. I didn't want him—— O Gustav!" Her speech was smothered in his great, red beard.

"Good-bye, dearest!" he said at last, putting her down. "Take care of her for me, nurse. I don't think it will be fifty years before I come again," he added,

Is your photo on page 502?

turning to Lieschen as he went out; "though to me, at least, it will seem twice as long."

Perhaps the wistful look in his eyes, or the sadness that crept into his voice as he said these last words, touched the girl—perhaps she loved him after all; anyhow, before he had crossed the threshold, she ran after him, and slipped her hand into his.

"I'll go as far as the gate with you, Gustav," she said; and they walked away down the yard together.

"Look at my young ducks, Gustav; aren't they growing fast? and the chickens, too! And look at those lazy geese; they do nothing but feed and sleep. Do you know, I brought them all up, every one of them."

"Ay, thou'rt a brave housewife, Lieschen; and if thou lovest thy father now, and servest him so well, I doubt not thou'lt love me when the time comes. Adieu! *Herzliebchen!* Be good and happy, and don't forget me—eh?"

"No, you dear, good Gustav! Adieu! Come soon again!" And so they parted.

"Nurse," said Lieschen, re-entering the scullery, "how do people come to have hearts?"

"Good gracious! What does the child mean? Hearts? Why, they are born so!" exclaimed the old woman taking off her spectacles, the better to see her young questioner. "What art thou chattering about!"

"Gustav says I have no heart, nurse," she replied, sitting on the old woman's knee and stroking her white hair; "and I think he is right. How do we get a heart?"

"Herr Gustav should rejoice that thou hast none," said the old nurse, looking thoughtfully into the bright young face with her dim eyes; "it comes by suffering—suffering and sorrow and trial and weeping and loving—loving brings it all. They say the heart is like the steel in iron, 'tis there, but you cannot have it till it has gone through the terrible fires and been beaten on the anvil. The good God save thee from finding thine; for truly I think 'twould be thy death, my little flower."

"But see," she said, pointing to the window, "is it not that thy Gustav come back again? Run, child, and see what brings him."

Lieschen ran out into the yard, but stopped suddenly short petrified with fear at the sight that met her eyes.

"Bring him in—so—gently," Gustav was saying; and two farm-servants followed him, bearing between them the apparently lifeless body of a young man—the head fallen back, the eyes closed, the lips parted, the hands hanging limply down, the clothes stained here and there with blood.

"Run away, child, run away! 'tis no sight for thee," Gustav called out, when he saw her standing there white and frightened. "We want the nurse."

Then he turned to the old woman, who had come out, and explained rapidly, Lieschen, instead of running away, listened eagerly to every word.

"There has been a duel—unless it was darker work. We found him in the wood up yonder, bleeding to death. Where can we lay him down? The nearer the better—here, on this sofa?"

"Oh, anywhere—yes!" cried Lieschen, brimming over with pity.

And so they laid him down on the sofa in the little sitting-room, and then Gustav not unkindly, but quite irresistibly, put Lieschen outside the door.

Soon the old nurse came out hurriedly. Her eye fell upon the girl's white face, and she sent her to fetch a bundle of old linen from the press in the garret, as quick as might be, while she herself went for water.

When Lieschen came flying back, the nurse had returned to the side of the wounded man, and she stole in after her with the linen. She could hardly repress the cry of pain and pity that rose to her lips when she saw the death-like pallor of the face lying back on Gustav's supporting shoulder; but she felt that she must be very quiet if she would not draw attention to the fact that she had come in unbidden.

The nurse took the linen from her hands, without noticing her at all; and then Gustav helping with his disengaged hand gently unfastened and laid open the young man's coat, disclosing a white shirt all soaked in blood.

"Cut it—cut it!" said Gustav impatiently; "there's no time to lose."

"What a pity! and the linen so fair and fine," lamented the nurse, in an undertone. "The lad is noble, no doubt."

"No doubt," echoed Gustav; "but, noble or not, he must die if we can't staunch this bleeding at once. If only I had both hands free!" he muttered, exasperated at the tremulous slowness of the old woman. "This won't do; and not a soul in the house to help. Here, Lieschen, you must be useful. Come and hold his head—so, so—upon your shoulder. Lucky I've [illegible] much of this in the war, and know what to be at," he remarked to himself. And Lieschen knelt and took the heavy fainting head upon her bosom, and closed her eyes to shut out the sight of blood that almost overcame her.

"Yes, he is noble," she thought to herself, trying to keep still and patient under the weight that began to make her limbs ache and tremble. "His hair is like the sunshine, and all waving—like that picture of an angel in my Bible," she thought noting him curiously; "and his forehead is so white that the veins show through. No doubt he is an officer"—this she merely inferred from "the knightly growth that fringed his upper lip." —"and how beautiful he is! Gustav is handsome but not like him"; and she could almost have laughed at the idea of a comparison between great broad Gustav, with his sun-browned face, fine rough-hewn features, and big red beard, and the delicate refinement and almost womanly fairness of the other face.

At length Gustav released her, and laid the lad, as he called him—he looked about five-and-twenty—gently down on the pillows.

"He may do now," he said, after watching him a little while. "I must leave him to your care, nurse, and that of Herr Uterhart. You will explain it—what little we know—when he returns to-night. Good-bye, heart's darling! Thou'lt be a first-rate nurse ere I come again"; and he kissed his betrothed on either cheek and went away.

It was drawing towards evening. A familiar clatter of wooden shoes on the stones outside warned Lieschen that it was time to go a-milking. She stole out, tied on her great sun-bonnet, took up her stool and pail, and followed the women away to the meadows, as she did morning and evening all the summer through.

The shadows were growing very long and the colours fading in the western sky when they came back; and Lieschen still had her young ducks and fowls to shut

Begin "Dead to the World" to-day.

up for the night. As she crossed and recrossed the yard—now with a can of water, now with the pail and stool ready for the morning—she sang in a shrill sweet voice some of those lovely plaintive Volkslieder—those "songs of love and longing," of endless wandering, seeking, and yearning, that have sprung from the heart of the German people.

Before going into the house, all her work done, she wandered down on to the sea-shore, and stood there dreamily looking over the smooth water into the fading sky, and listening to the splash of the little waves falling on the sand. She thought of what Gustav had said about the mermaiden, and thought it would be sweet to float away on the quiet tide, under the glimmering sky, and see the little stars light up one after another in the glimmering green up there, and watch the flights of birds winging over, and sing beside the boats of fishermen at their nightly toil, and dip down at sunrise—down, down among sea-weed forests, where strange wild creatures swim in and out, and the sea-flowers bloom, and the mermaidens sit combing their long golden hair under the tideless Baltic sea.

She was a strange, romantic child, this Lieschen, full of dreams and longings and fancies; and this seemed better to her than to be a creature of flesh and blood, with a human heart and human hope, and blessed with the love of man.

"And they live three hundred years," she murmured half-aloud, as the light died off the sea, "unless they strive to win an immortal soul by the love of a living man; if they fail they vanish into the sea-foam on the day when he weds another. But there is never, never found a man. He gives his love to a creature of his own sphere, and the foam ever gathers on the sea. If I were a mermaid, though," a shy, proud smile gleamed over her face, "I would not fail."

Lieschen was sitting in the sick room one hot summer afternoon, her patient asleep on the couch, and the warm fragrant air floating in with the murmuring of bees at the open window.

Her work lay in her lap, but her hands were idle, and her eyes gazing dreamily out at the sky, while very, very low and softly she sang, "War ich ein Vogelin."

"Brava, brava!" murmured a voice from the couch behind her. "A sweet voice and a sweet song!"

Lieschen coloured at his praise, and went and knelt by his side.

"I thought you were asleep. You are stronger—you feel better; life is coming back!" she said, in a voice quite tremulous with joy. "You have been so ill, do you not know it?"

He smiled faintly.

"How long have I been here?" he asked.

"Nearly three weeks," she answered. "See, how thin!" and she lifted up the hand that lay on the coverlet, and showed him how wasted it had grown.

He looked at it with a languid sort of curiosity, and then let it fall heavily by his side, and turned his head on the pillow to look at her.

She was a good sight for sick eyes to rest upon, with her pretty brown hair and great gentle brown eyes so full of womanly pity, tenderness, and submission, and, withal, dreamy and wistful as a child's eyes.

"And who art thou, dear child?" he asked presently.

"I am Elise Uterhart—Lieschen they call me. This is my home. I live here with my father and nurse, and keep the house."

As an invigorating strengthening beverage,

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"And hast thou nursed me all these weeks?"

"Yes," she answered, "and I have prayed for you when I thought you were dying, and see, the dear Lord has heard. You live, and you will grow strong again."

"Dear child! I owe thee my life. What can I give thee or do for thee?"

Lieschen blushed, her eyes faltered from his face, and she looked down in silence.

"Indeed, I know not; 'tis nothing I have done, only watching," stammered Lieschen. "Tell me your name," and she once more raised her eyes to his.

He tried to hold out his hand, and she put hers into it

"Let be, then," he said slowly; "there is time enough My name? My name is Otto von der Lanken; I——'

"*Ach!* You are tired," interrupted the girl, seeing a helpless look come into his eyes as he broke off. "Drink this, and do not speak any more."

She raised his head with one arm, and he drank the milk she held to his lips. Then she laid him down upon the pillows, and went back to her seat by the window, he watching her with the idle look of a man still too weak to speculate about things, or think any thoughts, but one or two that seemed of themselves to pass in and out of his brain.

Lieschen smiled, and shook her head at him.

"Shut your eyes and sleep," said she, with a pretty little authoritative air.

"Sing, then," he murmured, inclined to dictate his own terms, and watching her every gesture with passive enjoyment; "sing to me."

Lieschen could think of no song but the one she had been singing when he woke, which was still running in her head, and she sang it:

"Ach! wie ist's moglich dann
Dass ich Dich lassen kann?"

"Ah! can it ever be
That I should part from thee?"

When she had finished she turned and looked at him, and saw tears standing in his eyes.

"'Tis very sweet,' he murmured, "and plain to see that thou knowest what love is. Sing again—the last verse again."

So she sang it again:

"Were I a birdie wee,
And by thy side would be,
Fearing nor hawk nor kite,
To thee swift I'd fly.
Pierced by the hunter's dart,
I'd nestle next thy heart:
If one tear dimmed thy eye,
Glad then I'd die."

And he closed his eyes and slept.

So the slow summer days went by. Every day he grew a little stronger, and by degrees she gathered from him the story of the duel which had so nearly been fatal to him; how he and his friend had quarrelled about a lady, and had fought.

"I suppose they thought me dead, and left me," said Otto. "One has not much time to waste on these occasions. Poor Rudolf! He will have fled; but he can come back now, since no harm is done."

"And the lady?" asked Lieschen, breathlessly.

"She will marry Rudolf, no doubt," replied Otto, with a hard laugh; "and I shall dance at the wedding."

Lieschen said nothing; but the great dark eyes that rested on his face were lighted with a new fire, a burning worship; an unspeakable devotion; her heart beat, and her pulses thrilled with a new, sweet, mysterious pain. The die was cast.

At last there came a day—Oh, those days, those few

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days that make up the earthly history of a life! Some all in white, and garlanded with fresh flowers of spring; some flaming in gold and crowned with sunshine; some—some there must be—draped deep in black. There they are, within the veiled future, coming slowly, surely on, each in its appointed time, neither sooner for our longing, nor later for our agony of fear; and we cannot choose but take them all and bear them until the last sands have run, and there are no more. There came a day when Otto von der Lanken bade farewell. He went through the garden looking for his little nurse, to say good-bye to her. Then he saw little footmarks in the sandy path, under the roses and syringas, that led down on to the shore. He followed them, and found Lieschen standing by the tide, looking out to sea.

"Lieschen," he said, coming up to her, "I am come to say goodbye!"

"Oh, not to-day!" cried Lieschen, clasping her hands and looking up at him with her great, piteous eyes. "Not so soon!"

"I am well again, and strong now," he answered, "thanks to my good little Lieschen; and it is time to be up and doing. And now," he added, seeing the tears rush to her eyes, "now what can I do for thee, sweet child? Ask what thou wilt."

She looked up at him a moment, standing there, so tall and straight and fair, with the sun on his bright hair and the blue sky shining in his eyes; and then she put her hands over her face, and sobbed aloud like a child.

Then he drew a step nearer. "Dear little Lieschen, don't cry, for pity's sake! What can I do for thee? Tell me."

"Oh, give me your love—your love!" she cried passionately. "Love me, if only a little!" and then she broke down utterly, and leaned her little brown head against his arm, crying bitterly.

"Why, that thou hast, dear one—not a little, but a great deal. Who could help loving thee?" he answered soothingly. "Ask something harder for my love thou hast."

After a long pause, she looked up through her tears.

"And thou wilt—thou wilt come back one day?"

"Why, surely," said he, "I am not worth all these tears, pretty one! Be happy, right happy, till I come again. Adieu now, sweet child!"

He stooped and kissed her on the forehead, and went away up the sand, turning under the syringas to wave another farewell, and then she heard his horse's hoofs clattering up the yard, and he was gone.

Gone! How it haunted her day after day as she passed in and out of the house, empty of his presence; down the garden and the meadows, which knew his step and voice no more; and upon the shore, where he had bidden her farewell! Weeks passed before she at all turned from the feeling of missing him so sorely to the hope of his return.

But he did not come—not even when it was spring and the early leaves came out, and the clouds lifted and shone white in the young sunshine, and the birds sang merrily.

Gustav came and went, and began to urge the marriage. Perhaps he saw that his betrothed was losing the pretty roses in her cheeks, and that the light in her eyes was growing sad and strange; and he—knowing, as none but he knew, how much he loved her—longed to take her to himself in his own home, and make her happy.

So they fixed a day at last, and Lieschen, like one in a dream, helped the old nurse to make all the preparations, and plied her needle busily.

All was ready at length, and two days before the wedding Lieschen stood on the shore, her work done, and

A SOLDIER SAVED.

Bile Beans Repair War's Ravages.

Our soldiers now in the field have other dangers besides Boer bullets continually besetting them. Colds, rheumatism, chest affections, and serious liver and digestive disorders are all enemies as dangerous as any armed force. Disease kills more than war. These ailments are often contracted by civilians in the more peaceful walks of life, but to a civilian or soldier whom they attack Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness are a boon.

Mr. Geo. Hy. Biggins, of Grange Villas, Grange Street, Hull, testifies to their excellence. He served under Sir Charles Warren in South Africa, and was nine months in Mafeking. Some hard campaigning fell to his lot, and though he bears no scar of the battlefield, misfortunes have come to him in another shape. An *Eastern Morning News* reporter who called upon him the other day was certainly able to observe in him nothing but a fine healthy type of the British soldier, yet Mr. Biggins owes his present healthy condition exclusively to Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness, and he has not always looked as well as he does to-day. "I have known the time," he said, "when I used to be strangely overcome by a chilly sensation. I felt it all over my body; and it seemed to be the result of being altogether run down.

"I felt languid and too weary and weak to do anything. My joints ached as if I had rheumatism all over me, and many a time I had difficulty in keeping up with my duties. I began to suffer from biliousness, too, and to experience a nasty sharp pain at my heart. This pain continued to get worse. Whenever I moved quickly it commenced, and I had to go slowly to get ease. So bad did it become at last that I felt convinced I had heart disease. Of course, I tried to get relief, and purchased all kinds of medicines in vain until I tried Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness. The result was most satisfactory. I noticed an improvement after the first few doses, and so went on taking them.

"They soon ended the biliousness, and from first commencing to take them I have never again felt the pain in the chest. Bile Beans have completely cured me, and I am frequently recommending them to persons I find suffering as I did. While at Gosport I gave some to a gunner, and his mother-in-law derived great benefit from them. Only the other night my little daughter was quite out of sorts, and I gave her a few half beans. The next day she was all right again. I can tell you my family, both young and old, have used them with marvellous results." Wherever Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness are used marvellous results follow. For liver chill, colds, rheumatism, indigestion, anæmia, dizziness, kidney disorders, constipation, debility, headache, nervousness, female ailments, and as a preventive of influenza they are unequalled. Of all chemists, or post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 London Wall, E.C., by sending price one and three halfpence or two and nine,

no more to do but wait now for the dawning of the day that was to bring Gustav and make her his wife.

As she stood there she seemed to hear a voice answering her own thoughts:

"Thou wilt lose all, bethink thee well—all if thou fail. Thy father's love thy peaceful home, thy fair name, thy good, honest husband—all will be lost!"

"Alas, alas, I know it!" she answered weeping; "but I cannot, I will not fail!"

She went into the house and looked into the sitting-room. There sat her father in his chair asleep, the pipe still between his fingers, and the room dim with smoke. Her lips seemed to frame some word they vainly sought to utter, and then with a choking, stifled sob, she turned and stole away—away out of the house, across the meadows, and on towards the shore of the other side of the promontory on which lay her father's farm.

She was not strong, but something within her gave her power to walk all night in the chill spring weather. Long before noon the next day she had caught the Stralsund steamer on its backward way, and was being carried across the water to Stralsund.

She felt no weariness, no hunger, thirst, or cold, and only longed to be on foot once more. She was quite familiar with the quaint town, and hurried up the quay, across the Water Street, and up under the dark, shadowy Zemlower Gateway, along the quiet streets where grass grows between the stones of the pavement, and the old gabled houses have looked down for hundreds of years upon the simple burgher-life below. She went through the town and out into the country beyond, past many a pleasant little farm where the storks were patching up their great nests on the thatched barns and cow-houses, and making their curious rattling cry as they flew to and fro.

She remembered that the storks used to bring the summer in old days, and all good gifts when they came back, and that this spring they had not yet come to her home on Rügen.

In one little village she asked for a drink of milk, and they made her eat and rest a little while; but she was restless and anxious to be gone so they let her go, though the wind was rising and blowing sharp and keen, and little flakes of snow were flying through the air.

By nightfall a fierce storm was blowing, and the air was thick with driving snow. Lieschen asked shelter at a farm lying a little back from the high road.

"How far is it to Friedenhagen?" she asked.

"What, hast thou friends at Friedenhagen? In the service of the Count von der Lanken, then?"

"Yes, I have a friend there," answered the girl, with a faint smile. "Is it far now?"

"Why, thou wilt not walk it, surely? 'Tis a good four hours from here."

"Oh, I am very strong," answered Lieschen bravely. "Only let me sleep here, and then I shall be able to do it."

So she slept there; but very early in the morning she rose and stole away, out on to the snowy road in the cutting pitiless wind, leaving behind her, as a token of her gratitude, the only thing she had to give—her betrothal ring.

"She has a sad story, doubtless, poor thing!" said the good people, shaking their heads over it; and they put it away, and forgot all about it and her.

Meanwhile, she pressed on till it was drawing towards noon; and then the walls and turrets of the great Schloss Friedenhagen rose dimly through the falling snow. At every step her tired feet grew heavier, the snow glared upon her aching eyes, and the cold wind seemed to pierce her through and through: but still she struggled on, and stood at length under the great *porte-cochère*, and rang the bell.

She had no thought of her soiled and draggled clothes, or of the impression she might make upon the servants; no thought at all of them, but only of him, of Otto von der Lanken, and that another moment must bring them face to face.

She heard bells ringing merrily—was it only phantom music in her tired brain? And then the door opened, and a rough voice demanded her business and her name.

"Who are you, and what are you here about on such a day as this?"

Lieschen vaguely fancied he was referring to the snow, and timidly asked to see the young Herr Graf.

The man laughed aloud.

"A pretty request truly! Come another day, mein Fräulein. Know you not that the young Herr Graf has just brought home his bride, and is to-day receiving the congratulations of all his noble friends? The gracious lord would be somewhat astonished, I take it, to see a beggar maiden like you among the train. Make way, make way," and he pushed her hastily aside as a gay carriage came rolling up the drive.

Lieschen turned away faint, stunned, exhausted, broken-hearted; and the guests went laughing and chatting up the steps and into the great hall, and the door was shut.

Two days later a big, broad-shouldered man with a sun-browned face and red beard, came riding along the snowy road towards Friedenhagen. The storm was over, but the great drifts still lay piled by the roadside, deep and broad and white. The green buds of spring were withered on the boughs; sullen clouds moved slow against the leaden sky and huddled in great banks about the south and west. It was freezing, but the bitter wind was still. The horseman's face was sad and stern, and he looked absently at the snow as he rode along, when suddenly a great cry broke from his lips. He flung down the reins and sprung to the ground.

"Lieschen, Lieschen, my little Lieschen!"

For there, covered but not hidden by the snow, he discovered something—something that told him all, almost before his eyes had fully seen it—a few shadows, a few curved lines, a sweeping tress of dark brown hair. He fell down beside the still, unheeding form, and put back the matted hair that was blown across the face, and kissed the frozen eyes, and frozen parted lips, the little frozen hands in vain: dead, stark dead, his little Lieschen—frozen in the drifted snow!

This was the end of it all. He saw his ring was gone from her finger, but how or why he could not guess. He only knew she had fled from her wedding day and from him, and dimly felt that Otto von der Lanken might be the cause—whether innocent or guilty he could not tell, and littled cared to know, since all was lost.

And Otto von der Lanken never knew.

"That pretty child will have forgotten me," he said once to himself that spring, when something reminded him of his promise at parting from her, "and will have married the good Baier by this time, or I might send for her to wait upon my wife."

Turn to page 482 at once.

ACTS LIKE MAGIC.

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Mr. GEO. R. SIMS' HAIR RENEWER.

Called by him **"TATCHO."**

(Romany: "Genuine," "Good," "True.")

And why, pray, is the successful poet, playwright, and journalist an eminent authority on hair restorer? Eager for an explanation, a *Daily Mail* representative sought out Mr. Sims. . . .

Now Mr. G. R. Sims, as many people know, is one of the busiest men in the kingdom, but hastily affixing his signature to a letter, he looked up and extended a characteristically cordial welcome. Then he said: "I will explain. I found that I was rapidly going bald. Not seriously, you understand, but the thinning out was sufficiently marked to set me thinking out a remedy. I went to two specialists, both of whom cheerfully assured me that I should be absolutely bald in two years.

"Then I discovered the preparation which is now placed upon the market. **I found that I had hit upon a remedy capable of working wonders. Look at my hair now, isn't that convincing evidence of the value of my preparation.**

"Ladies confirm my good opinion of it as a dressing for daily use. Mrs. Brown Potter, whose beautiful hair is the admiration of the entire lady world, writes that she uses nothing but 'Tatcho.' There is nothing to prevent every woman from making her hair silken in texture and bountiful in volume, for she can obtain a bottle of 'Tatcho' now in every town or even village."

In order that the public may be able to test the superlative value of Mr. Geo R. Sims' discovery, the Company is issuing large 4/6 size test bottles post free for **1/10**, under plain cover, one of which may be had on application. Please cut off the corner of this advertisement where marked, and send with name and address, legibly written, to the—

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

A NEW SERIAL STORY begins in this number. It is written by Mr. H. T. Johnson, one of the most popular authors of the day. You will find it to be a thoroughly fascinating novel from the first to the last line. Personally, I read it with breathless interest when it was first placed in my hands, and more recently, on a second reading, I have found my pleasure has not waned. To my mind, it is one of the best things Mr. Johnson has ever written, and that's saying a good deal.

⁂

THE interest in the photo competition grows apace, and looks like proving a huge success. For the first five portraits published several claims came to hand. These were duly investigated, with the result that the two gentlemen whose names are given on page 503 each captured a five-pound note. They are to be congratulated on being the originals of portraits Nos. 2 and 4. The other claims were found to be incorrect. We are sorry, because we are simply dying to get rid of some more fivers. If your portrait isn't on page 502 don't get disheartened. There are a lot to be published yet.

⁂

ADVICE TO READERS ON VARIOUS MATTERS.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

"PATER" has a little boy who is afflicted with stammering, and he asks if I can suggest a cure.

Stammering is the result of a highly nervous temperament. Sufferers, in their great haste to speak, send so much energy to the vocal organs that these cannot act fast enough for the voice to escape, and the result is confusion. In the case of children, care should be taken of their general health, and those who are with them most should talk gently and slowly, carefully pronouncing each syllable. It is a great mistake to correct children for stammering; instead, they should be encouraged to open their mouths and take in breath before beginning to speak slowly and softly. Persons of all ages who stammer will derive great benefit from reading aloud carefully (especially books with conversations, etc.) and seldom reading to themselves without forming each word with the mouth.

"J. P." wishes to know a cure for sea-sickness.

Bromide of potassium taken in large doses before sailing, and in small doses after, is said to be one of the best remedies for the prevention of sea-sickness. Another plan which is supposed to be infallible is to rub the head immediately at the back of the ears until the skin is slightly excoriated, as this excites a certain nerve on which it is thought that sea-sickness is dependent. Persons who advance this theory for the cure of sea-sickness strengthen their claim to its efficacy by the fact that deaf mutes in whom the nerve thus agitated does not exist, never suffer from this distressing complaint. There is one consolation for those who are like the boy who complained that his dinner wouldn't stay swallowed, and that is that sea sickness is supposed to do you a world of good, but it would take a miracle to convince anyone suffering from the malady of this fact.

"POSTSCRIPT" has a large quantity of postage stamps, British and foreign. They are of no use to a collector, being of the common varieties only, and he asks me if I know of any use to which they can be put.

He might, with a little trouble, transform them into very pretty decorative mosaic work. The first thing is to thoroughly soak them, so that they no longer adhere to the paper, and the best way is to immerse them in water for some time. Then proceed to arrange them in geometrical patterns, cutting some diagonally across where the design needs it, or in halves. They can be adapted to the designs published for patchwork. The chief point to aim at is to select a good pattern, to keep it uniform, and to blend the colouring well. When these have been mastered it is very ornamental work, applied to the tops of tables, small cabinets, boxes, frames, letter-cases, screens, etc. It requires to be sized, and varnished with clear crystal varnish

YES, "H. P.," it is quite true that only about one out of every three or four hundred bullets fired in a battle is effective. Here are an expert's statistics on the question. When Frederick the Great defeated the Austrians at the battle of Czaslau, May 17th, 1742, out of every 357 shots fired by the Prussians only one Austrian was killed or wounded. In the campaigns of 1805 and 1806, when the great Napoleon was victorious everywhere, only one man was killed or wounded out of every 3,000 shots, and in 1813 and 1814, 10,000 shots were fired to kill or wound one man. Bautzen was an exception, for there 714 balls were fired for one man *hors de combat*. At the battle of Vittoria, Wellington's army fired 500 shots for one man killed or wounded. At Solferino in 1859 the Austrians fired 8,400,000 cartridges, and only killed and wounded 12 000 French soldiers, or one man out of every 700 shots. In the campaign of 1864 and 1866 the average was sixty-six shots for one man *hors de combat*. In the terrible battles of 1870-21, 250 shots were fired for every man killed or wounded.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I AM open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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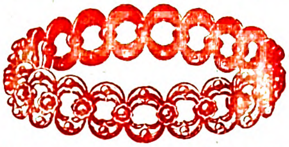

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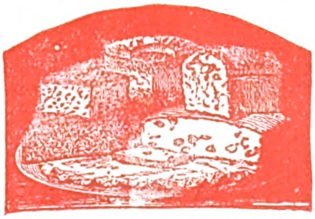

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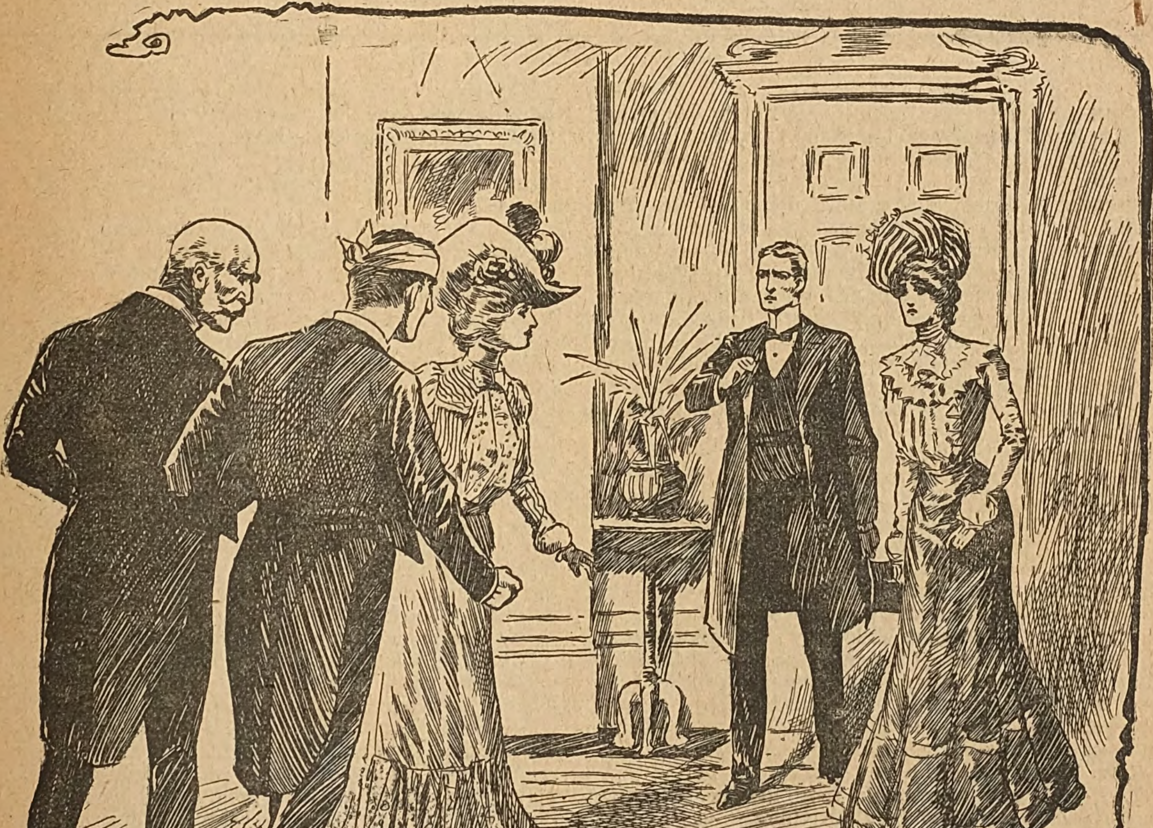
SHORT STORIES

No. 669.] For the Week Ending October 26th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

The Adventures of an Actress.



"You cowardly blackguard!" he said, "so that's your idea of fair play!"

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A THRILLING INSTALMENT.

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

XII.—THE LAST CARD. The Story of a Wager.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

Montagu Goldstein, money-lender, sat in his private office in East Street, Leeds, for all the world like a wizened old spider in the centre of his web, waiting for a fat and juicy fly.

Montagu Goldstein had a smile upon his face which cannot be said to have enhanced the attractiveness of his features, unattractive enough when in repose, though in some ways his face was unlike that of the typical son of Israel so often depicted in the pages of fiction and on the stage. His nose was only slightly hooked, and his thick lips and receding chin were hidden by long grey hair. He had scarcely any eyebrows, and though Nature had been beneficent to him as regards the hirsute adornment of the lower part of his face, she had been woefully sparing towards his crown, which was, to all intents and purposes, bald.

He was little more than five feet in stature, and had long skinny hands which seemed specially adapted for a man of his trade and calling.

On this gloomy autumn morning in November he sat poring over a dirty little account book which, notwithstanding its outward appearance, contained a vast amount of documentary evidence to show how far-reaching was the influence wielded by Montagu Goldstein.

Suddenly their came a knock at the door, and a lanky out-at-elbow youth, who might very well have stood as a model for Smike in "Nicholas Nickleby," entered. This creature sidled up to the table of the money-lender and said in a quavering, husky voice:

"Mr. Mark Spalding to see you."

The Jew's eyes narrowed; they always did when their owner was pleased about anything.

"Show him in," he said curtly.

The servant retired as he had entered, in a sidling, crab-like way. Scarcely had he departed than the door opened again, and a young man, well dressed, with a pale, rather weak face, a faint moustache adorning his upper lip, and with watery-blue eyes, entered.

"Good morning, Mr. Spalding," said the money-lender benignantly. "It was a pleasure to see you always. And of course you have come to settle that little account, eh? Sit down and I will give you a receipt in a few moments, and if at any other time Montagu Goldstein can accommodate you, well, you know Montagu!"

The young man gave vent to a nervous laugh, and flung himself down on the ricketty chair offered to him with a would-be air of indifference.

"I am afraid I can't pay you this morning, Mr. Goldstein," he said. "I've come to ask you to give me a bit longer."

The Jew squared his elbows on the table, and leant forward with an ominous look upon his face.

"I am afraid I can't do that, Mr. Spalding," he said. "You see, the bill has been due already some time. I am a poor man, and business is business. You came to me and said you were in a bother, and I lent you the money without a word. Now, when I ask you to pay as a gentleman, you tell me you can't. No, no, sir; I must have my forty pounds or I must take proceedings."

The young man took a cigarette from a silver *etui* and lit it with a very badly assumed air of nonchalance.

"By Jove, Goldstein," he said, "you do know how to lay it on. So the ten pounds I borrowed have become forty now. Well, look here. I can't possibly pay you now. I'll own I wanted that ten pounds so badly that I was ready to overlook your exorbitant interest, but my allowance doesn't come in till next week, and I'll pay you fifty then, if only you'll give me a little longer?"

But the money-lender shook his head.

"Business is business!" he repeated obstinately. "If gentlemen want to borrow money, well, it's only fair that we poor people who accommodate you should make a little profit" (if 100 per cent. is a little profit, there was justification in Goldstein's words); "either you pay me now, or I go to your father and tell him how his son plays cards with all the other young gentlemen in Leeds."

"Not that! not that!" cried Spalding in terror. "Why my father would disown me. He abhors card-playing more than anything else in the world, and you would be farther off than ever from getting your money."

"I'm not so sure about that," answered the Jew shrewdly; "I'm not at all sure that Mr. Anthony Spalding, one of the most respected mill-owners in Leeds, wouldn't be ready to pay a good deal rather than have all the city know how his son spends his time."

"Then it's very plain you don't know my father," came the quick answer. "He'd kick me out of the house, and tell you to go to blazes. You can take my word for that."

The Jew made no answer for a few moments. His crafty little eyes, keen as a hawk's, scrutinised the young man's face with preternatural sharpness. He was far too cunning to show what was passing in his brain, yet at the same time he realised that Mark Spalding's fear of his father was tempered by the reflection that the mill-owner would sooner disown his son than pay debts for such an abhorred pastime as card-playing.

"Well, what do you propose to do, then?" he said slowly. "How is poor Goldstein going to get his money?"

"Give me another week," came the almost despairing request, "and I'll find you fifty pounds somehow."

"And if you don't, what then?"

"Oh, but I will—I will! Something's sure to turn up by then."

Again came silence.

"Well, look here," said Goldstein suddenly, his wheedling, almost cringing voice suddenly changing its accent and becoming harsh and authoritative. "I'm not going to be played fast and loose with much longer. I'll give you till the end of next week on one consideration. Either you find me the fifty pounds as you promised, or the debt becomes doubled, and I get one hundred pounds from you any way you like. No, on second thoughts, if you again fail me I shall go at once to your father and you will be ruined in every way. I've had enough of your shilly-shallying. Will you promise to pay me fifty pounds next week?"

"I suppose I must," came the hopeless answer; "though it's the most sickening case of bloodsucking I've ever heard of."

"Bloodsucking, eh?" snarled the other; "didn't you come to me and say, 'Goldstein, I must have ten pounds; if I don't have ten pounds at once I am a ruined man,' and didn't I accommodate you at once, and am I to get you out of a difficulty for nothing? No, no, sir; when it's a question of business, business has to come first. I've got to earn my living, just as you have to yours, and if I weren't to charge a little interest how on earth could I hope to make both ends meet in these hard times?"

Spalding rose to his feet with an impatient gesture.

"Well, that's settled, then?" he said, with the air of a reprieved criminal. "I'm to give you fifty pounds next week, and all is to be over between us?"

"Not so fast, my young friend," answered the Jew, with an exasperating familiarity. "I must have your signature to that little bit of business, if you please. Merely a matter of form, I know, in dealing with a gentleman like you; but at the same time, as I always say, business is business."

With a feeling akin to despair Mark Spalding put his signature to the new bond, and left the Jew's office as he had come, shamefacedly and with stealth, and as he walked through the murky streets of Leeds he kept saying to himself, "How on earth am I going to find that fifty pounds? I swear I'll never touch a card again. And yet——" Here his thoughts broke off weakly, for he knew that he would again tempt fortune at the gaming tables, and, like a silly moth round a candle flame, he would go on singeing his fatuous wings until at last his whole being would be absorbed in the fire.

A large poster on a hoarding suddenly attracted his attention.

THEATRE ROYAL, LEEDS.
For Six Nights only.
THE GOOD SAMARITAN,
By a powerful London Company, including
MISS HAZEL HARLOW.

Then followed a cast of the performers, and underneath the lithographed portrait of a girl in colours, and really a very fine sample of the colour-printer's art. It was a beautiful face, with regular features and big blue eyes, surmounted by an aureole of red-gold hair. Underneath was written, "Miss Hazel Harlow in her famous impersonation of 'Ruth.'"

The young man gazed at the picture with eyes full of admiration. Suddenly a hand was laid on his shoulder. He wheeled round, to be confronted by a youth of about his own age and appearance.

"Hullo! Manners," he said. "It's you, is it?"

"Yes. So you're smitten with the fair Hazel, eh? Stunning fine girl, isn't she?"

"Rather!" answered Mark. "Only I suppose that picture is idealised a good bit, isn't it?"

"Don't you believe it, my boy!" cried Manners. "It doesn't half do her justice. She is said to be the most beautiful woman on the English stage."

"So I've heard. And they do say she is the most straight-laced, too. Her name's been in the papers a good deal lately."

"Oh, that's all my eye," answered Manners. "All actresses are the same, and I'll bet Hazel Harlow is no more straight-laced than you or I. She gives out that she is—it's a good advertisement. It draws all the High Church folk and the parsons who preach about morality on the boards. I'll bet you that I'll take Hazel Harlow to supper at the Metropole before the week is out."

Spalding uttered a half-laugh. Then suddenly the expression of his face changed.

"I'll bet you you don't," he said.

"Well, I'll lay you fifty pounds I'll do it."

"Are you in earnest? Do you mean to really say you will lay me fifty pounds that you'll get Hazel Harlow to come to supper with you at the Metropole of her own free will? I'll bet you sixty you don't."

"Done with you there," answered Manners, who, it may be noted, was the pampered son of one of the most wealthy manufacturers in a wealthy city.

The bet thus lightly made was speedily ratified, and the two friends parted, and as Spalding walked on down the street he said to himself, "Sixty pounds! If I can win I shall be able to pay off old Goldstein and have ten pounds for myself. Win! Of course I'll win. It's too good a chance to throw away, and if I can't do it by fair means, well, I must try foul!"

CHAPTER II.

It was six o'clock. Already a crowd was besieging the doors of the Theatre Royal all eagerness to see Hazel Harlow, the heroine of so eventful a tour as the present one had been. Ever since the theatre fire at Newcastle in which Hazel had played so conspicuous a part (*see Short Stories*, No. 662), Leeds, in common with the other great cities of the North, had been all agog to see the beautiful young actress who had had such a miraculous escape.

Hazel and Jenny Lovelace were in the former's dressing-room, getting ready for the evening performance, when a note and a small box were brought up to their room for Miss Harlow.

Hazel opened the note first.

"Dear Miss Harlow," she read, "although I have not had the pleasure of meeting you in private life, what I have read and heard about you has made me very anxious to be able to congratulate in person an actress who has already made herself such a name upon the stage. It would give me the greatest pleasure imaginable if I might be allowed to show some little mark of my admiration for your achievements. If you would allow me to give myself the pleasure of inviting you to supper after to-night's performance, at the Hotel Métropole, I should be more than honoured.

"Believe me, I make this request from no unworthy motives. If you would so far favour me I should take it as a sign that you are ready to accede to my request by your wearing the trinket that I am sending under separate cover. Should you display this upon your person to-night, I shall take it that you accept my invitation in the same spirit in which it is made, and will wait for you at the stage-door at the close of the evening's performance.

"With sincere wishes for your continued prosperity, believe me to be, yours very truly,

"Archibald Manners."

With a merry laugh Hazel tossed the note to her companion.

"What do you think of that, Jenny?" she cried "Am I not indeed honoured?"

Jenny read the note carefully through and her lip curled.

"What does the young idiot take you for?" she said scornfully. "But I must open the box to see what the trinket is," and she was just about to tear the paper off the little package when Hazel intervened.

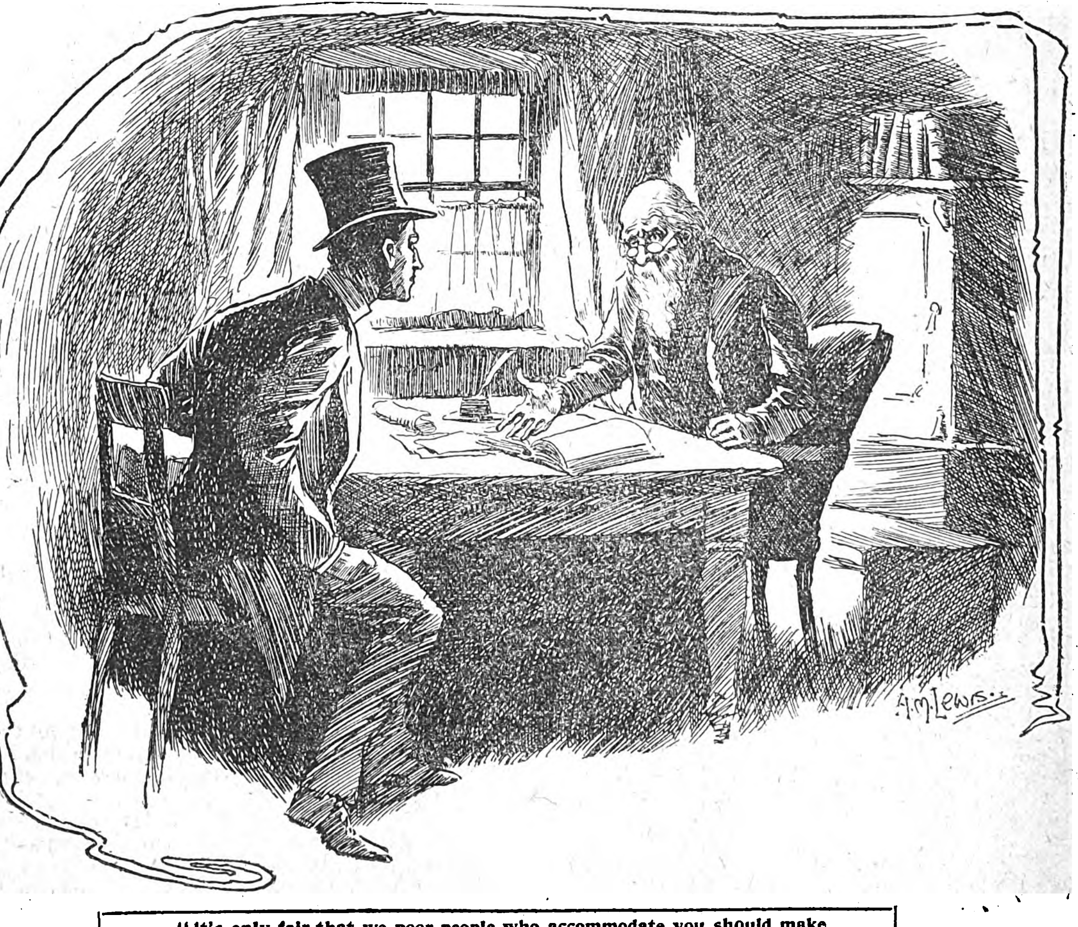
"I am going to send it back unopened, Jenny," she said firmly. "Don't you see the very fact of my inspecting it would be a confession of weakness."

Jenny put the box down without a word.

"You are quite right, darling," she said. "I didn't look at it in that way."

Hence it came about that Mr. Archibald Manners received a rude shock to his pride and the prospects of winning the bet he had made with Spalding, on his present being handed back to him by an attendant in exactly the same condition in which he had dispatched it. He had rather foolishly bidden Spalding accompany him to the theatre to see how Hazel was to succumb to his blandishments. Needless to say, Spalding's jubilation was ill-concealed.

"That's what I call a smack in the eye," he whispered jocularly. "You see I was quite right; you're not going



"It's only fair that we poor people who accommodate you should make a little profit."

Can you play "Hunt the Fiver"? See Editor's Page.

to catch Miss Harlow so easy as you think, in spite of your undoubted lady-killing propensities. You may just as well pay that sixty pounds and have done with it."

The other made a somewhat poor attempt at a smile. "Don't cry till you're out of the wood," he said, with choler visible in his voice. "I'm not beat yet. Mark my words; you haven't got that sixty pounds yet by a long chalk," and he thrust the little box (which contained by the way, a very charming diamond brooch) vindictively into his pocket.

The rise of the curtain on the first act of *The Good Samaritan* cut short a further conversation between the pair.

At Hazel's first entry on the stage, a storm of applause rent the theatre, in which Manners and Spalding joined heartily.

"By Jove!" muttered Manners, forgetful for the moment of the cause for rivalry between himself and his companion. "Her portraits don't do her justice; she's the most beautiful woman I've ever seen."

"Perhaps that is why she won't sup with Archibald Manners, Esquire?" muttered Spalding vindictively.

His remark was ill-advised, and had the direct effect of making Master Archibald all the more eager, apart from the monetary considerations of the question, to win the wager.

But Mark felt confident; that queenly, imperious figure, who moved about the stage with such grace and dignity, who spoke with such sweet purity of accent, would surely never condescend to join in the frivolities dear to the heart of the ordinary actress?

It is to be feared that Manners paid but little attention to the play. When Hazel was on the stage his eyes were fixed on her; when she was not his thoughts were entirely concerned with thinking out a plan whereby he could carry out the design which had been so recently foiled.

Now it so happened that the theatrical company numbered amongst its party a girl who appeared on the playbill "Miss Dorothy Lestrange," though her real name was as prosaically Mary Parker. This girl had only a minor part, and was, in theatrical parlance, "in the crowd," that is to say, she appeared in a scene where a number of well-dressed men and women moved about as a set-off to the more prominent characters. She was a warm-hearted, impulsive, frivolous young person, who was never averse to "a lark" or to receiving surreptitious presents from strange "johnnies." She had been "on the road" for quite a number of years, though she had never yet reached the dignity of a good speaking part. Like hundreds of other girls possessed of no extraordinary fitness or attainments, she had been attracted by the glamour of the footlights, only to discover, when too late, that the plums in the profession were few, and that "Hazel Harlows" were born not made.

As Archibald Manners' eyes were roving listlessly over the stage during a scene in which Hazel had but little part, they were attracted by Miss Lestrange, who was walking with an elegantly dressed young man at a fictitious garden-party. He hurriedly consulted his programme, "Lady Lanchester," he read, "Miss Dorothy Lestrange."

"By Jove!" he said to himself, "that must be the same girl that I was introduced to last year when *The Lights of London* Company was in Leeds. I remember her face quite well. Now, I wonder if it would be any good my trying to get her to help me to win this bet. I should like to score off Mark, to say nothing of the fact of getting such a lovely girl as Miss Harlow to have supper with one. It strikes me I was rather a fool to make that bet, but whoever heard of an actress that didn't like to be trotted round and have attentions paid to her? After all, there's no harm in it; I'll try and get the fair Dorothy to help me."

At the close of the performance Manners, in accordance with the plan that he had already worked out, said "Good-night" to Spalding, and announced his intention of going straight home. He hurriedly left his companion and ostensibly departed homewards, only to retrace his steps as soon as he had assured himself that the coast was clear, and hurry back towards the theatre.

The performers were already issuing in twos and threes from the stage door as he got back. His quick eye at once singled out Miss Lestrange, talking and laughing with some of her fellow-actors and actresses Concealing himself in a doorway he watched his opportunity, and at last saw her hurry away alone evidently *en route* for her lodgings. He hastened quickly after her, and taking off his hat politely, said:

"Good evening, Miss Lestrange; I think I once had the pleasure of meeting you about a year ago, when you were in *The Lights of London* Company. My name is Manners. Perhaps you remember me?"

The girl looked at him critically. She had met so many young men of this type during her stage career that, had she been absolutely truthful, she would have at once admitted that she had quite forgotten his face and existence. But this was not Dorothy's way.

"Why, yes," she said, smiling. "Of course I remember you."

"Good," answered the young man; "I am delighted to again have the opportunity of renewing your acquaintance. But it's rather late now, and I expect you are wanting to get home. It would give me great pleasure if you would honour me by accepting an invitation to lunch at Baton's, in Briggate. I could meet you anywhere you like at midday to-morrow."

There seemed no harm in this. The prospect of a good lunch in a restaurant with an evidently wealthy young man, was in itself sufficiently alluring to account for the readiness with which the girl accepted the invitation, and when Manners really departed for his home it was with a more comforting assurance that he was on the high road towards success in his attempt to entrap Hazel Harlow. He did not notice that the figure of a man had dogged his footsteps persistently ever since he had said "good-night" to Spalding. It was, in fact, friend Mark himself, who felt that he had too much at stake to give his so-called friend any latitude in his designs. The fear of what Montagu Goldstein would do unless the money owed him was forthcoming at the appointed time, acted as a powerful spur to Spalding to relax none of his vigilance.

"I wonder what game's up now?" he muttered. "I must try and keep an eye on coming events."

Thus ended the first act in the somewhat paltry drama.

CHAPTER III.

Dorothy Lestrange owned to a weakness for champagne; the lunch that Manners had ordered to cement the acquaintanceship between him and his fair companion was of the best. It was not till after the meal, when the young man had produced his cigarette case and obtained permission to smoke, that he ventured to broach the real subject that had induced him to renew Dorothy's acquaintance.

"What a beautiful girl Miss Harlow is," he began carelessly. "She has regularly taken the town by storm. I suppose you know her quite well?"

"Oh, yes," answered the actress, but without warmth; "she is beautiful, there is no doubt about that, but I can't say I know her very well. She's rather too stand-offish for me. She's very well in with Venables, the manager, but she doesn't chum up with anyone in the company except Jenny Lovelace. A lot of funny things have happened in connection with her, that some of us think must have been put-up jobs. Why, when she was at Portsmouth she and Lovelace, instead of pigging it in ordinary lodgings as actresses generally have to do, got themselves invited to stay with Sir George and Lady Terrington, about the biggest pots in Portsmouth. How they did it I don't know. Then she got kidnapped on board a boat at Bristol, and was at sea a whole night. That was a splendid advertisement, and of course it drew like smoke."

Manners expressed his interest.

"But I thought she was an awfully quiet sort of girl?" he said; "objected to supper-parties, receiving presents, or anything like that."

The other laughed.

"I believe she's a regular deep one," she answered. "To talk to her you'd think butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, and of course all the men are wild on her. A man that was in our company called Monteith got his head cut open at Birmingham, and he hasn't been able to rejoin us yet. This was because of her, though it's a long story, and too much trouble to tell you."

Manners was silent for a few moments; then at last he said: "Don't you think if I were to give a little supper-party Miss Harlow couldn't be induced to come too?"

"You might just as well invite the King of England to join you," came the quick answer; "and I see you're gone on Miss Harlow like all the rest."

"No, I'm not," responded Manners, colouring slightly. Then his voice changed and he leant forward. "Look here," he said in a low tone, "I'll tell you why it is I asked you if there wouldn't be a chance of getting Miss Harlow to come to supper. I've got a bet on with a chap that I'll do it, and I'd give a good deal to be able to bring it off. Will you help me?"

Seeing that he was in earnest the girl dropped her bantering tone.

"I don't mind," she said; "it wouldn't do Miss Harlow any harm, and it would be rather a lark to play a game on her. But she'll be a hard nut to crack, and for the life of me I don't see how you're going to do it."

"Well, I've got an idea," answered the other; "and I think if you will back me up, there is no reason why we shouldn't do it in such a way that Miss Harlow would never know what the real facts of the matter were. In the first place does Miss Harlow know anything about you?"

"Know anything about me!" This was uttered in some surprise. "What do you mean?"

"I mean does she know anything of your antecedents, anything of your private affairs? Have you ever told her who you are and where you come from?"

"Not likely," came the somewhat scornful answer. "My father was cashier in a London Bank. But what has that got to do with it?"

"Everything! I want your father to be a Leeds gentleman; a nice respectable old man who is very proud of his daughter, and fond of everything connected with the stage."

The girl's mystification deepened.

"I don't see what you're driving at," she said perplexedly. "What has all this got to do with Miss Harlow going to your supper-party?"

"You have just admitted," answered Manners, "that Miss Harlow has very rigid ideas on such subjects, but don't you see that if you were to have an elderly and eminently respectable father, who was dying with anxiety to make the acquaintance of the famous Miss Harlow, and had asked you to bring her to supper with him and yourself after the theatre, there could surely be very little harm in such a request. In that way I might win my bet, and you any little present that you had set your heart upon."

"But," said the girl with a laugh, "where's your old father? You are not going to tell me that you're going to pose as my venerable and respected old parent, for no matter how well you were to disguise yourself your voice and actions would surely betray you."

"I didn't say I was going to disguise myself as anybody," replied the young man. "But first of all, do you think you are game to help me?"

"Yes, as long as I know quite fully what I've got to do."

"Well, there's an old man I know," continued Manners, "who has been in my father's firm for nearly forty years. He's a jolly old boy and would do anything for me. I could easily get him to pose as your father 'for one night only,' as the playbills say. The conditions of my bet didn't say anything about two other parties being present. We should be a *partie carree*. All you've got to do is to go to Miss Harlow to-morrow morning and tell her that your old father is so delighted with her impersonation and herself that he is dying to make her acquaintance. You can pitch any yarn you like about him, and surely she won't see any harm in joining such a pair as you and he. I shall, of course, be waiting at the Metropole till you turn up. You can then introduce me as your cousin, or anybody else you like. We shall just have supper, papa and you will see the fair Hazel home, and I shall have won my bet."

"Well, it certainly sounds simple enough," answered the actress; "but I must be introduced to 'papa,' and we must know exactly what we are going to do."

"We'll fix all that up this evening," came the ready answer. "You can approach Miss Harlow to-night, introduce her to your 'father' at lunch-time to-morrow, and fix up the supper-party for the same evening."

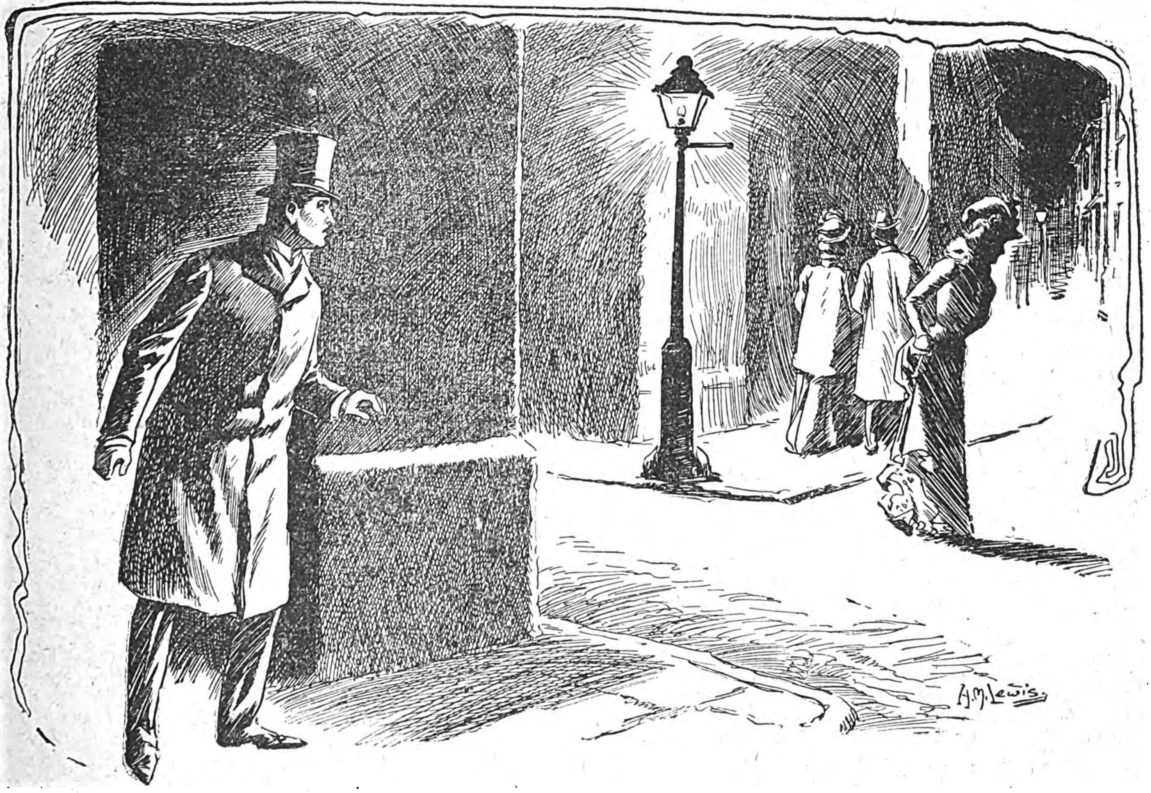
And so it was settled. Any qualms that Dorothy Lestrange might have had were lulled to rest by the reflection that there was nothing criminal about the plot in hand, and if Miss Harlow were by some untoward chance to discover that there was a plot afoot, even under that eventuality there would be but little to fear.

It was arranged that the actress should make her pseudo-father's acquaintance that same evening before the performance at the theatre. She could then approach Hazel, and they could see whether their scheme was likely to prosper.

CHAPTER IV.

"Can I speak to you a minute, Miss Harlow?" It was Dorothy Lestrange who spoke, and it was in Hazel's dressing-room on the same evening of the same day that had seen the interview between Manners and Dorothy.

Hazel looked up in some surprise. She had never had very much to do with Miss Lestrange, and up till now their acquaintanceship had been restricted to the ordinary topics caused by their common calling. She wondered vaguely what the girl could have to say to her. But there was nothing in Dorothy's face or manner to excite suspicion. She looked boldly and frankly in Hazel's eyes.



At last he saw her hurry away alone, evidently *en route* for her lodgings.

“Certainly, Miss Lestrange,” answered Hazel pleasantly. “Can I help you in anything?”

“I don't think I ever told you,” began the girl, “that my old father is at present living in Leeds. He was at the theatre last night, and will be here to-night, as I have got Mr. Venables to give me a ticket for him. He was very much struck by your performance, and he wanted to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance. I said I would do my best, and that is why I have come to you.”

As was somewhat natural, Hazel felt sligthly flattered at this tribute to her histrionic powers. She saw no reason to suspect anything underlying Miss Lestrange's request, and when in the interval between the first and second act Dorothy brought behind the white-haired, benevolent-looking old gentleman with gold-rimmed spectacles across his nose, Hazel received him graciously. She noted, moreover, that Dorothy Lestrange seemed particularly fond of her old parent; who had the appearance of a respectable old merchant by no means poorly off.

The old gentleman expressed the pleasure he had had in the performance, and especially in Miss Harlow's impersonation of the part of Ruth, the heroine of the play.

“My dear,” he said, turning to Dorothy, “I wonder if you could induce Miss Harlow to join you and me in a little supper-party to-morrow night. Just us three. Your friends, you know, my dear, are my friends.”

He said this with such a delightful air of old world simplicity, that Hazel, as was indeed pardonable, was completely taken in by his plausibility. She could do no more than accept the invitation with becoming grace.

“Then that settles it,” said the old man. “To-morrow night I'll send the carriage round for you both, and we'll go together to the Metropole. I shall then have much pleasure in seeing you home.” This to Hazel.

As was natural, Hazel told Jenny of the honour that had been proposed to her by the suppositious father of Dorothy Lestrange. Jenny was surprised, yet after Hazel's account could see no reason to put in the way of Hazel's accepting the invitation.

“He's a pleasant old gentleman,” Hazel said, “and seemed very fond of his daughter. You saw him, Jenny, didn't you?”

“Yes,” answered the latter; “and I must say he seemed a very decent old boy. I should never have

Can you play “Hunt the Fiver”? See Editor's Page.

imagined that the Lestrange would have come of such respectable parentage. I suppose it's all right in letting you go; but if I thought there was any chance of that blackguard Caldecott being in the game I'd see that you accepted no invitations anywhere. But I think after that little adventure at Portsmouth he will be chary of showing his nose anywhere where we are. We know enough now to have him laid by the heels and clapped into jail. Sir George Terrington would back us up in that."

In this Jenny was right enough. There was no fear of Caldecott putting in an appearance in Leeds. On the face of it there seemed but little reason to fear that there could be any danger to Hazel in accepting the invitation to supper at the Metropole. Yet had Hazel known the real facts of the case, and the cross currents that were connected with it, she would, under no considerations, have gone further in the matter. Her eyes were to be opened somewhat roughly.

Manners, as can be well understood, was jubilant at the success that had attended his plan. He had purposely kept out of Spalding's way, and on happening to meet that young gentleman on the morning of the very day that was, as he hoped, to see the successful fulfilment of his bet, he was careful to assume an air of the utmost dejection.

"I'm afraid it's all up," he said gloomily. "You were quite right about Miss Harlow. She's one in a thousand among actresses, though I haven't quite given up all hope."

But Spalding was not to be taken in by this assumption of despondency. He had, unknown to Manners, kept a pretty careful eye upon the amplification of the scheme, though he had been unable to find out the exact nature of his adversary's plans. But he knew that somehow Miss Lestrange was implicated in the affair. He accordingly sent an anonymous note to Hazel warning her of her fellow-actress, and admitting that there was a plot afoot to entrap her into a supper-party; but, unfortunately for his scheme, Hazel saw him hand the note in at the stage-door, and thinking that it was merely a missive from some would-be admirer, she tore it up without reading it. Thus Spalding was unwittingly foiled in his attempt to avert the success of the bet.

It had been arranged by Manners that Hazel, Dorothy, and the spurious father should drive from the theatre to the Hotel Metropole, where he (Manners) would be waiting them in a room upstairs, where the supper was to take place. In view of the fact that his appearance would create some surprise, the old man was to mention incidentally on the journey that he had invited a nephew of his to meet him at the Hotel and join them at supper. It would then be too late for Hazel to offer any protest at the introduction of a fourth party to their number.

But there was one thing that Manners had left out in his calculations. He himself had never known what it was to be hard up for money. The son of doting parents, his every whim had been indulged.

But with Spalding the case was different. His mother was dead; his father was a strict puritanical merchant of the old school, who looked with abhorrence on all forms of amusement, who expected his children to agree with him on every point. Thus Mark had grown up in abject fear of his stern parent, and had only indulged in those pleasures dear to the youthful heart surreptitiously and in secret fear, and where his follies had led him we have already seen. And now a chance had come whereby he could retrieve his position and deliver himself from the hands of Montagu Goldstein. In other words, he had staked his all upon the mad wager.

As can be well imagined, Miss Lestrange had concealed from her lady friends in the company her connection in the plot that was to intrap Hazel Harlow. This was not because she was afraid of the consequences that might ensue from her action, for, truth to tell, there were a good many in the company who would have rejoiced to see anything that might lead to Hazel's discomfiture. The girl's beauty, her reserve, her modesty, were all inexplicable to the frivolous actresses, a good representative of whom was Dorothy Lestrange.

Dorothy could see no harm in the deception; it was merely a lark; and if anything did happen to spoil the plan, well, she did not feel that her reputation or her chances of success in her profession would be any the more ruined by such an escapade.

CHAPTER V.

Archibald Manners, in irreproachable evening dress, sat in the private supper-room he had engaged at the Hotel Metropole, awaiting the arrival of his fellow-conspirators and the unsuspecting Hazel.

"How well everything has gone," his thoughts ran; "it'll be a nasty knock to Mark when he has to stump up sixty pounds. Dolly Lestrange is a brick. I'll have to give her that diamond star I got for the fair Hazel. I hope old Walker won't give the show away. He really makes a very excellent father. I must only see he doesn't take too much champagne."

Suddenly the door of the room shot open, and Mark Spalding entered the room with a would-be air of gaiety. Manners looked at him in astonishment, not unmixed with a certain amount of choler.

"Hullo!" he said, "what do you want here?"

"I heard you were giving a little supper-party," answered the other, "and I thought I would just trot up and see how things were getting on."

Manners made no answer to this statement. He was evidently revolving in his mind what this move of Spalding's could mean.

"I must say, Mark," he said at last, "I think it is rather impertinent of you to force your way up to a private room like this; but as you are here you may as well hear the truth. I am every minute expecting Miss Hazel Harlow and another lady and gentleman to sup with me here. So you see that in spite of all the bet is won, and you had better submit with a good grace."

Spalding's pale face went, if possible, a shade paler.

"You've not been playing the game," he said hoarsely. "Miss Harlow is not coming here of her own free will. You are entrapping her here." He paused abruptly. He could not say that he had sent a note to Hazel warning her of the plot that was afoot, for that would show that he had been playing the spy upon his friend, and, strange as it may seem, he had a curious feeling of false honour as regards his behaviour to "his friend the enemy."

Mark Spalding was a curious combination, torn between a sense of half-hearted honour and weak-kneed cowardice. Had he made a clean breast to his father of his delinquencies, it is probably that the way out of his difficulties would have been comparatively easy.

Manners looked at him attentively. In the hour of his triumph he saw no reason to restrain his gratified self-esteem.

"Excuse me," he said bombastically, "Miss Harlow

Is your photo on page 530?

comes here of her own free will, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it. I tell you the bet is as good as won."

"And I tell you it is not," answered the other in a voice of suppressed passion.

"How will you prevent it?" sneered Manners.

There was a look on his face that goaded Mark to madness. He seized hold of a winebottle that stood on the table and hurled it straight at Archibald's head. It caught the young man fairly on the temple. With a dull groan he sank in an inanimate heap to the floor.

"Good Heavens!" muttered Spalding, "I believe I've killed him."

He stooped down and put his hand over the other's heart. To his great relief it still beat. Then his senses quickened. There was a folding door in the room, connected with some apartment beyond. Mark threw it open and disclosed a dark bedchamber. He lifted the stunned man off his feet, and staggered with him to the bed, where he deposited his victim carefully upon the mattress, and wound the sheet tightly round his legs and arms.

"I don't think he'll come round yet," he muttered, "and when the other three come I'll get them off at once. Anyhow, I shall have won the bet."

This last remark showed in what channel his thoughts really ran.

He quitted the darkened room and locked the folding doors. Hardly had he done so than he heard footsteps outside. A waiter threw open the door to admit Hazel, old Walker the false father, and Dorothy Lestrange.

"Well, Charles," began the old man cheerily, but further words froze on his lips, for instead of Manners, whom it had been arranged to address as Charles Tomson, his nephew, he was confronted with the pallid face of Mark Spalding. As for Dorothy, she could do nothing but gaze open-eyc at the strange young man who so unexpectedly stood before her.

A sudden fear seized hold of Hazel's heart. She had accompanied Dorothy out of sheer good nature to a party that was against all her instincts and desires. What could this new development mean?

Spalding broke into quick speech.

"Miss Harlow," he said hoarsely, "listen to me, I beg you. You are in danger here. You have been misled. This old man is in the employ of Manners, the young man of whom I wrote to warn you. It was his hand that planned the scheme that was to lead you here. He has evil designs against you, and I have come to save you. Be advised by me, I beg of you. A scandal is sure to arise round your fair name unless you take heed to my warning. Go, while there is time. I will escort you to your lodgings."

The effect of Mark's words can be well imagined. Upon the faces of Walker and his fellow-conspirator guilt was largely writ. As for Hazel, she gazed from one to the other of them in the blankest amazement possible.

"I don't understand," she murmured. "Is this true, Miss Lestrange? Is this really a plot? What harm have I done you that you should betray me so cruelly?"

But Dorothy could find no answer. She could only gaze vindictively at Spalding.

As for Walker, he was the picture of villainy unmasked.

Hazel turned towards the door. Suddenly a stifled cry fell on her ears and caused her to pause irresolutely. It came from behind the folding doors of the room beyond.

This new and unexpected event had a marked effect upon Spalding, whose turn it was now to exhibit symptoms of guilt. A dull wave of colour flooded his pallid features.

"Fly," he said hoarsely to Hazel.

Again from behind the folding doors came a faint cry.

"Help! Help!" was heard.

Walker flung open the doors and dashed inside the chamber. The next moment he was beside the bed upon which Manners lay, having just struggled back to consciousness. To undo the captive's bonds was the work of a few moments. With a stifled oath Spalding rushed towards the door of communication with the main corridor of the hotel, but Dorothy was too quick for him. Like lightning she turned the key in the lock and planted herself against the door!

"No, you don't," she said defiantly. "You may as well face the music as the rest of us."

As she spoke Manners tottered into the apartment on the arm of Walker, his white face rendered more ghastly by a smear of blood caused by his assailant's blow.

As can be well imagined, Hazel's brain was in a whirl. She had accepted the old man's invitation, merely expecting a quiet little supper party, and instead of that she was suddenly confronted by a scene that might have been imported from a melodrama.

Manners regarded Spalding with a perhaps pardonable expression of concentrated fury.

"You cowardly blackguard!" he said, "so that's your idea of fair play. When I made that bet I didn't bargain to wager with a would-be murderer." Then he turned to Hazel. "Miss Harlow," he said, "I owe you an apology. The cat is out of the bag now, and it's no good beating about the bush any more. This man is not Miss Lestrange's father. My real name is Archibald Manners."

In a flash Hazel remembered the note she had received from a young man a night or two before.

"I bet this cur here that I would induce you to have supper with me of your own free will, and in order to prevent me winning the bet he came here and tried to kill me. There, that is the whole story, and I promise you there was nothing else at the bottom of it."

Spalding moved towards the door. "Let me go," he muttered sullenly. "You've ruined me between you; I don't see what good I can do by staying here any more."

Dorothy moved away from the door mechanically. As for Hazel she could find no words. Her one longing was to get away from the place as best she could. The affair had indeed ended in a fiasco.

Spalding rushed out of the room and down the broad stairs of the hotel, notwithstanding the outcry made by Manners when he realised that Mark had gone.

"What was the good of keeping him?" said Dorothy scornfully. "The game's up. I should think you had better cry off with that bet. The best thing we can do to have our supper as if nothing had happened."

A world of pent-up scorn was visible in Hazel's voice as she returned.

"You are perfectly free to do as you like, Miss Lestrange; as for me, I am going back to my lodgings at once. I am afraid my ideas of humour and yours do not coincide. I can see no fun in weaving a tissue of lies merely to have the laugh at one who has never done you any harm."

"That's all very well," answered the other with a sneer, "I don't set up for being a straight-laced goody-goody. I wonder what the company will think when they hear that Miss Hazel Harlow, the sanctimonious lead, has been supping at the Metropole at Leeds at the invitation of a strange young man—" but the rest of her words fell on the empty air, as far as Hazel was concerned, for the girl had swept with queenly grace from the room, leaving the three fellow-conspirators to derive what satisfaction they could from the outcome of their paltry scheme.

As for Manners, he was feeling too sick and ill to care about falling in with Dorothy's suggestion and partaking of supper. He wanted to get home, to hide his diminished head. He would settle with Spalding later.

Yet the settlement was to be deferred for a longer period than he dreamt of at that moment.

CHAPTER VI.

It will be remembered that Montagu Goldstein had given Mark Spalding a week in which to find the fifty pounds due to the rapacious money-lender. The time duly came round, but of Spalding there was no sign. Goldstein began to get uneasy. At last he resolved upon the extreme course of seeking out Anthony Spalding, Mark's father, and laying his claim before him.

On the evening of the day on which Mark was to have appeared with the needful money Montagu dressed himself in his best, and sallied forth with no slight feeling of misgiving for his interview with the wealthy mill-owner. He sent in his card, and was ushered into a splendidly appointed library. He had hardly had time to take in his magnificent surroundings when the door opened and a tall, grey-haired old gentleman, with keen eyes and hooked nose, entered.

Goldstein rose and made a profound salutation.

"To what am I indebted for your visit?" said the merchant curtly.

"It is about your son," answered the money-lender.

"About my son! What have you got to do with him?"

"Only that he owes me a matter of fifty pounds, and that I have come for a settlement," answered Goldstein, assuming a boldness he was far from feeling.

"Oh, he owes you fifty pounds, does he? Well, and how do you propose getting it?"

Goldstein began to bluster. "It's a fair and square piece of business," he said; "and if the money is not forthcoming, well, I shall have to see what the law can do for me."

"Then I advise you to go to law about it," was the cool answer. "I tell you I have washed my hands of Mr. Mark Spalding. I'm not a fool, Mr. Goldstein. I have taken the precaution to make myself in no way responsible for my son's debts. And as regards your getting the money, well I believe my son borrowed money off you at an extortionate rate of interest. Here's a letter for you to read that may give you some food for reflection." And he took a note from his pocket-book and handed it across to the infuriated money-lender. And this is what Goldstein read:

"My dear Father,—When this note reaches you I shall be far away. I have gone to London to enlist as a soldier. I grieve to tell you that I have got into difficulties over card-playing—a fact which I know will make you very bitter against me. I owe Montagu Goldstein, the money-lender, fifty pounds. I can't pay him, and I have other debts, so I thought the best thing I could do was to go away and see if I couldn't do better in the service of the King. Hoping you will forgive me, I am, your affectionate and sorrowful son—Mark Spalding."

The letter fluttered out of Goldstein's nerveless fingers on to the carpet. The older Spalding's eyes never left the other's face.

"But surely," muttered Goldstein feebly, "you won't let a poor man suffer this loss."

The adamant old man looked at his watch.

"I think this interview has lasted quite long enough, Mr. Goldstein," he said coldly. "I have the pleasure to wish you a very good night."

He pressed an electric-bell button in the wall. In a moment an austere man-servant answered the summons.

"Kindly show Mr. Goldstein out, Collins," said the merchant. And there was no course left to Mr. Montague Goldstein but to slink away discomfited, tail beneath his legs, liked a whipped cur.

Thus ended an episode in which Hazel Harlow had, unconsciously as far as she was concerned, played so important a part. It is needless to say that Goldstein never saw a penny of his fifty pounds, and the event, as it turned out, proved Mark Spalding's redemption. He served for five years as a common soldier, and then his father—his heart relenting with advancing years—bought him out and reinstated him in a position of trust in his own business. And Mark Spalding never regretted the years he had spent "with the colours."

Hazel had, of course, told Jenny the true story of how she had been entrapped by Manners, and of course Raymond Venables became acquainted with the story as well. This being the case, it was of small moment that among the rank and file of the company the story of the supper-party, as related by Dorothy Lestrange, did Hazel but little harm in the eyes of her intimates.

The better-minded members of the company listened to the garbled version of the story, chuckled over it, and speedily forgot it. If Venables had had his own way he would have given Dorothy Lestrange her *conge*, but it was Hazel herself who begged him not to adopt this course.

"It would be like an admission of guilt on my part," she said; "for of course they would all think that you had been influenced by me, and that I wanted to be rid of the one who knew a story so greatly to my discredit. I am quite ready to live the affair down, Mr. Venables, for, after all, I have nothing to blame myself with."

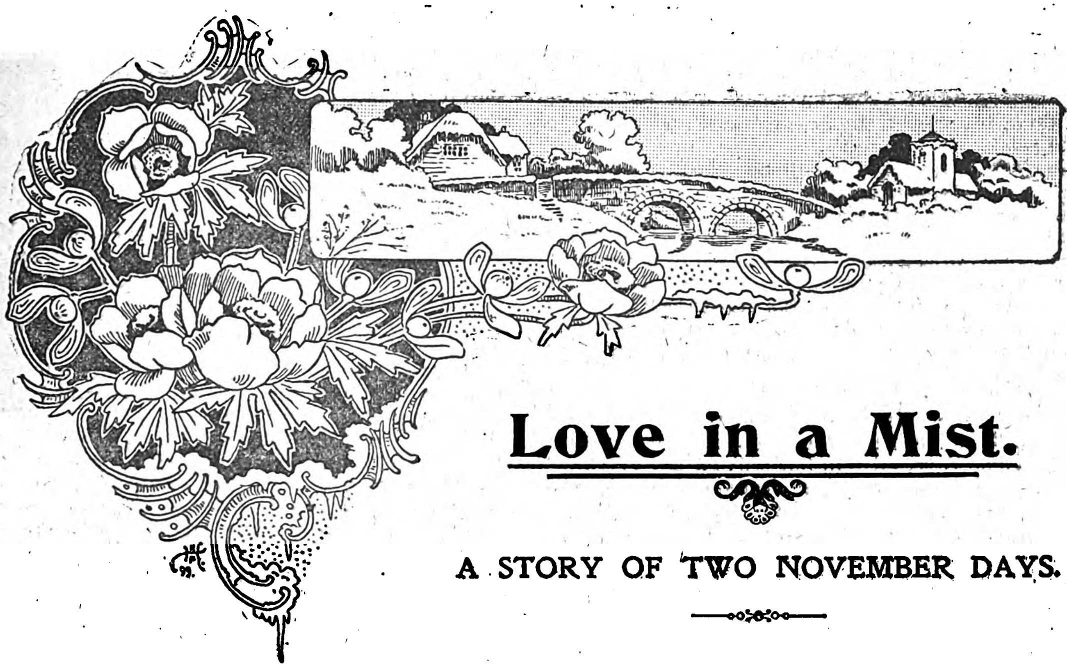
And when the knowledge of this came to Dorothy Lestrange's ears it did not, as might reasonably have been expected, make her change her views as regards her antipathy to Hazel.

"If ever I get the chance," she said, when talking to her other lady friends of the Company, "I'll get even with Miss Hazel. If she hadn't been so straight-laced I should have got a jolly good thing out of that young fool Manners. He promised me anything I liked if I helped him to score off our sanctified lead; and you know, dears, it was really she who suggested the supper-party, for all that she said."

Thus did the baffled actress seek to work out the revenge that she had promised herself against her more favoured and infinitely more honourable fellow-actress.

Next week Manchester is to be the scene of the *Good Samaritan* Company's triumphant tour. Here the company was to be treated to a strange and unpleasant surprise—a surprise due to the envy and malice of a rival touring company, who had been impressed by the triumph due to Hazel Harlow's personality.

Can you play "Hunt the Fiver?" See Editor's Page.



Love in a Mist.

A STORY OF TWO NOVEMBER DAYS.

CHAPTER I.

MY NAME IS CHRISTINA FENTON.

"BY Jove, Granger, it is thick and no mistake! Don't I wish I was up in our two-back-pair at Mrs. B.'s, contemplating a bright fire and a glass of something warm. Instead of which I shall be stuck here for another hour or so—these plans must be finished to-night. I wish you were sharing the job with me. If I don't turn up at supper, you'll know I've got lost in the fog on my way home."

The maker of this announcement laid down a long, finely-sharpened pencil, picked up a delicate pen, and began to work at the sheet of crisp paper pinned on to his drawing-board, whistling a gay air the while.

"Never mind, my dear Leslie," he was told soothingly; "the fire and something warm shall be arranged for, providing I don't go astray myself."

Maurice Granger glanced from the casement near which his companion sat—at a long table illuminated by a trio of green-shaded gas-brackets. Below was a usually crowded thoroughfare, hidden at present by a dense brown wall of fog. Through it neither street lamp nor the lights of the shops were able to penetrate. Even the roar of the traffic was dulled to a ghostly murmur.

"Nice boy!" said Mr. Jack—otherwise John Leslie—as he stroked in a solid section on the elevation he was completing. "What a blessing you are to me! I'm mortally afraid of your falling in love, and then farewell to our bachelor friendship, our study of the Elizabethan drama, our cycling, our pipes of peace, in short, our idyllic state of male existence."

"Rubbish!" retorted his ally, donning a smart Raglan of gray frieze, and lifting his bowler hat from its peg; "I've seen prettier faces in Canada than ever I hope to see among your stunted, anæmic townsfolk; and as they didn't soften my heart towards the sweet sex I don't expect an Englishwoman to do it."

"Boaster!" said the other; "well, be off, and don't forget the fire and the toddy. You'll be safe from Cupid's arrow in this fog, at all events, for there's no seeing a bright eye or a trim ankle in the pea-soup mixture the clerk of the weather has served up to us for air."

Maurice buttoned his gloves, took his umbrella, and crossed the lofty room. Only he and his friend had remained out of the half-dozen draughtsmen who worked for the famous engineering concern which had given to the riverside town of Groudle its chief source of prosperity.

"I say," cried Mr. Jack Leslie, twisting in his chair as Maurice Granger reached to the handle of the door; "you might lay in a few cigarettes, we're quite out, I know. None of your Turkish for me, though—mine's the right navy-cut, and medium, you absent-minded rascal; the last you stocked were mild, and I like to taste my tobacco."

"It shall be done as my lord commands," replied Maurice, stepping out on to the dusky flight that descended to the huge yard at the back of the soot-grimed house sacred to the draughtsmen and the designers of the Groudle Steel Company.

The vast stretch of irregular ground, littered with disused boilers, orderly heaps of scrap-iron, girders, engine-beds, and a thousand other forms of rusty metal was invisible. The fog covered it with a bewildering veil.

Maurice found the path to the exit, said good-evening to the porter, and swung off into the oppressive yellow haze. It was his first experience of an English fog. Born in the Dominion—as Canadians love to call it—he had lived there for twenty-three years, of infancy, youth, and early manhood. But at last, alone in the world, with a profession in his fingers, common to most civilised countries, he had been seized by a passion to behold those little islands on the coast of Europe from which so many lands have been peopled. He had ended by packing a kit-bag, drawing the few hundred dollars he had saved, and booking his passage on a Montreal liner. Six months later he was installed at the Groudle Steel Company's yard, the bosom friend and partner of Jack Leslie.

Many things drifted through his mind as he strode along; he was beginning to sicken of the English winter, the thought of the Canadian one came back to him with an irresistible appeal. He heard again in imagination the chime of the sleigh-bells, and the pistol-shot crack of the whip, sniffed the keen, pine scented atmosphere, heard the whine and yelp of the careering dogs. The fog stifled him and stung his face like the fumes of an acid, he muttered a malediction upon the weather of the Old Country, and there rose in his mind a project of returning to the Dominion with the ensuing summer.

He had walked on for three-quarters of a mile—mechanically following, as he imagined, his habitual route. Vehicles passed him but seldom, the pavements were deserted, the town seemed dead—smothered by the overpowering pressure of the fog.

Suddenly Maurice Granger halted; he had awakened to the fact that he was in an unfamiliar locality. A sharp rise in the ground warned him that he was ascending a hilly road, bordered, he could just discern, with closed shops. He struck a vesta and consulted his watch—it was ten o'clock.

"The deuce!" he exclaimed. "I must have been confoundedly late leaving the yard. Leslie, poor beggar, won't get home till the small hours. When I shall arrive there depends upon where I have wandered to. How on earth am I to find out?"

As he propounded this query, he glanced around him, seeking to penetrate the ocean of mist in which he had been moving. A dim patch of radiance shone dimly through the haze. It proceeded from the other side of the street; he went over to it, trusting it might prove an establishment where he might inquire the best way to his lodgings.

His wish was gratified; the illumination arose from a cigar-divan, the neatest and most diminutive he had ever beheld. Scarcely wider than the hall-way of an ordinary dwelling-house, the shop was sandwiched between tall and shuttered neighbours; matting ornamented its strip of floor, a settee fronted the counter, the window held a picturesque display of tobaccos, and, to crown all, a pretty attendant was visible beyond the amber plush curtains, reading a bulky novel.

Maurice Granger recollected Jack Leslie's commission and entered the place. Its custodian started and sprang up.

"I—I'm afraid I alarmed you," said the young Canadian smiling; "sort of absorbed in your book, eh?"

The girl flushed.

"Y—yes," she stammered; "there's been no one in for such a while that I fancy I had slipped into another world. What—what can I get for you?"

Her customer glanced at her critically; she had spoken in a soft and cultivated tone that deepened the impression her appearance had made upon him. She was dark-eyed and dark-haired, with a clear complexion, and her figure, though disguised by her loose blouse of black silk, was sweet and dainty.

"Well," answered Maurice thoughtfully, "I want a large box of navy-cut cigarettes, medium strength, and half a pound of your best Turkish—Diplome Regie, if you have them. Also I should be glad if you could tell me where I am?"

The attendant turned from the shelf whence she was lifting the enamelled box of navy-cut, to stare at him. She checked herself and laughed.

"Oh, the fog!" she said, commencing to weigh the second item of his order. "Why, you're at Pike Hill, in the north-end of Groudle."

The Canadian whistled.

"Am I?" he exclaimed; "that is curious. I struck out for Clubmoor. I am only about two miles out of my course. I see your fogs are as bad as the Dominion blizzards."

"The Dominion!" repeated the girl; "you are a Canadian?"

Maurice nodded; he had caught a cigarette from the scale-pan, and was lighting it. "Certainly," he said. "Have you friends out there?"

"Lots!" was the answer; "why, I am a Canadian myself. But I came to England when I was quite a child. I have always promised myself to go back, though."

Her customer leaned on the counter interested. "I have only been a year in the Old Country," he responded, "but I am pining to sight Montreal again. Oh, for a swift team and a box-sleigh on the Lafayette Road, or an ice-yacht on the St. Lawrence. This isn't weather, it's pea-soup."

The youthful tobacconist sighed.

"I remember the sleighing," she said. We lived near Lafayette, by the saw-mills."

"Did you?" cried Maurice Granger, "my dad had a stake in those confounded mills. They were burned in the big strike."

"I was a tiny mite then," said the girl, putting the Diplome Regies into a tissue-paper bag; "but I have heard that time talked of. My uncle was a foreman there and helped to lead in the strike."

"And my father helped to suppress it," answered Maurice; "how strange it seems, and how queer that you and I should be standing in far-off England talking about it! Thank you! I'll put some of those in my case, if you don't mind."

He produced a silver receptacle and began to fill each compartment, peeping covertly at the girl behind the counter. He noticed that she had firm, white hands, and that there were no rings on them.

"Don't you think we ought to introduce ourselves?" he ventured; "we may have met before in Lafayette, as kiddies, but that don't count. I'm Maurice Granger: won't you let me know who you are?"

The girl flushed, and lowered her eyes—two womanly hazel pupils.

"My name is Christina Fenton," she said.

Maurice raised his hat.

"Your servant, Miss Fenton," he replied. What more he would have added must remain doubtful, for a shuffling footstep sounded in the shop, and he moved from the counter that the young tobacconist might deal with her fresh patron.

The newcomer was a bent, grey-bearded fellow of some fifty winters. He wore a shabby great-coat, a broad brimmed felt, and supported himself on a stout stick as he walked. By his wide, blue, expressionless orbs Maurice perceived that he was blind. His features were harsh and sullen, his fingers bony and knotted.

"Evening, my lass," he said; "got the usual ready for me?" He slipped a rubber pouch from his pocket and held it out. Christina took it and proceeded to replenish it with a coarse, pungent shag.

Read "Dead to the World."

"It's very foggy to-night, uncle," she observed. The visitor drew forth a florin, tossed it on the mahogany, and possessed himself of the pouch.

"Bah!" he growled, "what is fog to me? I know my way about this dog-hole of a town as well as if I had my sight—my sight that was stolen from me. What are fog or sun, day or night to such as I?"

Christina put the change into his withered palm. "Let bygones be bygones, uncle," she begged; "you will only excite yourself."

The blind man beat his staff upon the floor, and set his mouth to speak. But Christina prevented him.

"This is my uncle, Mr. Granger," she said; "my uncle William. Here is a gentleman, uncle, a customer, that used to live at Lafayette. We were talking—of—of Canada when you interrupted us."

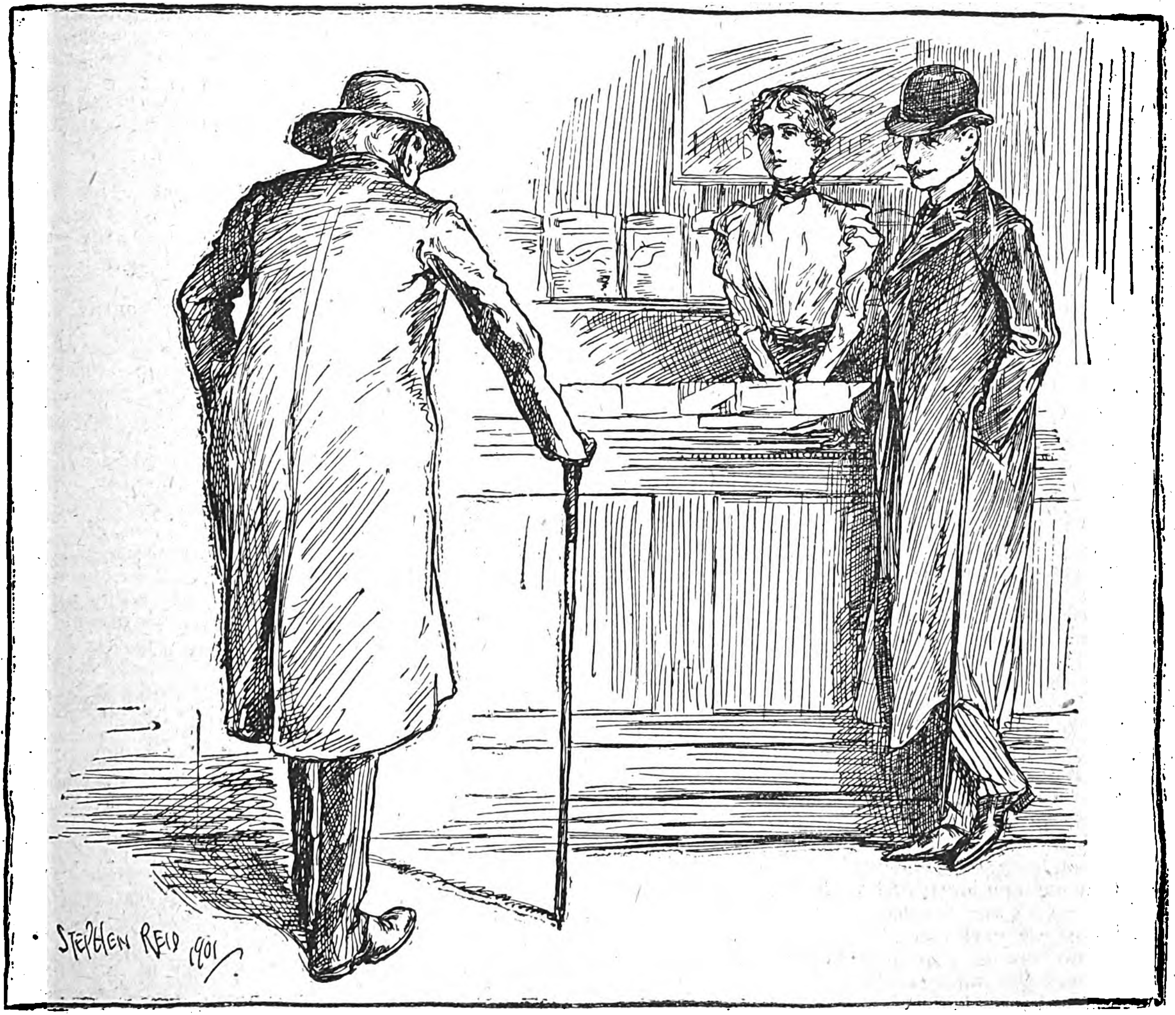
"A curse on Canada!" hissed the bearded lips; "and a bigger on Lafayette. It was there I was deprived of my sight, sir," he added, "by a whip-lash as laid open both my eyeballs. I was leading a strike at the Lafayette Lumber Mills, and a party of the owners combined to protect the machinery. Firearms were unpopular, so they used cowhide whips on us."

"*You* were attacking the machinery, I presume?" said Maurice.

The blind man drew himself together as if he had been struck, and his visage contorted hideously. The next moment it had relaxed into a hypocritical grin.

"Quite so, quite so," he quavered; "all's fair in love and war, and I'm not complaining—not complaining. On the contrary, I am cheerful and resigned, aren't I, Chrissie?"

"Yes, uncle, yes," declared his niece gently, and motioned to Maurice as though to warn him against continuing the subject. He assented with a mute glance of sympathy, and deposited upon the counter a



The newcomer was a bent, grey-bearded fellow of some fifty years.

Can you play "Hunt the Fiver"? See Editor's Page.

suggestive sovereign—he had not yet paid for his purchases.

"You might direct me to Clubmoor," he remarked; "whether I shall be able to follow your directions in this fog is another matter."

"Clubmoor!" broke in the blind man eagerly; "I live in that direction. Let me show you the road, sir. I have the map of Groudle in my head and fog and midnight do not affect it an iota. You may trust me, indeed, sir, and I shall esteem it an honour to guide a gentleman from the Dominion. Your name, my niece said, was Granger. I fancy, sir, I have known the name over yonder."

"Maurice Granger is mine," was the response, "and I am much obliged for your offer, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Fenton, sir," supplied the other; "William Fenton, Christina is my own brother's child. Then I may have the pleasure of piloting you through the fog, sir?" His wizened, deferential visage twitched oddly as he put the question.

"I should be very much relieved," answered Maurice, "if I were not interfering with your visit to Miss Fenton. Besides, she will need your escort as much and more than I!"

Christina Fenton looked at a timepiece on an Oriental cabinet at the extremity of the counter.

"It is half-past ten, and no use a night like this in wasting gas. I shall close the shop, uncle, and you can take me home as well as Mr. Granger; it is all on your way."

"That's a clever lass," cried the blind man with effusive readiness. "She's perfectly correct, Mr. Granger, perfectly. It's no trouble whatever, not in the least. Hurry up and make all snug, Chrissie, my girl."

Maurice hesitated. But there was something in the charm of Chrissie's shapely little figure and her quick movements to and fro about the shop, as she addressed herself to the task of closing, that decided him to accept the opportunity of spending a further half-hour in her company. Also, to be honest, he had not the remotest idea of the route to his own particular quarter of the town.

At this moment Christina brought out a hooked pole, and would have tripped out to have pulled down the shutter above the window. But Maurice appropriated the instrument and performed the operation himself. Their intending escort had sunk into the lounge and listened silently.

"I'm proving a great nuisance to you," Maurice managed to murmur, as he restored the pole to its niche.

"Not at all," she assured him; "uncle William often takes me part of the way home. I live at Weaste Park, close to Clubmoor, and he comes up here to a crony of his to play chess." And with this decisive explanation she jumped up to extinguish the lights.

Soon the last jet was put out, the door of the shop drawn to and secured, and the three Canadians, so singularly encountered, strode off, the blind pilot marching in the van. The temperature had fallen and the ground was slippery with frozen vapour. Once or twice Maurice had to support Miss Christina Fenton—he appreciated the privilege absurdly.

From street to street their leader stalked, his head at a peculiar bird-like angle, his beard shaking with the motions of his jaws as he muttered to himself. Maurice and Christina exchanged few sentences, a species of constraint had seized them in an embarrassing grip.

At length the blind man halted. "You go down here, Chrissie," he said; "good-night to you, my lass."

Christina Fenton glanced at her young compatriot.

"Good-night, uncle," she rejoined; "good-night, Mr. Granger. Uncle will see that you get home all right."

"I am much obliged to him and to you," returned Maurice, "though the fog has lifted, and I recognise my whereabouts perfectly." He lowered his voice. "We shall meet again, Miss Fenton," he faltered, extending his hand.

Christina laughed and touched it shyly.

"If you patronise my shop," she said, and ran off in the diminishing haze.

The blind man moved on sombrely with Maurice Granger, nor could he be induced to talk except in monosyllables.

Maurice had told him the necessary address and he steered for it unerringly. At a garden gate he paused, correct even to the number of the house—he had counted it from the street-end. His charge pressed a couple of half-crowns into his fingers, and weilding a dexterous latch-key, gained an illuminated hall.

When the click of the lock reached the blind man's ear, he poised the silver pieces, flung them, with a terrible oath, far into the misty night, and stumped on, mumbling in his beard.

Maurice, unwitting of this singular action, arranged for Mr. Jack's Leslie fire and spirituous refreshment—that gentleman not having, as yet, reached home—and went to bed, to dream of Miss Christina Fenton.

CHAPTER II.

"A Drop of Brandy, Quick!"

"Maurice, you're confoundedly moony—I haven't been able to get a word out of you all day, and now you've had your dinner I suppose you're going to sit there and glower at me for the rest of the evening. What is it? You're as fit as a fidddle, you don't owe anyone a sou, and you're not in love. Hang it, man, wake up and be sociable!"

Jack Leslie grasped a squat "bull-dog" pipe, after the manner of a revolver, and levelled it threateningly.

The recipient of his demand lit another cigarette, "Diplome Regie, Superfine," and smiled, indulgently.

"I've no trouble that I know of," he responded; "sorry I'm dull, Jack, old boy, but the fact is I was thinking of Canada; in imagination I was driving a team of bays and a box-sleigh, with bells and a red snow-net, through the moonlight. Fine things for flirting in, Jack, those sleighs. You lounge on springs, muffled in furs to your neck, and with a peaked cap pulled over your forehead, while a dear little somebody leans against you, and soft orbs look up into yours. Heigho!" and Maurice sighed sentimentally.

The listener leapt to his feet.

"Maurice Granger!" he cried, "you're in love—you've been winged, for a thousand. Confess, confess; when, and how did it happen. Why, you haven't been out of my sight for a week, except last night, and you were all right then. Besides, it was too thick to tell a pretty girl from a hag."

He pointed the pipe at his friend. "Nevertheless," he said solemnly, "you had better describe in detail your movements yesterday evening. You told me a fantastic story of your being lost in the fog, and guided here by a blind man. Were you stuffing me? was that blind man the little blind god of love, and did he lead you astray instead of homewards?"

"Oh, go to the dickens!" grumbled the Canadian; "can't a fellow see a sweet face, and enjoy the recollection of it at his leisure without being subjected to an absurd cross-examination when he wants to be quiet?"

"Great heavens!" moaned Jack Leslie; "he has all the worst symptoms. A sweet face, enjoyment in recollecting same, desire for solitude and meditation. Maurice, my poor chap, you've got it bad. I will prescribe for you; regard me as your doctor from this moment. Be perfectly frank with me. Firstly, her name, secondly, her complexion, thirdly, the colour of her eyes. The least evasion, and you are beyond hope."

Half-amused, half angry, Maurice Granger snatched a cushion to hurl at his tormentor. It flew athwart the room, propelled by a powerful arm, and landed full on the bosom of a lean yet dignified person in a rusty black dress, who had at that precise instant, opened the door of the apartment. She reeled and sank into a seat.

Maurice sprang to her side, followed by the cause of the catastrophe.

"My dear Mrs. Boldero," he said, "a million apologies. I was trying to dot Leslie, who has been behaving like a idiot, and the unchivalrous rascal dodged. Are you hurt?"

The astonished landlady recovered her breath and her equanimity in the same moment. Flattered by discovering that she was supported upon the breast of the repentant Jack, and that Maurice was bending filially over her, she beamed upon them.

"Not me," she gushed, "only took aback, as you may say, Mr. Granger. I came to tell you that there is an old blind man asking for you downstairs, and that huzzy of a maid of mine being on her afternoon off—which she should have turned in an hour ago—I fetched his message myself. It was that a Miss Fenton—the young lady you met last night, he did say—was wishful to see you, if you would step round."

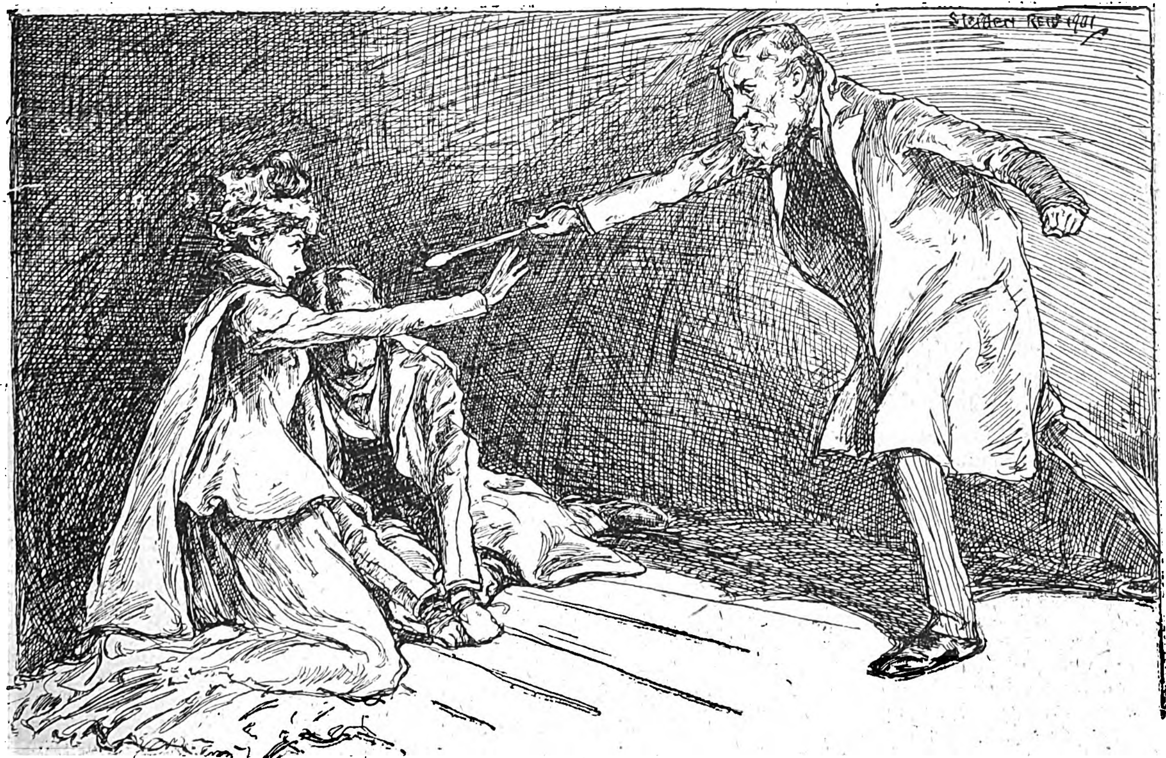
Mr. Jack Leslie whistled shrilly, and executed an impromptu war dance. Mrs. Boldero regarded him maternally.

"What sperrits you have, sir," she said; "but there, I must be off to my darning, for the laundry is in and Mr. Leslie's socks are riddles for holes."

"Wait till they give me Granger's salary," retorted that person unabashed; "one must economise somewhere."

When the scrawny but cheerful Mrs. Boldero had departed, Leslie proceeded to draw on his boots, and don his coat and hat.

"I'm going to accompany you, Maurice," he announced, "trust me not to spoil your fun. But I must gaze



He advanced to her, thrusting the iron in front of him.

Read "Dead to the World."

respectfully upon the fair countenance that has robbed me of my more than brother."

Maurice protested in vain; he and his friend descended the stairs together. The Canadian was racking his brain for an explanation of this unexpected message from Miss Christina Fenton. He had been round by the little cigar-divan on his way home from the yard, but the shutter was down and the place dark. On the iron outer gate a curt intimation had saluted him. "This establishment closes at five o'clock on Wednesday." And Maurice had cursed his luck, for it was Wednesday and no other.

Could that disappointment have any connection with his summons she had sent him by her uncle. And, in any case, was it—he had to confront the question—quite, quite maidenly to favour him with that summons when, as yet, they had met on but a single occasion? So reflecting, he reached the hall, and recognised the bent, though muscular, frame of Mr. William Fenton.

"Good-evening, sir," he said, as soon as Maurice had gained the lowest step, and giving him no time to speak, added. "Pray pardon my disturbing you, sir, but Chrissie, my niece, sir, desired me to fetch you—if you would be kind enough to permit me—to her mother's house. She has—she has had an accident—she—she is dying, sir."

He covered his wrinkled cheeks with his large hands and choked huskily. "You were chatting of Canada with her yesterday," he went on, "and of being from Lafayette. She knows you for a real gentleman, sir, and I fancy she desires you to serve her in some small way."

Maurice gazed at him. "Dying!" he repeated; "dying! It seems impossible. You'll come with me, Leslie?" he said, glancing at his ally; "you may be able to help; she must have the best doctor in Groudle, Jack—she's a Canadian—from my own place. I—I hoped we—we should be—friends."

The last part of his sentence was murmured in a sorrowful aside as he opened the heavy street door. The fog had continued for some thirty-six hours, alternately thinning and deepening; now it was thick and suffocating.

Preserving the silence into which he had so suddenly lapsed, the blind man led them over a portion of the route along which, the preceding night, he had piloted his niece and youthful compatriot.

"What sort of an accident has Miss Fenton sustained?" asked Maurice gently.

"A 'bus was upset this morning in the fog on Pike Hill," explained their guide, "and Chrissie was in it. She was cut about with the glass, sir."

"But surely they took her to the hospital?" responded Maurice, amazed.

"So they did, sir," allowed the blind man; "and it was decided that her wounds were not dangerous. She was brought home in a cab and put to bed. But it seems she was hurt internally, and she's had a bad turn this afternoon."

Mr. William Fenton heaved a great sigh and stumped onward through the haze. Maurice was wrestling with the realisation that the slender figure of Christina was now maimed and agonised, her grave proud features white and bandaged, her gentle life nearing an untimely close. His vague interest in her seemed, in a flash, to have become a passion.

They had reached the dark street down which Christina had flitted the night before. Their escort walked down it unerringly, chose a bye-path, and commenced to twist this way and that among narrow thoroughfares.

As they passed a dingy block of dwellings—low and cramped—their guide tottered and lost his balance, doubling up limply. Maurice caught at him and broke his fall.

"A drop of brandy, quick," whispered the blind man, sinking to the ground; "it's my heart—I often have it. Oh, I'm ill, I'm ill!"

"Get some spirits, Leslie," said Maurice hastily, propping the grey head upon his shoulder; "brandy, whiskey, anything. Heart-failure is a horrible affair, and the old chap's had a bad shock over his niece."

Jack Leslie hurried off, looking for licensed premises of some sort, and Maurice raised his patient to a more comfortable position.

The blind man groped in his pocket and pulled out a key. "The house is Number Eleven," he faltered, "the next one on this side; here's the key. Help me in quietly; they're all with—with Chrissie."

"Very well," said Maurice, a little staggered by this accumulation of unusual events. "I suppose I can keep an eye out of the doorway for Jack—Mr. Leslie."

He clasped the passive frame in his arms, bore it to the indicated portal, rested it on one knee to make use of the key, and carried it in.

Unexpectedly his drooping burden became vigorous, active, powerful. A kick from a dextorous foot, slammed the door, and Maurice Granger, throttled, mastered, tripped up, reeled backwards to the ground.

CHAPTER III.

The Iron and the Ring.

"Good-evening, uncle, may I come in for a moment?"

Christina Fenton asked the question, and she stood upon the threshold of a small dark passage, across which a street-lamp, glimmering through the fog, sent a few rays of uncertain light. The little tobacconist was warmly cloaked against the penetrating mist, her bright glance flashed from under a fur toque, and her curved lips and dainty nostrils were covered by a fleecy wrap.

The blind man had answered her summons, belatedly, and now hesitated in the entrance of his dwelling. Christina, however, did not wait for a formal assent to her query, but tripped into the lobby and stepped over a worn woollen mat into a bare kitchen.

In this apartment there was a chair or two, a table, and a dresser, by way of furniture, but neither, carpet, picture, or other decoration. No fire shone in the high grate, though the choking ash betrayed that it was frequently used. A single source of radiance illuminated the chamber—an iron gas-ring, connected with the hanging chandelier by a length of rubber piping. Upon it was heating a brazing-iron, such as plumbers employ to smooth their leaden joints; its red glow threw a lurid tint into the air.

"Gracious!" cried Christina, "what are you doing?" Her uncle had followed her from the door, which, however, he left open suggestively.

"I—I was just about to stop a trifling leak, my dear," said the blind man; "wait till I get you a light—you're not as handy as I am in the dark."

He struck a match, put it to the wick of a lamp, and adjusted the chimney. "You wanted to see me with reference to some matter?" he inquired nervously,

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looking from side to side of the apartment with a curious, twitching impatience.

"Y—yes," said his niece; "that gentleman you showed home last night, he—he left a cigarette-case at the shop. I thought if you remembered the—the address, I could write to him."

William Fenton rubbed his large palms together.

"Oh, I am sorry," he said; "the fog lifted, you know, my dear, and we parted before he reached home. He—he did tell me he had only a short distance further to go, but I didn't gather the actual address. How unfortunate!"

"How unfortunate!" echoed Christina, dispiritedly, sitting down on one of the rough deal chairs; "never mind, perhaps he will think where he lost it and come again."

"Let us hope so, Chrissie," answered the blind man, fidgeting; "but hadn't you better get back, dear? This is no weather for you to be out."

"I suppose I ought to," said Christina, and she rose to act on the implied advice. As she crossed the floor there was a sudden crack, the noise of rending wood and separating hinges, and she started aside to escape the falling frame and panels of a door that closed a cupboard by the fireplace. From its dusky depths rolled a masculine figure, gagged and bound. Christina shrieked. It was Maurice Granger, and he lay at her very feet.

Her uncle heard the clamour of the burst door and interpreted the significance of Christina's shriek. Flinging himself towards the brazing-iron, he caught it up and flourished it.

"Stand out of my road, girl!" he bade her; "I've trapped him with a clever tale about you, and I'm going to have my revenge. His father was the fiend as lashed my eyes out. I knew him by his voice yesterday, and the fool gave me his other name to make sure. Stand clear and let me blind the son as old Maurice Granger blinded me. I'd have done it before this if you hadn't interrupted me and made me have to hide him in that rotten locker."

Christina Fenton dropped on her knees and caught the pinioned form in her arms. "You shan't!" she cried, horror-stricken; "I won't let you. Uncle, are you mad?"

"Yes," hissed the blind man; "mad with a twenty years' grudge. Curse you, Chrissie, stand back, or I'll brand you."

He advanced to her, thrusting the iron in front of him. Christina clasped the head of Maurice Granger, burying his eyes in her soft bosom, and screamed out wildly in that awful woman's cry for help which he who has once heard will never forget.

The cry met with a prompt response. Christina felt the glow of the white-hot metal near her cheek and then it was whisked away, as Jack Leslie, springing three yards at a bound, leant over the crouching Christina and planted a blow on the blind man's chin that stretched him unconscious upon his own hearth.

* * * * *

When the liberated Maurice and the astounded Leslie picked up William Fenton he was laughing to himself, with odd crowing sounds of pleasure, like those of a young child. To-day he sits in an armchair in a great Southern lunatic asylum, making the same noises and laughing in the same grim way.

"*S—sh!*" he will say sometimes; "I did it—I did it! That's a secret. *S—sh!* Blind as a bat both of us; one blind man debit, one blind man credit, another account balanced in the Big Book. *S—sh!* not a word, not a word, it's a secret!"

Christina and Maurice are married. The little tobacconist resigned her position a month after her exciting experience under the blind man's roof. They have returned to Canada—to Lafayette. Jack Leslie spent a month with them a year or two after their wedding, and there was sleighing and ice-yachting and snow-shoe parties, and all the winter gaieties of the Dominion.

When Mr. John Leslie returned to England, he brought with him—on Maurice's behalf—a draft for a thousand dollars. This he paid subsequently into the savings' bank account of a smart young labourer. It was Maurice Granger's acknowledgement of the fact that, on the momentous night when Jack Leslie ran hither and thither through the streets of Groudle, seeking his vanished friend, the said young labourer had directed him, with unusual intelligence, to William Fenton's dwelling. What that information prevented we can guess.

At times, when the white snow-fogs descend on the wintry roads of the Dominion, and Maurice checks his team to draw the great sleigh-robe protectingly round his wife's shoulders, he will sigh and smile, and end by whispering:

"This is like old times, dearest. You remember we first learned to love one another in a mist!"

JUST OUT. . . .

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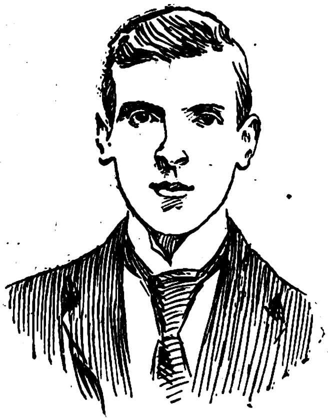

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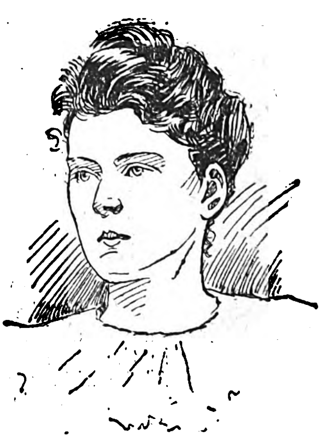

No. 22.

He: "Your life shall be filled with sunshine." She: "Yes; but how about lamplight? Can you undertake to keep the oil-can filled?"

Sybil: "What a lovely little watch!" Millicent: "Yes, I bought it for Frances as a wedding present, and I liked it so much that I kept it for myself."

Mary: "Mebbe I'm ugly now, mum, but in my day I've broken a great many hearts." Mistress: "Well, Mary, if you handled the hearts the way you do my best china, I believe you."

He: "For some time past I have been thinking——" She: "Oh! I wondered what was the cause of that strange look upon your features. I had never seen it before."

First Passenger: "I wonder why we are making such a long stop at this station." Second (a traveller of experience): "I presume it is because no one happens to be trying to catch the train."

"I am here, gentlemen," explained the pickpocket to his fellow prisoners, "as the result of a moment of abstraction." "And I," said the incendiary, "because of an unfortunate habit of making light of things." "And I," chimed in the forger, "on account of a simple desire to make a name for myself." "And I," added the burglar, "through nothing but taking advantage of an opening which offered in a large mercantile establishment in town."

In a first class carriage in Germany an Englishman was observed to be constantly putting his head out of the window. The train was going very quickly, and a sudden gust of wind blew off his hat. With a somewhat strong expression, he seized his hat-box and hurled it after his hat. Then he sat down and smiled on his fellow passengers, but of course, did not speak. The Germans roared with laughter, and one of them, indulging in an expletive, exclaimed: "You don't expect your hat-box to bring your hat back to you, do you?" "I do," said the Englishman. "No name on the hat—full name and address on the box. They'll be found together, and I shall get both. Don't you see?" The Germans were satisfied, and said they always had considered the English a great and practical nation.

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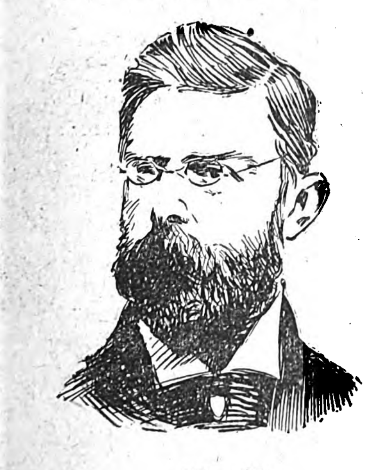

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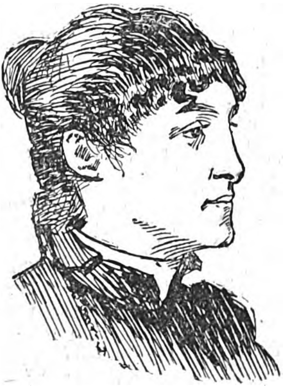

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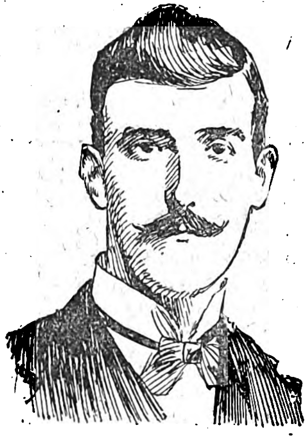


No. 25.

The Cost of a Portrait.

By JOHN DE MORGAN.

"Is it not wonderful?"

"I never saw anything to equal it. Don't talk to me of the old masters after that. I tell you the man's fortune is made."

"Who is he?"

"I do not know. Some American, let me see though, I have heard his name before. Not in our set you know. Poor fellow, good family, but deucedly poor."

"He won't be poor long. That portrait will make his fortune."

Three Americans stood gazing at a portrait hung on the walls of a Paris saloon. It was the portrait of a young, lovely girl, fresh with the bloom of innocence, charming, because perfectly natural. The portrait had become the talk of Paris, and soon would be of the world, for there was a fascination about it which one seldom sees in a modern portrait. In the corner of the canvas was the name of Gerald Manton, a name unknown to fame until then.

As the three men passed on some of the fairer sex took a position in front of the portrait.

"Who is she?" asked one.

"Don't you know? Why Emmeline Grandin, the multi-millionaire's daughter."

"What, Grandin the brewer?"

"Yes. Hush, she is close by. I wish he would paint my portrait I'd give—"

"Come along, you are not a brewer's daughter."

The girls turned away and made room for Emmeline Grandin, who stood blushing as she heard the compliments of her companion, a penniless English peer, who had offered her a title in exchange for herself and a goodly portion of her father's millions.

"You think the portrait a good one?" she asked.

"It is superb! It is glorious! By Jove, I should say the fellow must have been inspired. I must get him to paint me."

While the city rung with praises of the marvellous piece of work and the wealthiest in the land were ready to pay their thousands to have the same artist immortalise them on canvas, but few knew of the tragedy behind that painting.

One year before, Emmeline Grandin had met Gerald Manton in the salon of one of the city's proudest art patrons.

Manton was handsome, witty, talented, and just such a man to inspire a girl with love. She was young, wealthy, ambitious, and a coquette.

The two Americans met frequently, their friendship seemed to grow in intensity. On his side it was love, a love which was all-absorbing, a love which filled his thoughts by day and lived in his dreams by night. On her side, well, it was difficult to see beneath the surface, and only in the privacy of her own boudoir did she ever ask herself how she felt towards him.

Often he had expressed a desire to paint her portrait, but she had only laughed at him, and told him that he would not be in love with a picture of her because it would lack animation, and "really" she said, "I am not pretty when in repose."

A day came at last when her mood changed and she consented.

"You really will sit for me? You are an angel!"

"I know that, Mr. Manton. I have been told that so many times, but it is not an angel I want you to paint, but just plain, every-day Emmeline Grandin."

"When may I have the first sitting?"

"Any time, whenever you please."

"To-morrow?"

"I shall be engaged all day to-morrow, but the next day at eleven, will that suit you?"

"Excellently well. I shall count the minutes until then."

"Do not be silly!"

Punctually at the appointed hour she presented herself at the studio. She was an American girl, and, as her mother was engaged, she dispensed with a chaperon and went alone.

The portrait progressed slowly. The artist became deeper in love with her. His passion was almost too much for him. The studio lost all charm when she was away.

One day his hand shook so that he could not paint, and she asked him most sympathetically, if he were sick. That little question unnerved him. He could not restrain himself longer. He poured forth the story of his love, of the consuming passion that filled his soul.

At first she listened with blushing cheeks and downcast eyes. There was something pleasing in the knowledge that she had won his love. But even while the blushes told of her soul's rapture she remembered her ambition. She had resolved to marry a title, so that Grandin brewery might be forgotten and her children belong to an aristocratic class.

She waited until he had revealed his soul's longings to her, and then, drawing herself up in all the dignity of insulted womanhood, she grew angry at his presumption as she called it, and left the studio.

When away from his presence she relented a little, for she admired him, and that evening she wrote:

"Never speak to me again like that, what you ask can never be. I am not made for a poor man's wife, and unless I marry to please my parents, I may be cast off. I will give you three more sittings, and then—we must never meet again."

It was a cruel blow, but Manton was a man and

Read "Dead to the World."

reasoned it all out, giving her every consideration and coming to the conclusion that she was right.

"It was presumption," he declared to himself. "How could I have dared to hope, even? I'll never let her see that I suffer. God bless her!"

She appeared at the studio radiantly beautiful, a smile on her face and happiness in her voice.

Not one pang of remorse did she feel when she saw how his hand trembled.

Manton worked, but any dauber could do as well. The portrait was beginning to look like a caricature.

"I cannot do anything to-day," he exclaimed at last. "Please pardon me."

"I am very sorry. Shall I come to-morrow?"

"If you will so favour me."

He made several attempts, but try all he could he could not paint her portrait.

"I am afraid Mr. Manton, that—that it is going to be a failure."

"Not going to be, it is a failure, Miss Grandin."

"You commenced so well, you worked as though——" she bit her lips and wished she had not uttered those words.

"I had ambition, you were about to say. It is true. I had ambition but I have lost it, and am not a painter. I know it, I feel it."

She drew near to him, she laid her hand on his arm, he felt her fingers tremble. His blood boiled in his veins. What could she mean?

"Suppose," she paused, "suppose I should tell you that I am sorry for what I said that day. Suppose I should say," she dropped her voice to a whisper. "Gerald, won't you ask me that question again? What difference would it make?"

"Do not, for mercy's sake, do not drive me mad. Forgive me, but you tempt me beyond endurance."

"Gerald, what if I were to say, my answer would be different when the picture is finished?"

"Don't Oh, don't!"

"Must I speak more plainly? Cannot you see how I am blushing? May not you see how I am blushing? Must I say, 'Gerald, I love you?'"

"You do not mean it?"

"Try me."

His face was transformed. The beauty of a glorified spirit overspread it. He was a new man. He knew not what to do. In his ecstasy he opened his arms and she was pressed to his heart. His burning kisses seemed to scorch her, and then—he stepped back, the artist had taken the place of a lover.

A few touches of the brush and what had looked like a caricature became the very perfection of art.

"Not a word of this to anyone," she said, "let us keep our secret for a time."

"Until the portrait is finished?"

"Until then."

Day after day she sat for him, and each day love furnished inspiration. The picture grew until it was as perfect as man ever made a counterfeit of nature's perfection.

"One more day and then——"

"And then," she murmured in reply.

The portrait was finished. She stood before it looking at it and trembling.

"It is too beautiful, oh, far too beautiful!" she exclaimed.

"Nothing could equal your beauty, my darling."

"You will send it to the Salon?" she asked, and the artist's face paled. He had hoped that the eyes of the curious would never rest upon it.

"You wish it?"

"How silly! Of course I wish it. Is it not beautiful? Is it not likely to be admired? Please send it."

"And may I see your father, and—"

"When the picture is sent to the Salon."

Once more she visited the studio. She was unexpected, but a glad light came into the artist's face as he saw the one girl in all the world he had ever loved.

He took her hand but she drew it away. Something had happened.

"What is it, darling? he asked. "May I not even touch your hand?"

"No, Mr. Manton. I said when the picture was finished I would give you my answer, and it is the same as at first."

Was he dreaming? Was she jesting? If so, it was a sorry jest.

"I—I—do not—not understand, you said you loved me, you said——"

"I said many things. I saw you were spoiling my picture and I had set my heart on getting a good one. I am sorry if you misunderstood me, but I won, didn't I? I got a good picture. Good-bye, Mr. Manton."

She left the studio. The artist stood for hours, like a statue. His brain was numbed. Night came and he walked about, eat, slept mechanically. He was soulless. All that was God-like left him and he bore merely the outward resemblance of a man.

For several days he was like this, and then a strange desire to know whether his picture had been hung possessed him.

He rang for a messenger boy. He bade him buy all the papers. Hastily he looked them through. His brain was on fire at the furore his picture had caused. His artist's soul was filled with joy.

He read what the critics said of it. He saw that they prophesied that he would be a greater portrait painter than Lely or Sir Joshua Reynolds, or any of the modern masters.

Almost he had forgotten his sorrow.

Art struggled with love and might have been the victor had not his eyes caught sight of a little paragraph headed, "Won by a Picture."

He read it carefully, and at last realised that the Earl of Pangbourn had seen the portrait of Miss Emmeline Grandin and had wooed and won the fair original.

The artist turned over the paper mechanically and his eye rested on a society *on dit*. "The engagement is announced of Miss Emmeline Grandin to the Right Honourable the Earl ———"

He read no more.

* * * * *

"That Manton is a lucky chap. His fortune is made. Why, I tell you he will be the most sought after artist in the world. Every girl will— here is his studio, let us congratulate him."

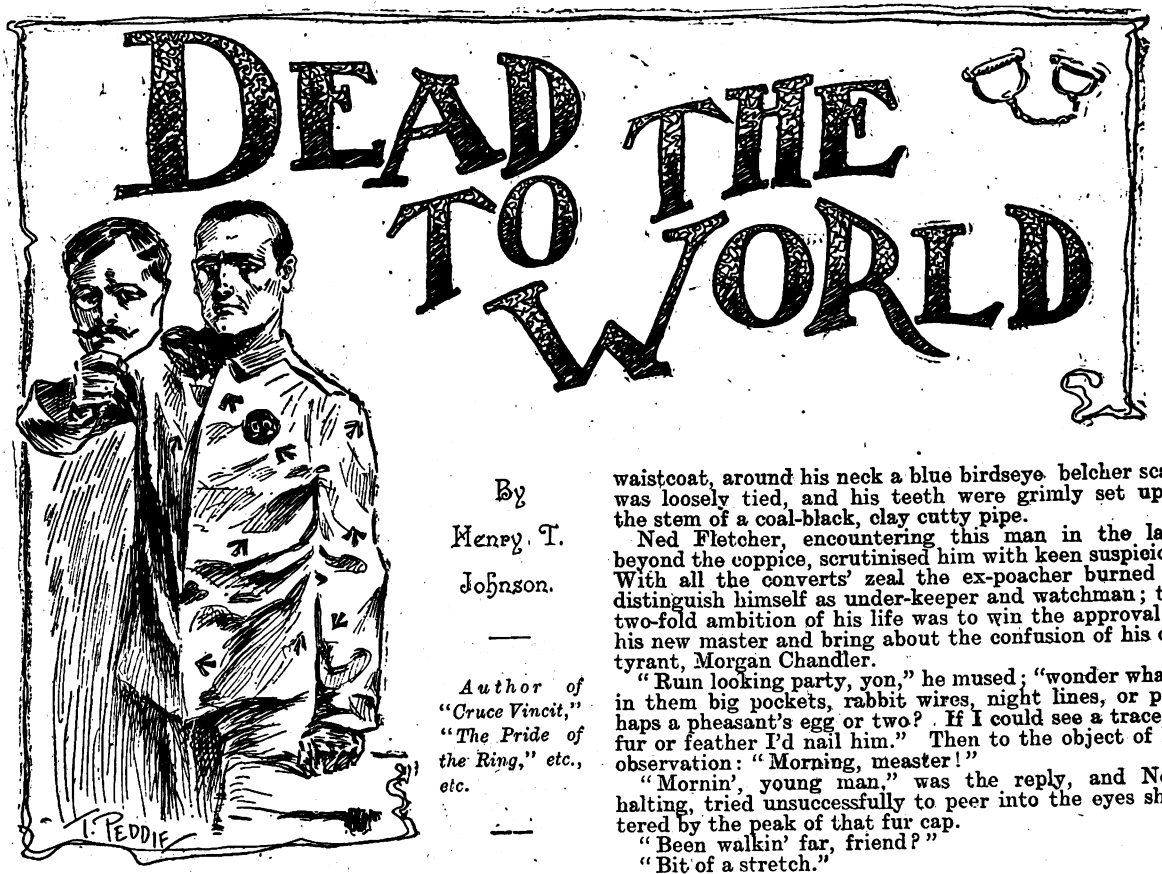
Two rollicking art students ran up stairs and pushed open the door.

They gave a startled cry, for on the floor, his head lying in a pool of blood they saw Gerald Manton, a pistol in one hand, and in the other, a paper in which appeared the engagement announcement of the subject of his painting.

Can you play "Hunt the Fiver"? See Editor's Page.

New Serial

DEAD TO THE WORLD



By

Henry T. Johnson.

Author of "Cruce Vincit," "The Pride of the Ring," etc., etc.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST CHAPTERS.

Richard Seldon, a convict, escapes. In a train he meets Cyril Roylance just back from Australia, whom he murders and impersonates. He assumes the role of squire, and pays attention to Doris Dale. One day he encounters two old criminal acquaintances and agrees to meet them.

CHAPTER VII.

And Forms New Plans.

The appointment so strangely made was duly and punctually kept.

The new Squire left the Hall unattended, indeed, unnoticed; carrying in one hand a handbag; avoiding the gravelled walks and the carriage drive leading to the terrace, he took a small secluded footpath through the shrubberies, then, casting occasional furtive glances around him, made his way along a glade of green sward studded with spreading oaks of giant girth and known as The Chase. And so he reached the five-barred gate leading into the Home Coppice.

About an hour later, through the far side thicket hedge of that coppice, there clambered a man who, from his appearance, might have been a navvy, an agricultural labourer, a poacher, or a compound of the three. He wore a peaked fur cap, a threadbare fustian coat with flap pockets, light corduroy trousers tied round the ankles, heavy hobnailed boots, a pearl buttoned corduroy waistcoat, around his neck a blue birdseye belcher scarf was loosely tied, and his teeth were grimly set upon the stem of a coal-black, clay cutty pipe.

Ned Fletcher, encountering this man in the lane beyond the coppice, scrutinised him with keen suspicion. With all the converts' zeal the ex-poacher burned to distinguish himself as under-keeper and watchman; the two-fold ambition of his life was to win the approval of his new master and bring about the confusion of his old tyrant, Morgan Chandler.

"Rum looking party, yon," he mused; "wonder what's in them big pockets, rabbit wires, night lines, or perhaps a pheasant's egg or two? If I could see a trace of fur or feather I'd nail him." Then to the object of his observation: "Morning, measter!"

"Mornin', young man," was the reply, and Ned, halting, tried unsuccessfully to peer into the eyes sheltered by the peak of that fur cap.

"Been walkin' far, friend?"

"Bit of a stretch."

"From what part?"

"From where I started."

"Where bee'st thee going?"

"About my business."

"What business is that?"

"My business."

Ned's anger as well as his suspicion was aroused by the tone and substance of the stranger's replies.

"We're a bit particular who we see about these parts just now," he said, turning and walking alongside the stranger, who still plodded along the dusty lane.

"There's need to be, I hear," the latter replied. "I heard summat a month ago about an under-keeper being badly fettled in yonder coppy by a man with a mask across his face."

Ned started. The identity of the masked poacher in question had never been clearly established, but it was said that for some days afterwards Ned's hands were too badly bruised for him to go to work. It was even hinted that he had some difficulty in lifting a mug of ale, which, in his case, betokened no light injury.

"Thee'st main little to say about that business, measter," he ventured after an awkward silence, and the other answered:

"Ay; it is canny to say nowt."

"Suppose I demand to know it?"

"Thou'lt waste thy breath; I'm on the King's highway and not even thee dare stop me."

"My master's the Squire of Fallowfield, and he's soon to be a magistrate."

“I care no more for thy master than I do for thee.”

“Civil, master, there's other magistrates.”

“Ay, there's many of 'em knows 'ee, Ned Fletcher; would'st 'ee like to go before 'em again?”

The new keeper was dumfounded. Strange as the man was to him he evidently knew something of his record, and Ned decided that it would hardly be wise to make an appearance before the Bench in the capacity of the scourge of evil doers until the justices had had a chance of forgetting some of his own misdeeds.

He stood still, and the stranger trudged on with something that sounded to the indignant Ned unmistakeably like a chuckle.

Round the bend of the lane, through the lush grass of the meadows, the man in the fur cap came to a rustic bridge spanning the stream that raced bubbling and babbling to the quaint, quiet, grey old mill, there in the shadows of the willows.

A side-saddled hack was tethered to the bridge rails, and along the meadow margin of the brook its rider sauntered, idly flicking the grasses and the rushes with her riding crop, her habit skirt caught up across the other arm.

And the man who had aroused the new under-keeper's suspicions ducked down with a sudden oath and watched

For the horsewoman was Doris Dale, and the lad sauntering by her side was Jack Branscombe.

By and bye they turned towards the shadow of the bridge, approaching so near that the man playing the spy there could hear their voices.

“And now, Jack dear, I must get off home to lunch.”

“Wicked, heartless girl, to leave me—for lunch.”

“Not for my lunch, Jack, but for dad's.”

“And you'll come to me again?”

“I will—I will.”

“And the stern father shan't part us?”

“No more than Lord Ullin parted his daughter and her Hieland lover.”

“Dearest!” Then for awhile no other word was spoken except what the willows might have been whispering and the rippling laughter of the stream among the rushes, and mingled with these sounds that other one which first was heard in Eden's Garden when the old, old story first was told.

And the man peering through the rails of the rustic bridge, hearing that sound, ground yet another oath between his teeth.

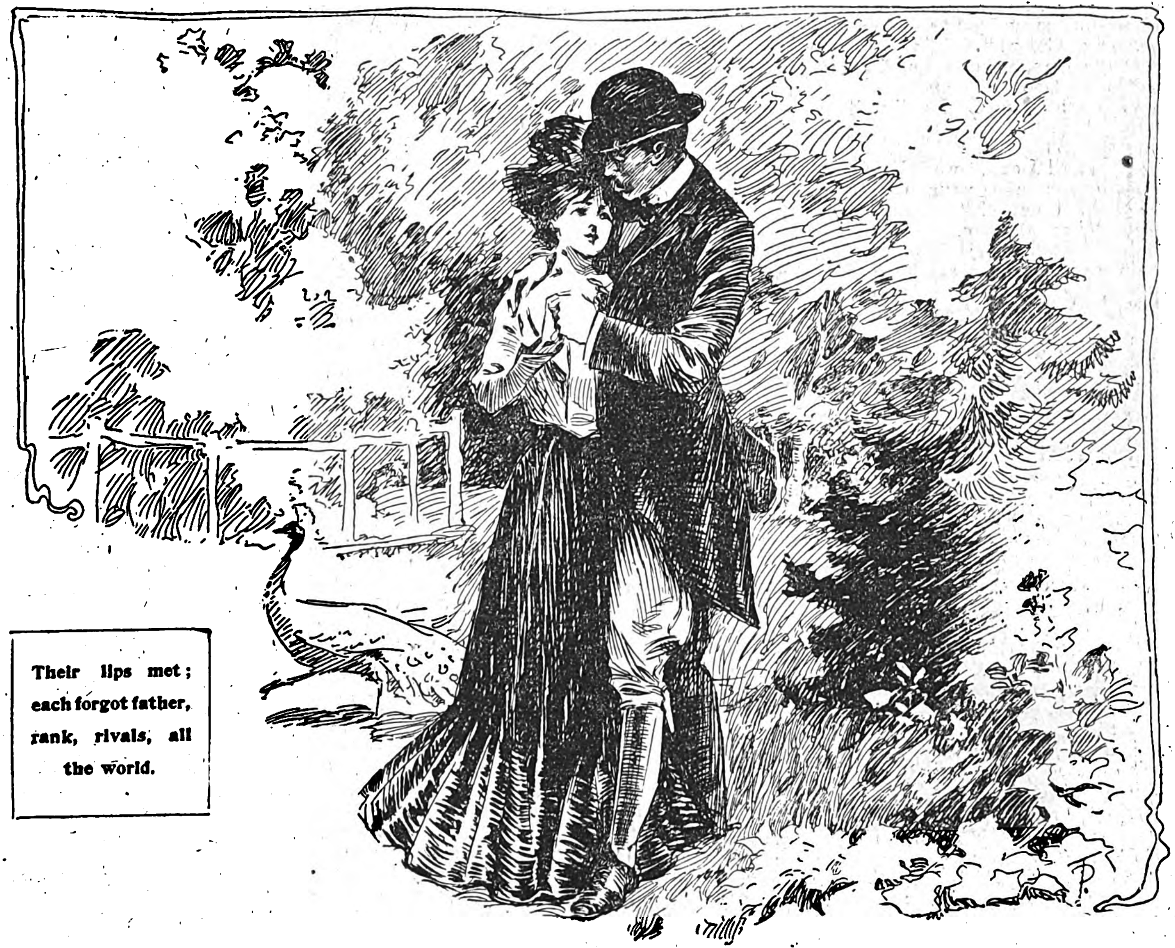
“Dearest Doris,” Jack Branscombe murmured, “you will love me always.”

“Always.”

“And not even the squire of boundless acres shall come between us; no one in the world shall take you from me?”

“No one in the world shall take me from you.”

“Doris, I have brought a little keepsake for you, this marquise ring, dear.”



Their lips met; each forgot father, rank, rivals, all the world.

Read “Dead to the World.”

"Opals and pink pearls, set in diamonds! Oh! how exquisite! Jack, dear, this shall be the dearest gem of all my jewels. And you must keep this, Jack, you must wear this locket on your watch-chain. It was my mother's!"

An exclamation of delight came to the young lover's lips, straight from his heart, as she placed in his palm the pretty trinket she had detached from her châtelaine.

"Your miniature!"

"Yes, Jack dear, I had it painted on ivory especially for you."

"I will wear it all my life."

The spy there, behind the bridge rails, watched the young lover, with fingers that trembled with joy, attach the trinket to his watch-chain, and then and there in his black heart devised a plan to seal Jack Branscombe's doom by means of that love token.

And now Doris Dale, with all the grace and lightness of a fawn, sprang up the bank towards the bridge. Her lover followed, untethered her horse's bridle, and, catching her dainty foot in his hand, swung her into the saddle, their eyes drowning in each others and all their souls in those fond eyes absorbed. What wonder they took no heed of the fur-capped man who trudged along that dusty road, nor of the baleful glance of that wayfarer's deep-set eyes?

Messrs. Branner and Plumb for the third time vowed that the man for whom they looked in vain should repent his contumacy, and that they would put him away, even if the so doing involved their being put away themselves.

"Steady, Cully!" said the former suddenly. "Jest pipe that cove 'anging about 'ere, what's the odds! He might be sent to watch us."

"We'll make it 'ot for 'im if 'e 'is," declared Mr. Plumb. "'Ere, I say, matey, you seems pretty busy taking stock."

"I takes all I can," was the reply.

"S'pose you takes your 'ook."

"S'posin' I don't?"

"Down 'im, Barney."

"I will, s'welp me! 'Ere, steady, what yer up to?" For he was looking straight into the muzzle of a tiny revolver, not too small, however, to bid him pause.

"Put that thing down, guv'nor," said Mr. Barney Plumb, "it might go orf."

"It most certainly would go off," said the man who held it, "if you tried to use that knuckle duster or your pal his life preserver, just as it would have gone off if I'd happened to have had it handy last night."

Then they recognised the voice.

"Lummy, Tiger!" said Mr. Plumb, "I allus said what a play-actor you'd 'ave made if you hadn't happened to have been one of us."

"Let's get to business," said the new Squire of Fallowfield, and then and there the precious three applied themselves to the planning of the only business they knew, the business they were prepared to carry out at the risk of liberty, even life, certainly at the risk of the lives of others.

CHAPTER VIII.

"You must Pinch that Trinket from his Cable, Barney; Let the Ticker Slide!"

It was just then that North-east Brankshire was seized with something closely approaching a panic. Week after week the countryside was startled by some fresh instance of desperate and successful burglary, carried out with an audacity and cleverness bewildering, not only the police of the county, but the experts specially sent down from Scotland Yard. Some of the most important houses in the countryside had been broken into and rifled of plate and jewels of enormous value; the county bank itself had been entered and a considerable amount of bullion had been stolen. The burglaries were generally agreed to be the work of one gang, though probably a large and powerful one.

Questioned as to his opinion on the matter by the owner of Fallowfield Hall, who took a remarkable interest in the matter and who was by his own urgent request furnished with the latest information and views of the authorities on the subject, Detective-Inspector Rossiter of Scotland Yard expressed himself as follows:

"If I weren't very well aware that a certain chap named Richard Seldon, but better known to us and to his own fraternity as Tiger Dick, was found drowned in the river Dass, into which he'd evidently plunged off the railway viaduct after escaping from Brimington Convict Prison, I should say that four out of five of these jobs were distinctly his work. The same thoroughness of workmanship, the same daring, the same absence of clue. Just consider those bank shutters. No ordinary centre bits bored them; this gang, whoever they are, are equipped with as good a set of jimmies, fret-saws, wedges, and tools in general as we've got in our Black Museum, Charlie Peace's not excepted. It's the work of artists, sir. Like this wine, sir? I should think I do; as you say, men of my experience are pretty good judges of a vintage. Your very good health!"

Ned Fletcher, for his part, roundly asserted to the Squire his conviction that the strange man he met in the lane skirting the far side of the coppice was one of the marauders, and Ned had become encouraged to speak his mind to the new Squire pretty freely, greatly to the irritation of Mr. Morgan Chandler, who had, indeed, on more than one occasion, been promptly and sharply checked in attempts to browbeat and bully the man he had purposed evicting, but whom his master had not only re-instated in his cottage, but employed, on which account Morgan Chandler owed them both a grudge.

"If you suspected the man why didn't you arrest him, Fletcher?" asked the Squire with the faintest suspicion of a smile.

Fletcher scratched his bullet head. "Egad, Squire, I'd a mind to, but bare suspicion's a plaguey uncertain thing to go on, and that chap seemed to know it, he kind o' dared me to take him before the justices, as if he were a bit of a lawyer, besides knowin' as they know a bit about me, but if I see 'im again I'd collar him and chance it."

"Quite right, Fletcher," said the Squire, "stick to that. Next time you meet that man face to face take him by the throat, twist your hands in his neck till he can neither speak nor see, give him a backheel and bring him to his knees. Now come along, you men there, isn't that dogcart ready?"

"He be a rum 'un, the Squire," mused Fletcher, watching him. "Lord! when he were talkin' to me just now like that there was a look about 'im as if he could do what 'e was tellin' me to, easy as he was sayin' it; and, dang me, I'll do it too, if my chance comes, for 'e's bin a main good measter to me. 'E give me a chance to swim when that white-livered scallywag would have sunk me," and he turned a bitter look on Morgan Chandler who, crossing the stable yard, was wondering:

1. What had happened to the sight of Cyril Roylance's left eye that he should take to a monocle.
2. What had induced him to cultivate a moustache since it so thoroughly altered his appearance.
3. Whether he had discovered anything peculiar in Morgan Chandler's system of keeping the estate accounts.

It was a capital day for driving, the roads were in excellent order, and in less than half an hour the Hall dogcart, at a spanking trot, had covered the distance between Fallowfield Hall and Dalehurst Grange.

Doris was in her garden; a rose amongst her roses, so she seemed to the Squire of Fallowfield, but he felt a stab as he noted the little frown that momentarily

Can you play "Hunt the Fiver"? See Editor's Page.

pursed the rosebud mouth and shaded the dove-grey eyes as he approached her. Rogue and ruffian as he was, he had nevertheless learned to love this girl who was all goodness, innocence, truth, not with the higher love which can even forego the loved one for that loved one's sake; that was not his way, ever since he could remember, to desire a thing was to determine to possess it, by fair means or foul.

"Doris dear," said her father, "Cyril has driven over for the flower show, can't you make him stay to dinner as well as luncheon?"

Harcourt Dale's semi-paternal tone was part of his plan. Doris could be neither discourteous nor unkind even to those she could not like, and she gracefully seconded her father's invitation. It was further a part of her father's plan that their visitor should drive them over to the flower show in his dogcart, Dale chuckling that he did not mind taking a back seat, it was one of the penalties of being an old fogey. He observed with keen satisfaction the ardent glance his new neighbour and the son of his old neighbour fixed upon Doris. That was as it should be, their guest was young, distinctly good-looking, smart in every sense of the term, just the fellow to make a girl forget a foolish tendresse for an ineligible suitor, and he ascribed to this growing infatuation his visitor's reticence at the luncheon table. It did not occur to him how much that reticence increased in the presence of Barker, his garrulous old retainer with his eternal reminiscences of the Squire of Fallowfield's boyhood—reminiscences which at times seemed rather to bore the hero of them.

Luncheon over, the dogcart was brought round, and Doris took her seat by their visitor's side. He was a perfect whip, his turn-out as smart a "lot" as was to be seen on the road, and many were the significant nods, winks, and prophecies of the country folk they met or passed, particularly as regarded the feminine contingent. Squire Roylance was losing no time. What a capital pair they made! Their wedding would be the county event of the year. Poor Jack Branscombe was out of the running now. And so on.

And Jack Branscombe himself, ambling towards Hazelwick on his cob, looked up as the dogcart spun past him, raising a cloud of dust, and caught one glimpse of the sweet face he loved best in all the world. And it was so radiant and happy that his heart winced with a jealous pang. Who was he, he asked himself bitterly, a mere yeoman farmer, to aspire to a lady of county family, and with a landed squire in the field, too, against him?

Jack Branscombe was in love and he was three and twenty, and youth and love are rare fertilisers of the rank and baneful weed of jealousy that had sprung in his heart in swift growth. Its tendrils were twining themselves around his very soul, strangling that which they clung to, and for all the golden sunshine of that summer day, for awhile it seemed to Jack Branscombe, even as he moved along the aisles of flaring, joyous bloom, that the poets were wrong and only the cynics were right. All was not gold that glittered, but the glitter was the true magnet for a woman's eyes. The very sight of happy faces around him jarred on him, the ripple of laughter and of airy gay chatter fell like a discord on his ear, and avoiding the throngs he sought the nearest approach to solitude, angry and ashamed with himself for feeling so out of tune with his world.

"Oh Doris, Doris, the one girl in the world for me, to think that you of all others should be dazzled by the dross."

"Jack!"

Looking up with a cry of delight, he beheld her standing face to face before him in the narrow path between the banks of summer roses, not one of them so fair or sweet as she.

A picture of English girlhood, breezy, creamy, fresh,

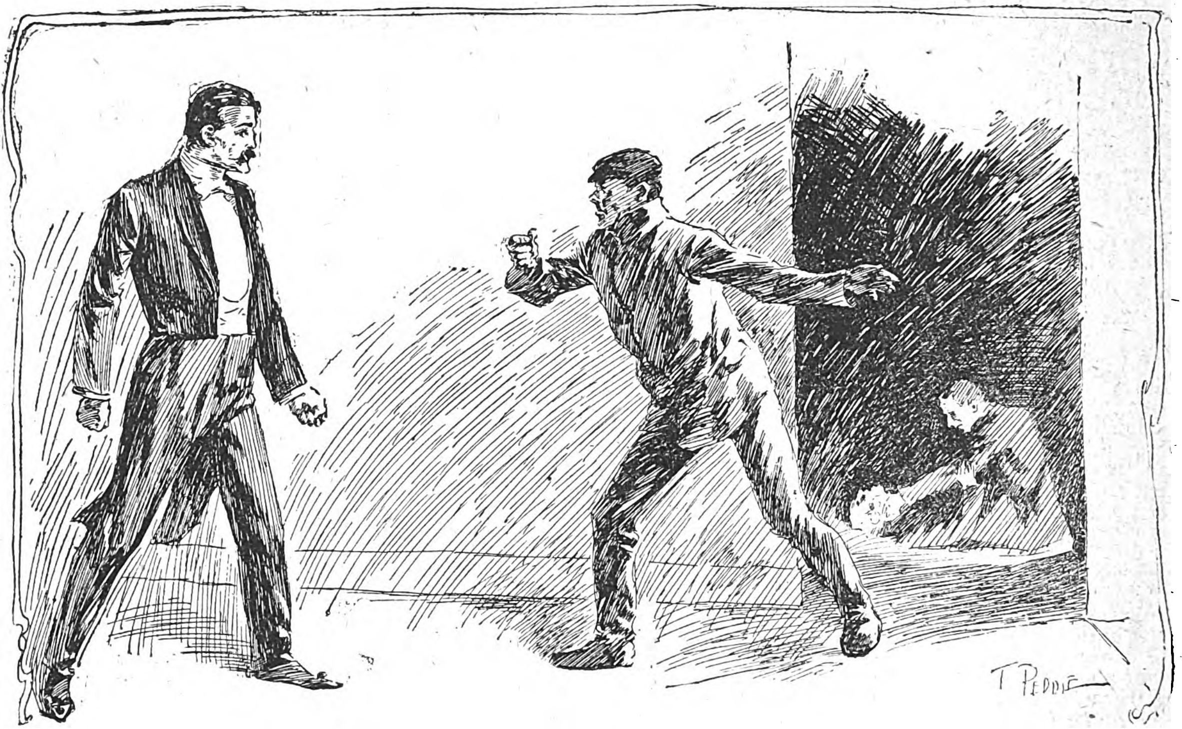
IS STOUTNESS PERMANENTLY CURABLE?

Mr. F. C. Russell's Opinion.

It is with no small satisfaction that we have perused a little volume entitled "Corpulency and the Cure" (18th edition, 256 pp.), by Mr. F. Cecil Russell, who for many years has devoted his entire energies to the study of obesity, its causes, and its cure, and who has originated a treatment widely known as the "Russell" treatment, of which more anon. The treatise under notice is written in a clear and lucid style, and is fairly free from those break-jaw scientific terms which only befog the lay mind. There is no aspect of the subject that Mr. Russell does not touch upon. For instance, on the question of hereditary tendency or constitutional predisposition to obesity, our author gives facts and figures which go far to destroy the popular notion that the tendency to stoutness is hereditary; for out of 13,599 cases he has examined and reported upon, he finds that in no fewer than 9,153 instances neither parent was stout. Again, out of the same number of cases, 10,409 persons declared themselves to be small eaters. Now as to the treatment which bears his name, in what does it differ from others? Simply in this, that it does not demand those semi-starvation dietary restrictions so weakening to the system, that it reduces *without injury to the constitution*, and that it aims at the radical cure of obesity, so that when persons under treatment have been reduced to their normal weight the incubus does not return. Says Mr. Russell, "Under any circumstances, my readers may rest assured that if the removal of dangerous internal fat, with a corresponding improvement in health be a *desideratum*, I may fairly claim that *failure is practically impossible*." In support of this claim, Mr. Russell gives about a thousand extracts from letters of grateful persons who testify to the enormous benefits they have derived from a course of "Russell." The compound which forms the basis of the "cure" is a pleasant-tasting, refreshing, and cooling tonic, which aids digestion and assimilates and stimulates the jaded appetite, thus affording the necessary increased nourishment to the body, while the elimination of the unwholesome accumulation of fat is steadily going forward. How very different from the irksome, disagreeable, and even dangerous sweating, purging, and famishing processes by which so many persons do lasting harm to their constitutions, and all to no purpose, for as soon as these debilitating methods are discontinued the fat incontinently returns. The "Russell" treatment, as we have seen, goes to the root of the evil, and cures permanently. The test? The weighing-machine is infallible, and will prove that the process of reduction commences within twenty-four hours of beginning the treatment, the decrease being from ½lb. to 2lbs. (more in severe cases of obesity), and this reduction continues in the same ratio daily until normality is reached, when the treatment may be discontinued. If our stout readers would like to know about Mr. Russell's marvellous success in the cure of corpulence, they may obtain a free copy of the book under notice by sending two penny stamps (for private postage) to Mr. F. Cecil Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., at which address, by-the-bye, some thousands of original testimonials are kept filed for reference, together with hundreds of newspapers containing eulogistic articles on the success of Mr. Russell's *regimen. The above authoritative statement is taken from a recent issue of "Cartwright's Lady's Companion."*

All Communications will be considered Private.

F. C. RUSSELL, Woburn House, Store St., Bedford Sq., London, W.C.



"We've had to put him through it," said Brunner.

and fair, with the radiance of innocent happiness in her smile and the crystal light of truth in those twin lamps of love, her eyes. Looking upon her he felt abased because of the doubt that he had harboured, even for a moment, in his breast.

"Doris, my dearest!" he exclaimed, and in a moment, forgetting all the fathers and all the rivals in all the world, he had clasped her to his heart, and their lips had met. And then, all of a sudden, a wild resolution born of his maddening love for her surged up in his heart. She was his own before all the world by love's own sacred charter, why should he not claim her to have and to hold? In an impassioned torrent the ardent words gushed from him, words of pleading, of entreaty, almost of command. They loved each other, their love was the very keystone of their lives; why should they be subjected, he to the weary heart-sickening waiting, she to the parental suasion, the daily importunity of his rival? Yes, yes, he would win her father's forgiveness as well as her own dear self to be his wedded wife, but it would be all the same in the end. Oh! if she would only let him win her first and her father's forgiveness afterwards. And she, listening, loved him, as girls do, all the more for his daring, and when he whispered his plan love was blended with admiration of the genius that could frame that scheme, that preliminary journey to town to arrange a special licence and the place. Yes, yes, it was all so delightfully like it was in the books, and if only that dear, prim Mary Morrison, whom she, a sisterless girl, had grown to love like a sister, would only be the bridesmaid at the runaway wedding! Her father would be angry, the fathers in the books were always angry, but he would be certain to relent in time, they always relented—in the books!

And so, half afraid, and with a strange, wild bliss of doing something wrong and daring, she said:

"Very well, dear, you know best, and it'll be wisest perhaps in the end, and oh! I love you, Jack, best in the wide, wide world. Yes, dear, I'll wait your signal, and when the hour comes the girl will be there."

Their lips met; each forgot father, rank, rivals, all in the world. Once again, as for all time, from before the beginning till after the end, *amor vincit omnia*.

Yes, but strategy is as necessary to Field Marshal Love, Commander-in-Chief, as to any other general intent on conquest, and so for a while, therefore, it was laid down in their plan of campaign that they should act ostensibly independently of each other, Jack undertaking for his part, as if any such undertaking were necessary, not to flirt with any dame or damsel present, and Doris declaring that not all the landed squires in all the counties in all the realm should cause her for one moment to forget her Jack. So like a butterfly she flitted away and was lost in the floral vista, and Jack Branscombe, turning in the direction of a busier quarter of the flower show, suddenly came face to face with—Morgan Chandler.

"Good morning, Mr. Branscombe, sir," said the Fallowfield steward with unwonted politeness, and Jack returned the greeting with characteristic geniality.

"Why, it so happens, Mr. Branscombe, that you're the very gentleman I was a-thinking of, and only to think I should have the luck of happening on you just at the moment!"

"Indeed? What is it, Mr. Chandler?" asked Jack in some surprise, for in the course of certain business dealings he had been accustomed to finding the steward of the big manor of which he was in respect of certain fields, a copyhold tenant, in a much less amenable mood.

"These are trying times, Mr. Branscombe, for people who live by their land. I daresay even you find that out, for all the best part of your farms are freehold and your copyhold on our estate stands you at a mere bagatelle."

"Oh! I mustn't grumble," said Jack Branscombe, who, after his *tête à tête* with Doris, felt his heart in tune with all the world.

"Ah, you're doing well, Mr. Branscombe, not but what you might be doing better," Chandler added with a mysterious dropping of the voice.

"What do you mean, Mr. Chandler?"

"I mean that I can put you up to a good thing in the way of business."

"How's that?"

"You're not above making a bit of brass?"

"Naturally, if I can fairly and squarely."

"Well, all's fair in love and war—and business."

Jack, wondering what was coming, made no reply, and the other went on:

"Look here, Mr. Branscombe, this is between you and me. Besides your own freehold and what you hold as copyhold tenant of Fallowfield Manor, there's some two hundred and fifty acres of our estate farmland that you've been leasing for the last three years at a rack rent, you've been leasing that from me as receiver, and now the new squire's come back and cleared off the mortgages, and there's accounts to be made up, besides that, in the way of farming, I've bought as receiver and manager from you, fodder, stock, and seeds."

"Well?" said Jack after a pause. And Chandler went on:

"Now, suppose you and I were to so manage, were to work out accounts, so as to make it look on the surface as though the land you've been farming under us had been rented at a little bit less an acre than you've been actually paying."

Jack's hand instinctively closed on the riding whip he held.

"It could easily be arranged," Chandler went on. "At the next audit you could pay a smaller amount, you and I could fix in five minutes here and now, and in case any questions might be asked, which I think very likely, I could furnish you, for the sake of precaution, with a fresh set of receipts for the last three years; do you twig? And supposing that you gave me, for the sake of convenience, another set of receipts for what I've paid you for hay, straw, seeds, and live stock. Well, you know, Mr. Branscombe, the differences in all those amounts would make a very tidy sum, and between you and me, as a matter of business, if you only acted sensible I could let you have a cheque; no, not a cheque, perhaps that wouldn't be quite wise, but a nice little roll of notes or a plump canvas bag of sovereigns for one equal half of that amount."

Now if Jack Branscombe, besides being an honest man, had been a somewhat cold-blooded and a somewhat crafty man, he might have invited Mr. Chandler to have put his proposal in such a form that he could have nailed it to the counter and that his own act should have been his own unanswerable accuser. But what he did was this. Swiftly with one hand he gripped Chandler by the collar, swung him round, and brought him to his knees, then with the other he slashed him once, twice, three times across the shoulders with his riding whip!

"You hound! you thief!" exclaimed, "to dare to propose such villainy to me! Now I understand a lot that I have heard, and now I'm certain of a lot that I've suspected. Get up and clear out, or else I swear I'll drag you by the collar into your master's presence,

"SHARPSHOOTERS."

A TALE FROM REAL LIFE.

In the typical Lincolnshire village of Little Hale, two miles from Heckington, lives Miss Mary Charlotte Porter. She is a dressmaker; and having for some time been closely connected with the Primitive Methodist body is well known locally as an enthusiastic worker in the good cause. A *Boston Independent* reporter with an eye to good "copy," called upon her recently to ask her if she would recount the real facts of an experience through which she has recently passed; and she willingly acceded to his request. Thereupon she related to him a wonderful account of how Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness had cured her of neuralgia and rheumatism with other complications from which she had suffered for years. Said she:—

"For twenty years I was troubled with rheumatism and neuralgia. I suppose I had it in my system, and being out dressmaking and sitting in draughty houses would have something to do with it. I thought I should never overcome it. Then I had influenza more than once, and that, of course, made me worse. I have been in bed and could hardly move, and even in bed I had to wrap carefully up. The pain was chiefly in my head and round my neck. Once I had a violent attack, and it drew my head quite down to my right shoulder. I thought it was a stroke. We called in a doctor, and I was very ill for about a month. I suffered also a deal with my face, and some of my teeth loosened and came out. I felt the pain in my limbs too, and at times could scarcely move. When I did move I had sharp shooting pains—sharpshooters I used to call them—which made me fairly hold my breath. At the same time I was sorely distressed by bad bilious attacks, accompanied by sick headache. With this combination of ailments you may imagine the miserable plight I was in. Doctors were unable to bring me real relief. So when I read in the paper about the good done by Chas. Forde's Bile Beans I thought I would try them, and got some. In a very short time I experienced good from them. They seemed to clear my head; and the pain which had always been present to a greater or lesser extent, disappeared completely from my back and head."

"What was the result of the continued course?" asked the reporter. "I found I could eat better," was the reply, "and I had no more biliousness. That has now quite gone. I feel brighter and stronger, and can work well and long without the old feeling of distress. The rheumatism and neuralgia have also been driven from my system. My appetite has continued to improve, and is now better than it has been for years. I am strong and healthy in every way, and my cure is due solely to Chas. Forde's Bile Beans. I have never met their equal in all my experience, and I have used many medicines. If they can do me so much good, they can do others good too, and I strongly advise sufferers to give them a trial."

Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness are without doubt the world's specific for neuralgia, rheumatism, gout, nervous and general debility, colds, bilious attacks, sick headache, indigestion, pains in the chest, side, and back, palpitation, anæmia, liver chill, female ailments, constipation, piles, pimples, face sores, all blood impurities, and liver and kidney disorders. All chemists sell Bile Beans, or they may be had, post free, from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 London Wall, London, E.C., for one and three half-pence or two and nine.

thrash you before his eyes, and tell him the why and wherefore."

Morgan Chandler, smarting with pain, but smarting worse with rage and hate, scrambled to his feet, read determination in the other's eyes, and slunk, like the rogue and coward that he was, out of Jack Branscombe's presence.

And having done this he stood rubbing the wheals on his shoulders, writhing in pain and impotent malice.

"I'll pay him out for this," he said, "I'll get level with him somehow and some time if I get the chance. No! I won't wait for the chance, I'll make the chance. I'll repay every blow that he's struck me a hundredfold."

The flower show was an unqualified success. All the big people of the district flocked to gaze upon the big blooms and vegetables. The hearts of some exhibitors were elated, others were broken; the marquees were gorgeous with tiers upon tiers of flowers, bright and bizarre as summer, and hats and bonnets as beautiful to behold as flower beds.

Doris Dale and her cavalier from Fallowfield Hall were the observed of all observers, and her father's delight at the impression created by their appearance and the circumstances under which they appeared knew no bounds.

"Of course," he remarked with somewhat laboured airiness, "there's nothing in it. He's a smart young fellow and Doris is a smart girl, being a Harcourt Dale she would be. I never interfere in these affairs, I let them take their course; still, young people will be young people, she might go farther and fare worse—and I'm certain he might."

Crowder Keene, the old lawyer who knew, and mostly had something to do with, the affairs of everybody in the county, took the situation at a glance, and decided mentally not to call in that mortgage on the Dalehurst Grange property just yet awhile.

Jack Branscombe listened to the murmurs that reached him frequently, thanks to good-natured friends, he had no need now to even fight against them. What was idle gossip against her own sweet promise? He held that promse, yes, and her own love token! And instinctively his hand sought the, to him, priceless locket he wore upon his chain.

A cry of consternation escaped him; it was gone!

Gone! The trinket he prized above all others, that he would have died sooner than surrender. Yes, it had been stolen, and by a practised hand, for there the link of the chain hung broken and gaping wide! Strange to say, the watch, of treble the intrinsic value of the locket, remained; but he had lost her love-gift, the gift he prized more highly than all the jewels in the world.

CHAPTER IX.

"Murder Most Foul."

That night Harcourt Dale enjoyed his dinner. Matters were going exactly as he wished them. Roylance was evidently infatuated with Doris, who, for her part, seemed very interested in him, and after all, a genial son-in-law with a convenient balance at his bankers would be a more amenable, as well as economical creditor than old Crowder Keene, who was so inconveniently insistent upon punctuality in respect of interest payments.

But really he would have to speak to Barker. As an old and faithful servant, the man had been accorded some indulgence. And till then had never presumed upon it, but on this particular evening at dinner-time Barker was an absolutely unbearable bore with his incessant incursions upon the conversation, his comments, and his reminiscences. Old retainers were very well in their way, but one hardly desired the butler to deputise as a Greek chorus.

"Dear, dear, dear!" said Harcourt Dale after a pause, "how time flies. I've been thinking to-day of your poor dad. When he and I last dined at this table you were a little chap, just out of kilts and into knickerbockers."

"And he don't seem to favour his father, do he, sir, Master Cyril?"

Harcourt Dale answered with a frown.

"Why, the very last day, sir, as you came 'ere with your pa, you tumbled down the stairs running along the corridor from the drawing-room."

"Barker; I think Mr. Roylance requires a little more wine."

"Certainly, sir. What a head he did have to be sure, poor little chap!"

"And perhaps fewer reminiscences."

Barker took the hint and subsided.

And so for another evening the Master of Fallowfield hovered around Doris Dale, while, pressed by her father, she sang to him, played to him, proving himself most of winsome of girl hostesses. Doris seemed both to her father and their guest a trifle pre-occupied, and yet she sang her tender love ballads never with more pathos and expression. Soon, far too soon for him, the time arrived for him to go. And then an untoward incident arose. The head groom reported that Mr. Roylance's horse was dead lame.

"By Jove!" said Harcourt Dale, "you'll have to leave him here to-night and the vet. shall see him to-morrow. I can lend you a bagmunless; by the bye, you let us put you up for to-night, we shall be delighted."

"You're awfully kind," said the guest, "and if it isn't putting you about, it will give me the inestimable pleasure of another hour of Miss Dale's music."

Harcourt Dale expressed himself delighted, Doris could be nothing but gracious, and so their guest remained to experience another spell of, perhaps, the most genuine happiness he had ever known.

"By Jove!" he soliloquised, looking into the drawing-room from the balcony, whither he had gone to smoke a cigarette, and regarding the white-clad, supple, comely form of Doris seated at the piano, waking a ripple of music as her lily hands wandered over the scarcely whiter keyboard.

"Is it all a dream? It's so different, what is to what was, and only such a little while ago. How, I wonder, will it end—will it end? Oh! if it could only go on for ever, why shouldn't it go on, if I play a cautious game, I've got a hand chock full of trumps this time, and, by the Lord Harry, the stakes this time are worth the winning." For his eyes were fixed on Doris Dale.

But even the extended spell of bliss came to an end at last. Doris was gone to bed and Barker, by Harcourt Dale's direction, showed the visitor to the famous guest room of Dalehurst Grange, the one wherein the first Charles reposed when on a visit to that Harcourt Dale who, later, laid down his life for the cause and the king he loved.

"You see 'ere, sir, on this mullioned window, where his Majesty scratched his name with his diamond ring."

"Yes, yes," said the other impatiently.

"Here it is, sir. Carolus Rex, that's Latin, sir."

"Ah! yes."

"Rex is king."

The visitor yawned.

"Don't you remember you had a terrier called Rex, sir?"

"Ah! I daresay!"

"Your memory ain't as good as mine, sir. I recollects a lot more about you than you does about me."

"Very likely," said the other angrily; "only, you see, gentlemen of my position have to occupy their minds with other matters of more importance than dogs—and servants."

(To be continued.)

Read "Dead to the World."

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And why, pray, is the successful poet, playwright, and journalist an eminent authority on hair restorer? Eager for an explanation, a *Daily Mail* representative sought out Mr. Sims. . . .

Now Mr. G. R. Sims, as many people know, is one of the busiest men in the kingdom, but hastily affixing his signature to a letter, he looked up and extended a characteristically cordial welcome. Then he said: "I will explain. I found that I was rapidly going bald. Not seriously, you understand, but the thinning out was sufficiently marked to set me thinking out a remedy. I went to two specialists, both of whom cheerfully assured me that I should be absolutely bald in two years.

"Then I discovered the preparation which is now placed upon the market. **I found that I had hit upon a remedy capable of working wonders. Look at my hair now, isn't that convincing evidence of the value of my preparation.**

"Ladies confirm my good opinion of it as a dressing for daily use. Mrs. Brown Potter, whose beautiful hair is the admiration of the entire lady world, writes that she uses nothing but 'Tatcho.' There is nothing to prevent every woman from making her hair silken in texture and bountiful in volume, for she can obtain a bottle of 'Tatcho' now in every town or even village."

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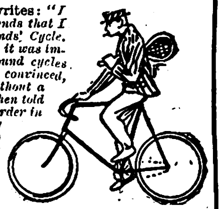

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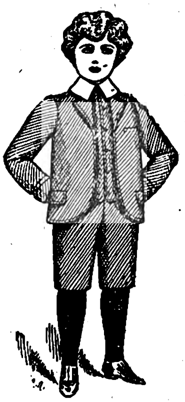

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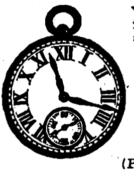

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SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 87 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 28lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Coniston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a *P.W.* penknife to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, October 28th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Mr. P. J. Hardman, of 35 or 85 Gardner Road, Prestwich, near Manchester, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

HE: "There was a terrible accident in town to-day. nine lives lost." She: "Really, how *very* sad; how did it happen?" He: "Well, it was this way. One of the new electric trams ran over a cat."

A pupil teacher was instructing her class upon the positive, comparative and superlative of adjectives. "Now," she asked, "how would you define 'ill'—can we say 'ill,' 'iller,' 'illest'?" "No, miss," exclaimed a pupil, "it would be 'ill,' 'worse,' 'dead!'"

A NERVOUS man whose life was made miserable by the noise of two blacksmiths, prevailed upon each of them to remove by the offer of a liberal compensation. When the money was paid down he kindly inquired what neighbourhood they intended to remove to. "Why, sir," replied one of the smiths, with a grin, "Tom moves to my shop and I move to his."

* COMING home rather late one night, old Jones discovered a country bumpkin with a lantern standing by the kitchen door. "Young man," said he, "what are you doing here?" "I've come a-courting, sur." "A-courting? What do you mean?" "Well, I'm a follower of Mary, the kitchen maid, sir." "Do you usually carry a lantern when you are on such errands?" asked the old man, sarcastically. "Yes, sur, al'ays." "Don't tell me such nonsense. You had better be off quickly—courting with a lantern, indeed! In my young days I never used such a thing." "No, sur," replied the bumpkin, sliding of; "judging by yer missus I shouldn't think yer did."

THE commercial traveller seated himself in the corner seat and carefully adjusted his portmanteau as a foot-rest. Then he handed a newspaper to a passenger opposite, and remarked: "Another of those dispatch-riders captured, you see; they don't know the A B C of their business." "I suppose you could teach them?" remarked the man opposite, with an attempt at sarcasm. "Well, I think so. You don't know Jones, I suppose—Jones, of Birmingham? Smart man, he is! Well, he went out to the Transvaal with the Yeomanry. He was given some dispatches to carry, but he didn't get caught. No, sir. He had his head shaved, and then had the message tattooed on his scalp. Then he applied hair-restorer and he felt safe. He was stopped three times and searched, but, of course, nothing was found. Finally he reached his destination, had his head shaved again, and went to show his head to the general. Oh, he was smart, I tell you. And now, gentlemen, if any of you would like to try a bottle of our 'Grow-up' hair-restorer, price 3s. 6d., I will give a written guarantee that—— Thank you, sir. Three-and-sixpence from ten shillings leaves six-and-six. Good-day; I get out here."

MRS. NEWLYWED (to cook who she has just engaged) "You see, my husband is very particular about his food." Cook (sympathetically): "They're all alike, mem, my old man was just the same. I never cooked nothing to please him in my life."

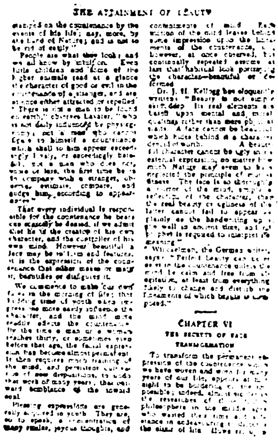
TEACHER (to new scholar): "Now, Mary, I'll give you a sum. Supposing that your father owed the butcher £7 4s., £3 17s. 1d. to the baker, £14 8s. to the coal merchant, £20 10s. to the landlord——" Mary, (confidently): "We should move."

"WHAT'S the matter, William?" said the wealthy householder. "Anything gone wrong?" "Not exactly gone wrong, sir, but I want a new understanding." "What about?" "My pay, sir." "Why, you get very good wages for a cook." "Yes, sir, they does very well for a cook, sir. But I overheard you when you were talking to your friends, sir. You called me your chef." "Well, you ought to be complimented." "Yes, sir, I'm complimented, but business is business. I can't be a chef for less than £800. Wages is all right for a cook, but a chef has to have a salary!"

WHILE a drove of bullocks were being driven through an Irish village from a fair one of the animals suddenly stopped, and, notwithstanding all the efforts of the driver, would not move on its way. A chemist who happened to see the affair went up to the bullock and injected a drug down its throat, which made the animal career down the street like greased lightning. About five minutes afterwards the drover entered the chemist's shop wiping the sweat off his head, and asked the shopman if he was the party who gave the bullock the medicine. "I am," said the chemist. "Well," said Pat, "I'll take a pennyworth of it, as I have to follow the baste."

THIS is what a young lady is reported recently to have said *apropos* of marriage: "Well, no, I don't know if I would marry for money alone; but if a man had plenty of money, allied to a sweet disposition, and a moustache that curled at both ends, and nice blue eyes, and a social position; if he had a distinguished status in a profession, or even as a merchant, and his father was rich and his mother and sisters aristocratic, and he wished to marry me, and he would promise to let me have my own way in everything, and keep me liberally supplied with money, and have a splendidly-furnished town house and a handsome country residence, was liberal about diamonds and other gems, also about the milliner, never grumbling, and I really and truly loved him, I shouldn't consider marriage a drawback."

HE was "cracking" a house in the suburbs when a slight, delicate woman came running down the stairs, and putting her hand on his arm, inquired in a terrified tone: "What's the matter? Is there a burglar in the house? Oh, protect me!" In her terror she did not think of him as the robber, and the evident comfort it gave her to find someone to protect her afforded him a new sensation. He was staggered for the moment by the situation, but hearing other inmates moving upstairs, who had evidently been aroused by her loud exclamations, he quickly said: "Certainly, ma'am, I'll protect you—have no fear. Just stand here behind the door while I look in the kitchen, where the noise seems to come from." "Oh, thank you," she replied, as he slipped out into the kitchen, picked up his shoes, and vanished, leaving the booty piled up on the floor in a tablecloth.



A MINIATURE PAGE FROM THE GREATEST BOOK ON EARTH.

Here is presented to the readers of Short Stories a miniature page of a book pronounced by the Press to be the most remarkable work of the century. Every year thousands of new books are published. They are read and forgotten. But once in a hundred years a new book appears which THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR. It contains some new truths which alters the history of mankind. Such a book has been issued. You will read it. If not to day, then some other day, for sooner or later it will be read by all men and all women. And when you have read it your life will be altered. It will become better, happier, more joyous. The writer of the book is Professor Boyd Laynard, who is now recognised as the greatest living authority on personal hygiene. The name of the book is "SECRETS OF BEAUTY, HEALTH, AND LONG LIFE." Its sale is rapidly approaching

ONE MILLION

copies.

"Secrets of Beauty, Health, and Long Life," is no misnomer respecting the title of this extraordinary work. The author has unfolded to the world many secrets regarding these subjects, the importance of which it is impossible to over-estimate. The work, however, has not been written for the purpose of startling the reader with remarkable theories, but as a practical handbook for all those desiring good looks, health, and long life.

The publishers have issued a popular edition, at a price within the reach of all, so that the book may find a place in every home. The work is arranged in 127 chapters, the whole of which (in the popular edition now offered to the public) is bound in **one** volume. The book, although published at **Two** Shillings, will, if ordered direct from the Publishers, be forwarded to readers of Short Stories, carriage paid, at the low discount price of

ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE.

Among the numerous subjects dealt with, the following are but few. A complete syllabus, showing the contents of the whole of the **127 CHAPTERS,** enumerating upwards of **500 SUBJECTS** and divisions of subjects, can be had free on application to the Publishers:—

The way we make our own faces—Secrets of face transformation—Changeableness of beauty and its causes—Some strange facts concerning the variableness of beauty—"Odd-faced" beauty—The countenance the counterpart of the mind—How pleasing expressions become permanent—How a person's habitual look is acquired—How permanent expressions can be transformed—Metaphysical secrets of keeping young and preserving a youthful appearance—The author's investigations into the causes why some individua's look younger than others at a certain age—Discovery of a great metaphysical secret—Wonders of the skin—Effects of mental emotions upon the skin—Bad complexions and their causes—Diet that spoils and diet that improves the complexion—General care of the complexion—Construction, growth, and wonders of the hair—Why hair falls out—Premature greyness: its causes and prevention—General care of the hair—Superfluous hairs and how to treat them—Wrinkles: their prevention and treatment—Freckles, tan, and blackheads—Oily skin, dry skin, and loose skin—How the nose can be improved—Protruding ears and their treatment—Offensive breath—Anatomy of the teeth—Why teeth decay—General care of the teeth—Tallness, and how to attain it—Round shoulders and how to cure them—How to acquire a full chest—Perfect form and figure: their proper proportions—Thinness, and its treatment—Excessive stoutness—Care of the hands—Care of the feet—Physiognomy; or, the art of reading character from the face—Mental influences upon health—Power of the mind over the body—Influence of the mind in curing diseases—How the mind can cause dyspepsia—Effect of the direction of thought to the heart—How real diseases often supervene upon fancied ailments—How violent passions injure health—Laughter as a medicine—Ailments cured by laughter—Wonders of digestion—Relative value to our bodies of the principal articles of food—Fruits and vegetables as medicine: their various influences upon the physical system—Health-preserving diet and its consistency—Diet favourable to mental exertion and intellectual culture—Influence of various foods upon our passions and propensities—The influence exerted by the mind upon the appetite and digestion—Some perilous articles of food—Exercise and its relation to health—Baths and bathing: their influence upon health—The way we breathe, and how it affects our health—The marriage state, and its influence upon health—Statistics showing the comparative vitality of married and single persons—100 professions, trades, and occupations: their respective influences upon health and long life—Sleep, and its relation to health—Insomnia, and its treatment—The eyes, and how to preserve them—The ears and hearing: how to prevent deafness—The voice: its cultivation and preservation—Memory, and how to improve it—Sudden failure of memory—Rules for cultivating the memory—Influence of diet upon memory—Stammering, and how to cure it—Prevention of disease—Nervousness—Blushing: its physiology and treatment—Rules of life for attaining longevity—Compendium of the mental, moral, physical, and external influences that lessen the years of our earthly existence—How to live to a hundred—Premature old age and its causes—Short biographies of 30 modern centenarians, whose ages range from 115 to 185 years—General principles that can be laid down for the anticipation of longevity—The eight signs of long life.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

That good old family game of "Hunt the Slipper" is doomed. It has been beaten out of existence by a new pastime called "Hunt the Fiver." Never heard of the game, you say? Good gracious, how behind the times you are. You'll be saying that you never heard of football next. However, in case you don't understand the latest popular game, let me explain it to you.

Take this copy of *Short Stories* in your left hand, then turn the leaves with your right till you arrive at page 530. You will there find five portraits. If yours is amongst them and you send in a claim to us in accordance with the conditions printed on the same page, you have won the game and get a £5 note for your trouble. If you don't find your portrait in this week's number, the game is to buy next week's, and so on till you do find your portrait.

Of the second batch of portraits the originals of three of them have claimed, and £5 notes have been dispatched to them. Here are their names and addresses:

Mr. H. Bramwell (No. 6),
50 Gordon Buildings,
Datchelor Place,
Church Street,
Camberwell, S.E.

Mr. F. D. Strange (No. 8),
Calne, Wilts.

Mr. William Maher (No. 9),
22 Tangier Lane,
Eton, Bucks.

⁂

Advice to Readers on Various Matters.

(*Replies to Correspondents.*)

In reply to "Beginner," something remotely akin to the tricycle was known as far back as 1767. The infant progenitor of the bicycle was the "dandy-horse," introduced into England in 1818 by Baron von Drais, in which the initial impulse came from the rider's own feet, with which, as he bestrode his vehicle, he propelled himself rapidly along the ground. The first pedalled bicycle was invented about 1846, and is generally credited to Gavin Dalziel, a Scotch cooper, of Lesmahagow, Lanarkshire, but it was a very primitive affair, and it was not till 1867 that modern cycling, as we know it, took its rise in the "bone-shaker" of M. Michaux, a wooden machine.

On several occasions last winter (says the editor of *Home Notes*) I mentioned that I knew a quick cure for neuralgia, toothache, and earache, and in reply to many hundreds of inquiries I sent particulars. In the treacherous weather we get during an English winter we never know when one of these complaints may attack us. Whilst I am unwilling to mention the remedy by name here, I am quite willing to give all information as to where it can be obtained, etc., on receipt of a stamped addressed envelope. It has been used, and is always kept handy, by the Duchess of Sutherland, the Earl of Wemyss, Lady Courtenay, Mrs. Kendal, and others. As it cures in one minute, no reader of *Short Stories* should fail to keep it in the medicine chest.

One of my lady readers writes to ask if it is really true that certain smart society women indulge in cigarettes made of tea?

Yes, unfortunately; and it is certainly one of the maddest and most dangerous "fads" ever conceived. The cigarette is formed of the unbroken leaf of green tea, slightly moistened. The taste is not so disagreeable as might be supposed, but the effect on the tyro is a sense of thickening in the head and a disposition to take hold of something or sit down. If the beginner quits them, that settles it—she will not try tea cigarettes again. If, however, the smoker sits down and tries a second cigarette, inhaling it deeply, then the thickening feeling passes, and is succeeded by one of intense exhilaration. The nerves are stimulated until the smoker feels like flying, skirt dancing, or doing something else entirely out of the common way. This stage lasts as long as the smoke continues, which is until the reaction of the stomach sets in. Words cannot describe the final effects of the tea cigarette. The agony of the opium fiend is a shadow to that of the nauseated victim of the tea cigarette. It will be hours before food can be looked at, yet, curiously enough, the first step towards a cure is a cup of tea.

In answer to "D. B.," the creation of a peer is now effected by letters patent, addressed to the new lord of Parliament, which are accompanied by a writ of summons to the House of Lords. The following is the form of procedure. The Prime Minister informs the Home Secretary of the intention of the Crown. The Home Office thereupon instructs the Crown Office in Chancery to prepare a warrant for the sign-manual. This warrant, when prepared, is submitted by the Home Secretary to the King, and having been countersigned by him, it is returned to the Crown Office for the preparation of the letters patent and the affixing thereto of the Great Seal, and the letters patent and writ are then sent to the newly-created peer. On the introduction to the House, the new peer presents his patent to the Lord Chancellor, and this and also his writ of summons are read and entered upon the journals of the House. They form the "matter of records," in which, as the Lords resolved in 1680, the title to a peerage must originate.

◆

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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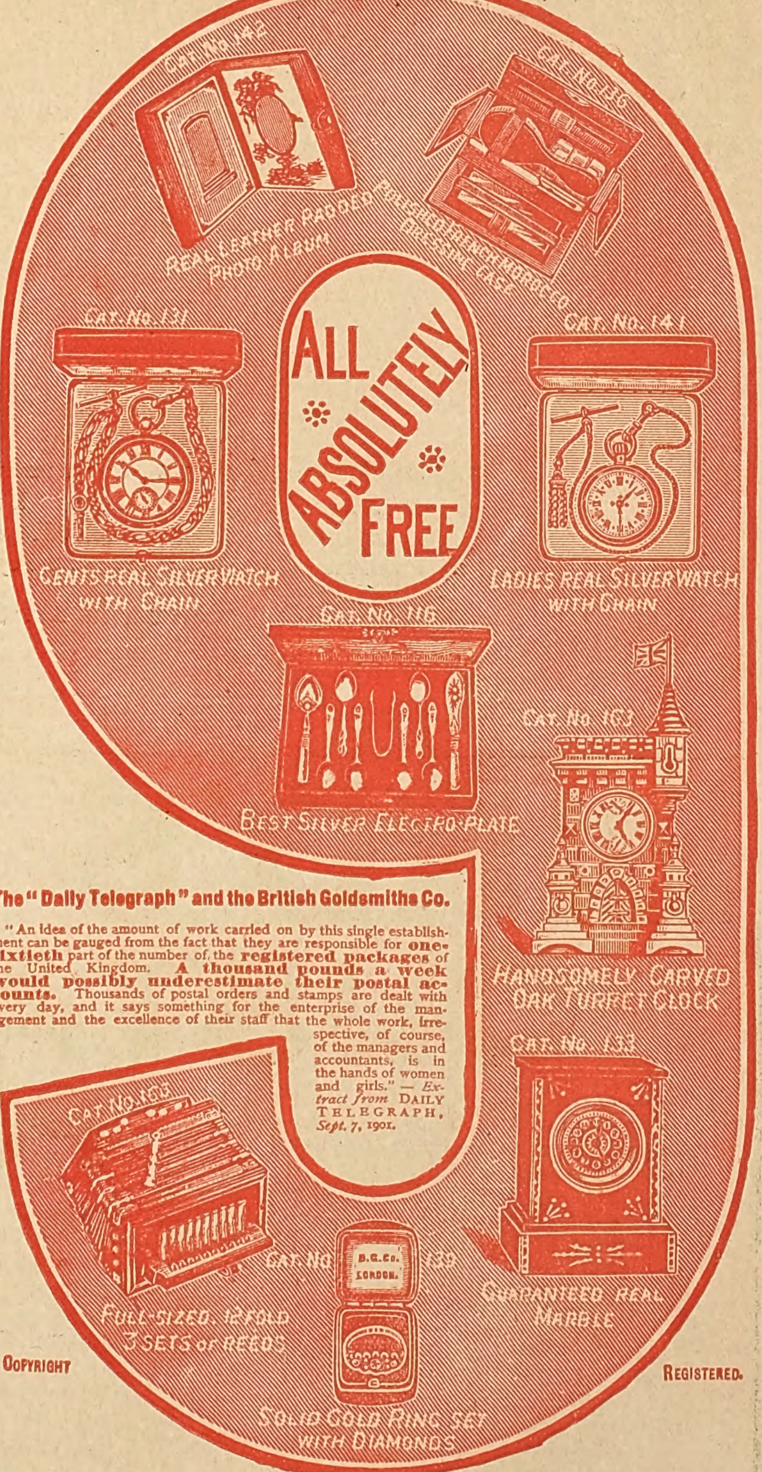
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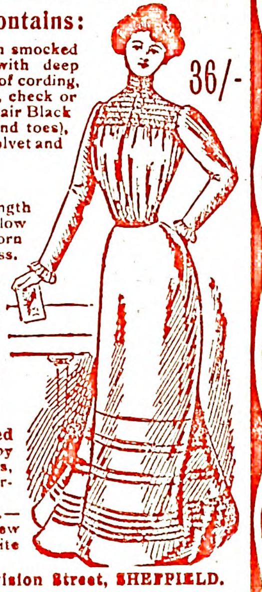

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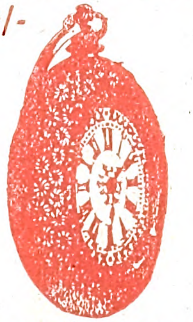

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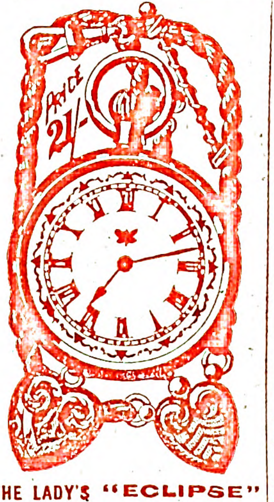

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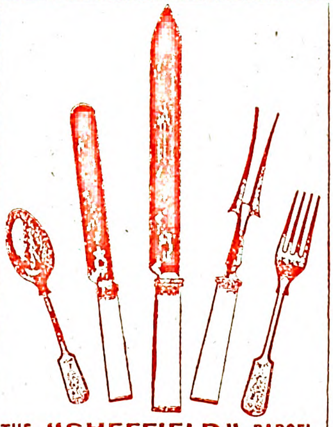

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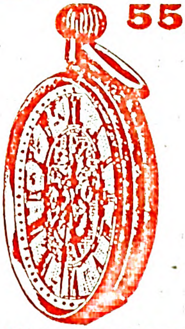

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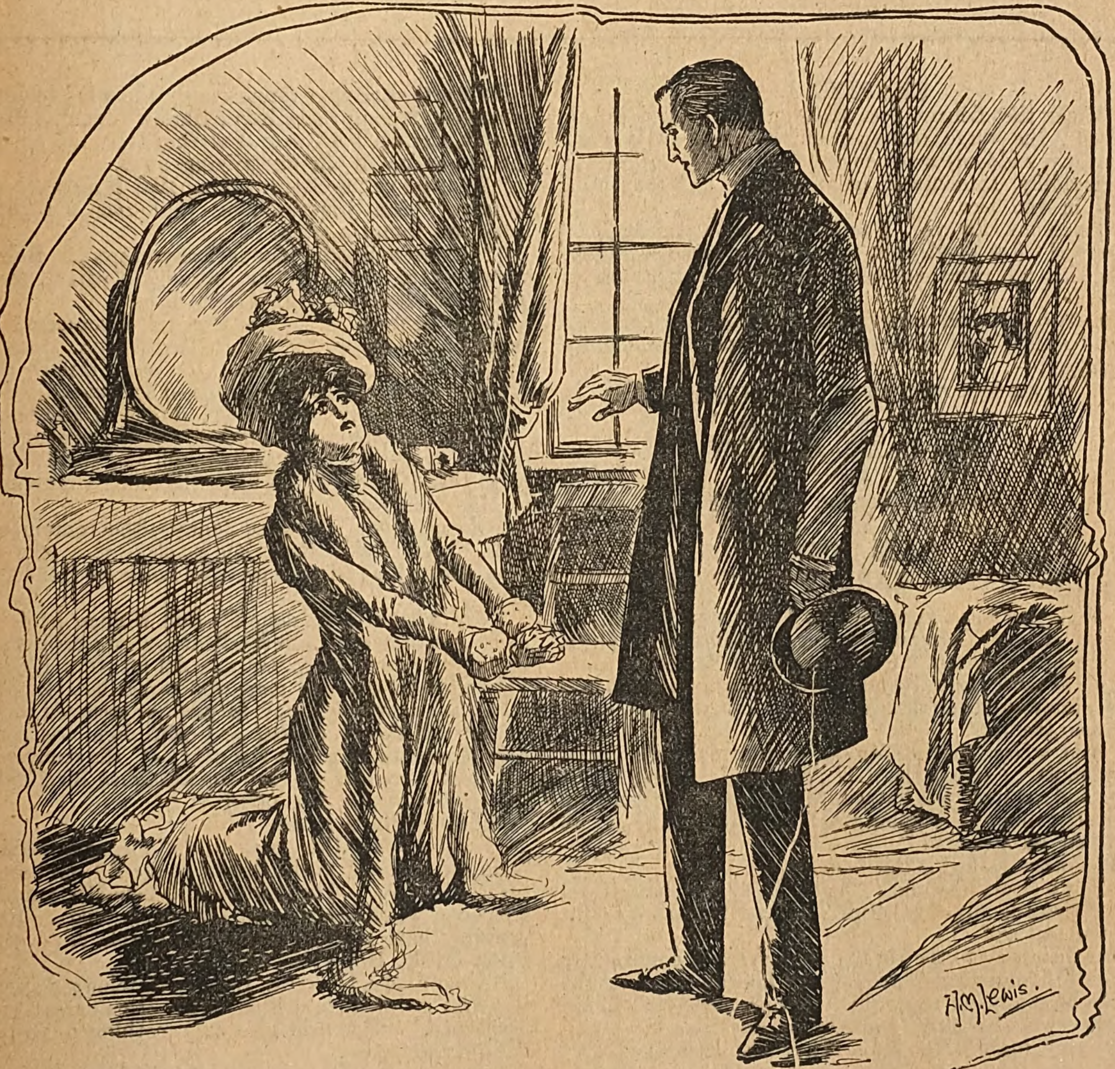

In a moment the Duchess changed her front and flung herself at the young man's feet.

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A THRILLING INSTALMENT.

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

XIII.—THE DISGUISE OF A DUCHESS.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

"WHAT the dickens does that mean?" And Frank Holmes, the stage manager of the *Good Samaritan* Company, suddenly came to a halt upon the pavement of Piccadilly, Manchester, as though he had received a blow in the face.

"Pinch me, hit me. I can't have got them again!" answered Clive Pendennis, actor, in the same company. "No, it's all right enough. What on earth does it mean?"

The two men had come to a halt opposite the hoarding upon which the following poster was prominently displayed:—

PRINCE'S THEATRE, MANCHESTER.
For Six Nights Only.
MISS HAZEL HARLOW
AND
Powerful London Company
IN
EAST LYNNE.
Miss HAZEL HARLOW as "ISABEL."

"Well, this is the rummiest go I ever struck in all the course of my theatrical career," ejaculated Holmes. "Here are we with the one and only Hazel billed to appear at the Theatre Royal, and on the top of that there's this announcement that Hazel Harlow will appear in another theatre."

"And where, in thunder, are our own bills?" cried Pendennis. "Here, there is something wrong about this, and, as luck will have it, Venables doesn't turn up this afternoon. I wonder what he will have to say to it when he appears?"

The other looked at his watch.

"Ten o'clock," he said. "Let's go to the theatre and see if there is anybody there who can throw any light on the matter."

On their way to the theatre they noticed, confronting them in flaming letters from every hoarding and on the backs of sandwich men, the announcement that Hazel Harlow would positively appear in *East Lynne*, and on that very night (Monday). They also remarked that their own posters were in meagre evidence, and were quite overshadowed by the placards advertising the *East Lynne* Company.

At the theatre they found nearly the whole company assembled, among them Hazel Harlow herself. Holmes and Pendennis both saw that they were not alone in the possession of the electrifying news.

"What on earth does it mean, Miss Harlow?" cried Holmes. "Are you doubling your *rôle* to-night, or have you found a ghost?"

"I am just as much in the dark as you are, Mr. Holmes," answered the girl. "I was just saying what a terrible pity it is that Mr. Venables is not here."

"It's the most shameless piece of effrontery I ever heard of," broke in Jenny Lovelace hotly; "that anyone should have the audacity to usurp Hazel's name. It's easy enough to see what it is—it's a put-up job."

"But whose company is it?" broke in Holmes.

"Tom Henderson's," answered one of the actors. "I think I know his crowd pretty well, and there's no one there that I know of who bears the faintest resemblance to Miss Harlow."

"Of course not," answered Jenny with a contemptuous sniff. "As I said before, it's as plain as a pike-staff; it's a put-up job to draw a crowded house for Henderson's lot."

"But what's to be done?" said Holmes in despair. As stage-manager he was excellent, but in a crisis such as this he was practically useless. All felt that Raymond Venables was the only man who would be able to cope with such a situation, and he was not expected in Manchester till the afternoon, and with him was coming Eric Monteith, to rejoin the ranks of the company he had been forced to abandon for awhile at Birmingham: (See *Short Stories* No. 666.)

Suddenly Hazel spoke.

"I know what I'm going to do," she said decisively. "I'm going round to the theatre to see if I can't see this 'Hazel Harlow.' Then, when Mr. Venables comes this afternoon we shall have something to go upon. He will probably have some idea that will enable us to get the better of Mr. Henderson and Co."

"A good idea!" cried Holmes, catching eagerly at the first straw that drifted down the current of his perplexity. "That will give us something to go on, as Miss Harlow says."

"Yes," went on the actress; "I don't want anybody to come with me. I'm going alone, incognito. I shall just ask to see 'Miss Harlow.' I'll put on a thick veil,

Read "Dead to the World."

and if I can I'll find out who my namesake is, and anything else that may happen to crop up. Perhaps it is my double," she said, smiling; "anyhow, the idea of becoming a private detective is rather to my taste."

Jenny drew Hazel apart.

"Let me come with you, Hazel," she said.

Hazel hesitated.

"I should love you to come," she answered slowly. "But don't you think it would be easier for me to do this alone?"

"But supposing something should happen to you? Suppose there is something at the bottom of it all that means disaster to you. Supposing this is the work of your enemies—of the man Caldecott, of whom we have heard nothing for so long?"

"I'm not afraid," answered Hazel stoutly. "And I am sure, somehow, that Horace Caldecott could have no hand in this. He knows perfectly well that if he were to show his face here I would have him arrested. Sir George Chetwynd at Southampton told me not to hesitate for an instant, but to communicate with the police at once if I heard of his presence anywhere. He assured me that he would come forward and give his testimony on my behalf. And think, I am not going into any outlandish region. I am going to a theatre in broad daylight. No, Jenny, I think the real Hazel Harlow ought to tackle the false one single-handed!"

When once Hazel had made up her mind Jenny knew that argument was useless, but it was not without some feelings of misgiving that she saw her friend depart, veiled and cloaked, through the damp, foggy atmosphere of the November day on her self-imposed errand.

There were a great many people outside the "Prince's Theatre" as Hazel approached the building. Large placards were displayed with the words "Hazel Harlow is here" upon them.

Hazel made her way round to the stage-door of the theatre, where a top-hatted individual, with a clean-shaven, heavy face, was sitting in the little office adjoining the entrance.

"Can I see Miss Harlow?" said Hazel to him in a low voice.

The man stared at her with undisguised curiosity.

"What's your business?" he demanded curtly.

Hazel handed him a sealed envelope.

"Perhaps you would give her this note?" she said.

The man twirled it in his fingers for a few minutes.

"I don't know if she is in the theatre," he said at last. "If you'll wait here a minute I'll go and see."

In a short time he reappeared.

"Miss Harlow will see you," he said. "I'll take you up to her dressing-room."

He led the way up a flight of stone stairs and knocked at a door.

"Come in," cried a voice—a woman's.

The fellow threw open the door, and Hazel entered the dressing-room. It was a small apartment with a screen at one end, a table beneath the window upon which were displayed all the appurtenances of an actress's "make-up," and a few other insignificant details.

In the centre of the room a woman was standing, tall, superbly dressed and undeniably beautiful, though of that bold, pronounced type that is more or less common with women of a certain stamp in the profession.

The man shut the door and retired.

"Are you Miss Harlow?" began Hazel meekly.

"I am," answered the other defiantly; "or rather that is the name that I have elected to assume."

Hazel threw back her veil.

"But I believe I have a prior right to that name," she said, as she did so; "and, besides, the name happens to be my own. It has not been assumed for stage purposes."

The other gave vent to a contemptuous laugh.

"There's no copyright in names," she replied disdainfully. "I believe if I cared to call myself 'Ellen Terry' or 'Sarah Bernhardt,' I could do so."

"But why should you have chosen my poor insignificant name?" replied Hazel, nothing daunted by the overbearing manner of the other woman. "I suppose I ought to take it as a great compliment, but surely your conduct lays itself open to a certain amount of censure when you adopt a name that appears for the first time side by side with mine in Manchester."

"I will admit I had reasons for what I did," came the calm answer. "It suited my purpose to assume your name and there's an end of it. The situation should appeal to you. We are going to ask the people of Manchester to decide between us; see whether they prefer the Ruth of Hazel Harlow No. 1 to the Isabel of Hazel Harlow No. 2."

"Yes," broke in Hazel. "But you don't seem to have given the people of Manchester much chance. Hazel Harlow as Isabel is billed far more than the other. That seems to be rather calculated to mislead. I am perhaps vain enough to think that people will visit your theatre out of compliment to my poor name."

"I am not an advertising agent," retorted the spurious Hazel Harlow, "and if Mr. Henderson has thought fit to spend more money in advertising than your man, well, the inference is obvious. Have you nothing more to say to me?"

Hazel was nonplussed for a moment. The cool and brazen effrontery of the woman almost took her breath away. She was at a loss for an answer. The other noted her hesitation.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"You may be quite sure that we shall take steps to protect ourselves," answered the other with spirit. "The game is not played out yet."

The unknown gave vent to a mocking laugh.

"You are quite right there," she said.

At that moment a faint noise from behind caused Hazel to turn her head. A woman had sprung from behind the screen with outstretched hands. Hazel felt her own arms gripped from behind, and then a sharp prick as of a needle being inserted into the soft flesh of her forearm. She uttered a sharp cry, and turned round to grapple with her unknown assailant; then a sudden overpowering lassitude seized hold of her: her strength seemed to be ebbing quickly away; the room swam round; then she lost consciousness.

"Very neatly done, Clara," said the false Hazel. "You drove the needle in well; there's nothing like a hypodermic injection to quiet refractory people. And now we must get on with the rest of the business."

CHAPTER II.

RAYMOND VENABLES's and Eric Monteith were met at the station by Frank Holmes and Jenny Lovelace, with consternation written on their faces. In as few words as possible Holmes related to Venables the astounding news that there was another Hazel Harlow in Manchester, with the result that the rival theatre had had unprecedented booking. But there was almost worse news than that. Hazel Harlow had disappeared. She had gone round to the theatre, and as she had not turned up within the time she had named Jenny had gone round to look for her, only to be met with the information that a lady had called to see Miss Harlow (meaning, of course, the false one) who had left almost directly after the interview.

Venables was distraught, as well he might be. It was bad enough to discover the trick of the rival company, but that Hazel had disappeared was far more serious news.

As for Eric, he had looked forward with intense longing to see Hazel once more, and now to learn that she was missing almost drove him frantic.

Eric, Venables and Jenny held a hasty council of war.

"I am sure," said Jenny, "that Hazel's disappearance is connected with the visit she made to the theatre. I tried to dissuade her from going, but she would not listen to me. What on earth can be done now?"

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do," said Venables. "I'm going round to see Henderson, and to threaten proceedings. It's scandalous that he should play such a scurvy trick. As if it were possible that there were two Hazel Harlows in the world. I shouldn't be surprised if it was part and parcel of the dastardly trick that they've got Hazel shut up there so that our hands are tied as regards billing her to appear at the theatre. This scheme hasn't been hastily thought out. There's something more at the bottom of this than we know."

Accordingly Eric and Venables lost no time in going round to the rival theatre. At the entrance they paused to read the great notices billing Hazel Harlow in *East Lynne.* Venables gnashed his teeth in fury.

"Look at that," he said hoarsely. "Did you ever see anything more abominable?"

Suddenly a voice fell on Eric's ears.

"Mr. Monteith," he heard. "This is indeed a pleasant surprise." Upon the steps of the theatre a woman was standing, a tall, beautifully dressed figure. Eric looked at her in amazement.

"The Duchess of Stanchester!" he ejaculated in sheer amazement.

The woman laughed at his astonishment.

"Alias Kitty Melville," she said. "It's like old times to see you here, Mr. Monteith. Someone told me that you had taken to the boards, while I—well, you know the moth that has once singed its wings at the candle-flame always flies back to the light, and so it is with me. I mourned for Stanchester a whole year and then—well, here I am!"

Words froze on Eric's lips. Phantoms of the past rose up before him as he gazed at the beautiful figure standing there. He remembered well how in days now dead his youthful fancies had been captured by Kitty Melville, as she was then, and how the actress had responded to his boyish passion. She had sworn undying love for him, beardless Oxford boy as he was; but the glamour with which she had surrounded him soon faded, and it was with a feeling of the utmost relief he read the announcement of her marriage with the aged and decrepit Duke of Stanchester. And now the Duke was dead, and Kitty Melville had risen up before his path to remind him of what were best forgotten. But what was she doing here? Could she have any connection with the spurious Hazel Harlow who had ousted the legitimate owner of that name in Manchester?

These thoughts flashed through Eric's brain faster than they take to tell. His thoughts were centred round Hazel; where was she? Perhaps this woman could give him a key to the situation. He looked round for Venables, but the manager had disappeared somewhere. Then Eric turned to the woman.

"Can I have a few words with your Grace?" he said, in a low voice.

"Certainly, Mr. Monteith. Come up to my dressing-room. It's quite like old times to see you again." But in spite of her lightly-spoken words there was a suspicion of latent nervousness lying beneath them.

As soon as they were alone Eric turned to the Duchess.

"Perhaps you can throw some light on this mysterious Hazel Harlow No. 2," he said quietly. "Perhaps you can also give me some information as to where Hazel Harlow—the real one—is at this moment. As you know, she is a member of the company to which I have the honour to belong."

The Duchess laughed mirthlessly.

"If you must know the truth," she said, "*I* am acting under the name of Hazel Harlow. As for the young lady in whom you seem to take so great an interest, I can only say that she came and saw me here and then went away. But why do you look at me like that? Have you forgotten the old days, Eric, and all that passed between us? I only married Stanchester out of pique. You know that as well as I do. My heart was always yours, and always will be. If you knew how I had been longing to see you, and to hear from your own lips that you had not forgotten me——"

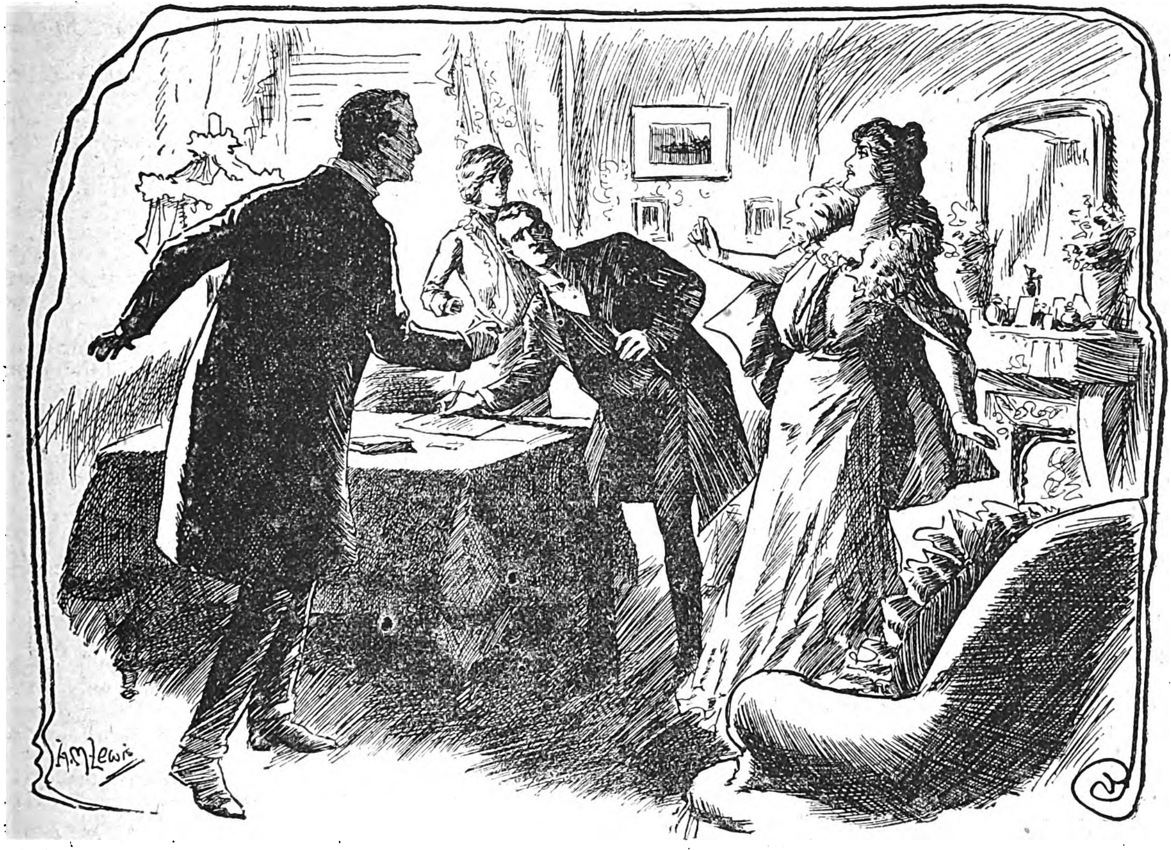
But Eric put up his hand with an imploring gesture.

"How can your Grace speak like that?" he said coldly. "The past is long since dead. It is surely but little use to rake amongst the embers of a forgotten folly."

"Folly!" echoed the actress with heaving bosom and face aflame; "then you mean to say that you were not in earnest, or is it that I have grown plainer and older in these years that have passed since we met? Ah, I see what it is," she continued, with rising passion, "it is this Hazel Harlow that has come between us. You have been captivated by her pretty looks, and are ready to forget all the love words you uttered to Kitty Melville. It is for her—a country chit—that you would throw over a woman's love."

Eric was too dumfounded to find a ready answer to this stormy flood of words. It seemed incredible that he could have ever cared for this woman, or have fancied that he did, and it was incredible that she could make so much copy out of what had been, after all, only a youthful flirtation on his part.

"I regret exceedingly," he said at last, "to find that my past actions have been so misconstrued. I will own that I was in the wrong to have flirted with you, but I never for one moment imagined that you had taken my boyish actions so strongly to heart. I assure you that my regret is indeed deep, and yet I fail to see why you should have impersonated Hazel Harlow as you have done, or why you should take notice of the fact that I am her lover. I admit that I do love her, and if I ever marry, she is the only girl I ever will marry. I own that I have come here hoping to find where she was, for she has disappeared, and it is known that she came here to visit you."



"I have cheated the gallows!" she murmured faintly

A terrible look came into the woman's eyes as she heard this frank avowal, for, to give her her due, all her passionate nature was concentrated on Eric Monteith. In her case absence had indeed made the heart grow fonder.

"If that is your last word, then," she said hoarsely, "go and find Hazel Harlow, and I wish you luck. I don't know where she is and I care less."

In his heart Eric felt that the woman was lying. He felt instinctively that she did know where her innocent rival was; that she had, indeed, taken some steps to wreak her vengeance on the girl who had come between Eric and herself; that this adoption of Hazel's name was part and parcel of her plot. Eric knew that all the vast wealth of the Duke of Stanchester had come to the old nobleman's relict, and that the son of the Duke by his first wife had been practically left a pauper at his father's death. Yet what could he do? He had no proof to back up his belief that there had been foul play. The Duchess was an unscrupulous and a clever woman. She had probably laid her plans with a deep forethought.

"And if I tell you that I do not believe you?" he said curtly. "That I am of opinion that you *do* know where Hazel Harlow is? I shall take all the steps in my power to elucidate the mystery of her disappearance. What will you do then?"

The actress' eyes gleamed.

"Do your worst," she muttered. "I deny that I have any hand in the affair, and you have no proof to the contrary."

"No, but I will find proof. I see how great your boasted love for me is that you can wound me in my tenderest part, and hope by such methods to turn my affections from one who is purity and goodness personified."

His words had an unlooked-for effect. In a moment the Duchess changed her front and flung herself at the young man's feet.

"Don't turn from me like that, Eric," she wailed. "Why won't you give up this girl? I tell you that I love you with all my heart and soul. Is it nothing to you that I am the Duchess of Stanchester, that I am possessed of great wealth? Am I so unpleasing to look upon? Surely I am not altogether hideous or undesirable?"

But such self-abandonment had only the effect of increasing Eric's distaste for this unwelcome lover.

"Your Grace surely forgets yourself!" he said with difficulty; "it is unwomanly of you to abase yourself

Read "Dead to the World."

so before me. Heaven knows that you are beautiful and attractive enough, but love cannot be bought. It must be spontaneous, and besides, I cannot reconcile myself to the fact which you assert—that you do not know what has become of Hazel Harlow. I cannot help but think that you know where she is, and I cannot hold with your taking her name. There is no excuse for so wilful an assumption of another's reputation."

"And why not?" cried the Duchess, rising to her feet. "All is fair in love and war! Well, I have done for you what I would do for no other man. I have unsexed myself and for nothing. I bid you go!"

But Eric felt that the last word lay with him.

"Then you absolutely deny that you know where Hazel Harlow is?"

"Yes," came the defiant answer. "Go out into the streets of Manchester and look for her."

In the meanwhile Venables had been endeavouring to gain an audience with Henderson, the manager of the *East Lynne* Company, and to demand an explanation of the extensive billing of the name of Hazel Harlow.

But Henderson was not to be found. In other words, the badger refused to be drawn. Venables was beside himself with rage and mortification. In the first place Hazel had disappeared; and secondly, there seemed no way of counteracting the wily plans of his adversary. The blow had fallen so unexpectedly, and so much money must have been expended to gull the people of Manchester, that it must be some time before the evil could be counteracted.

Venables threatened injunctions and metaphorically shook the law in the face of Henderson's minions, who listened imperturbably to his railings. The day was getting on, the bookings for *East Lynne* were unprecedented, and—to crown all—the real Hazel Harlow had disappeared. Neither was there any evidence to show that Mr. Henderson had any hand in her disappearance. Everybody in the rival theatre was unanimous that a veiled lady had appeared that morning to interview the Duchess of Stanchester, and had left the theatre shortly afterwards. The Duchess had indeed laid her plans well.

Venables rushed out of the theatre breathing vows of vengeance, and almost ran into the arms of Eric returning from his fruitless quest. The two hastily compared notes.

"What are you going to do?" asked Eric.

"Do!" cried Venables. "There is only one thing we can do. Get out bills to the effect that the *East Lynne* people are advertising a spurious Hazel Harlow, and to offer a huge reward for the recovery of our own lead. That's what blues the whole concern, and makes me feel so unspeakably wretched, as I am sure it must you. To think that Hazel has gone, Heaven knows where, to say nothing of the fact that had we got her here we would be able to hoist Henderson's crowd with their own petard. As it is, upon my word, I don't know what we can do. I wonder if there is a smart detective in Manchester to whom we can turn. Anyhow, I think I'll go round to the police and put the case before them."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when Eric felt a hand upon his shoulder. He wheeled round, to be confronted by a somewhat ragged individual.

"How do you do, Mr. Monteith?" said a voice that sounded strangely familiar.

Eric stared at the man in astonishment.

"Who on earth are you?" he cried.

The man laughed.

"Ah, you don't recognise me in this get-up," he said. "Don't you remember a little affair at Rugby where we ran a very pleasing scoundrel to earth?"

Light suddenly dawned on Eric's brain.

"Kempton Bond!" he ejaculated.

"Not so loud," answered the detective. "So you recognise me?"

"What brings you to Manchester?" muttered Eric. "You are just the very man I want."

"If you'll come with me I'll tell you," answered Bond. "I shall be very pleased to help you if I can."

He led the way to a quiet hotel in Corporation Street, in a private room of which the three men soon found themselves snugly ensconced.

"And now," said Bond. "I'll tell you why I have come to Manchester. It is in connection with a little affair concerning Her Grace the Duchess of Stanchester."

"The Duchess of Stanchester!" said Venables, "alias Kitty Melville!"

"Yes," answered Bond, "also alias Hazel Harlow."

"So it's she!" cried Venables. "What on earth is her game?"

The detective smiled.

"Her game is nearly up," he answered grimly. "Do you gentlemen care to hear a little story?"

Both assented eagerly.

"You will probably remember," said the detective, "that his Grace the Duke of Stanchester died somewhat suddenly after a short illness, leaving the bulk of his property to his widow. By a will that was only a few days old, and that he would very probably have altered had he lived, the present Duke, then known as the Marquis of Saundersfoot, was left practically a pauper, and it was not till some time after that he made the discovery that there was a mystery surrounding the death of his august father. The Marquis, like many other young scions of nobility, had gone the pace a bit, and had been foolish enough to flirt with his stepmother's maid. This woman admitted to him one day, after a champagne supper, that the Duchess had resolved to become possessed of her husband's entire fortune by fair means or foul. Then came his father's sudden death and the disappearance of the maid afore-mentioned. For some time he took no action in the matter, but among some old rubbish that had belonged to the maid he discovered a small bottle containing the dregs of a particularly insidious poison. His suspicions were aroused, and he communicated with me. Since then I have been on the track of that maid, and I have only just succeeded in running her to earth. She has again entered the employ of the Duchess of Stanchester."

"Then you think that the Duchess poisoned the old Duke?" asked Eric in a horror-stricken voice.

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"Such things have been done," he said quietly. "But what is this business about which you wish to ask me?"

"Why, that the real Miss Hazel Harlow has disappeared," replied Monteith, and he related to the detective all that he knew about the matter, telling pretty fully his interview with the Duchess only a short time previously.

"So that's how the wind blows," cried Kempton Bond. "That simplifies matters exceedingly. What do you say to paying another visit to the Duchess of Stanchester in company with me, Mr. Monteith? If that lady has had any hand in the disappearance of Miss Harlow, I think we shall be able to kill two birds with one stone. If we can force her hand the game is ours, and there's no need to prosecute any further search for the missing maidservant."

Kempton Bond spoke with confidence, and both Venables and Monteith felt that Providence had given them a most unexpected way out of their difficulty. Venables looked at his watch.

"It's five o'clock now," he said. "We've not too much time."

"Time enough," answered the detective coolly. "If we can only find her Grace the battle is as good as won. Mind you, I don't say positively she did poison the old gentleman, but the servant's words and the discovery of the phial ought to go a long way to clearing up the matter. And, depend upon it, her Grace would do a good deal to keep her name from being dragged up into public notice as a murdress. And, mind you, the facts are pretty strong. The only wonder is they didn't create more comment at the time. The Duke makes a brand new will, dies within a few days of it, and the servant disappears almost immediately after his death. Anyhow, it's enough for Kempton Bond to go on. But this new move of hers is a caution." He threw a sly glance at Eric. "There's some saying about 'a woman scorned,' I believe, Mr. Monteith," he said.

Eric coloured.

"At any rate," he said stoutly, "I don't see that I have anything to blame myself with."

CHAPTER III.

When Eric and the detective went round to the theatre it was to discover that the Duchess was not there. Neither would the officials at the theatre give her private address in Manchester. This was a check that Kempton Bond had foreseen. He accordingly determined to wait about until her Grace should appear.

Venables had not been idle. He had had huge placards put outside the theatre to the effect that owing to the indisposition of the genuine Miss Hazel Harlow her part would be filled that night by an understudy. Underneath the notice was the following sentence in smaller type:

"Miss Hazel Harlow achieved her first and only success in *The Good Samaritan*, and has appeared in the part of Ruth with unprecedented success in most of the large towns in England. In spite of all assertions to the contrary, Miss Hazel Harlow will appear in no other play save *The Good Samaritan*. The public are warned against being gulled by any misleading statement."

This notice was put into being at the advice of Kempton Bond, for the detective had assured Venables that if his surmises were correct, he need have little fear that Hazel had been put out of the way. He was convinced that although the Duchess of Stanchester had had a hand in her abduction, she would not dare to go to the extreme of silencing Hazel for ever.

And with this Venables had to be content.

About an hour before the curtain was due to be rung up at the Prince's Theatre on the first act of *East Lynne*, the Duchess of Stanchester, alias Hazel Harlow, turned up at the theatre with her maid. It was a dark foggy evening, and as she stepped from her carriage on to the kerb she was startled by the appearance of two men who confronted her in silence. With a thrill, she recognised one of them as being Eric Monteith, the other as a dapper, well-groomed stranger, unfamiliar to her. It was indeed Kempton Bond.

"I must have a word with you, your Grace," said Eric breathlessly. "I beg of you that you will grant my request."

The Duchess hesitated. Her eyes went from the one to the other of the two men. "I thought you had said all there was to say to me," she replied haughtily.

"So did I," answered Eric quickly. "But since I saw you last something has happened that makes it absolutely imperative that I should have a few moments conversation with you."

Again the actress hesitated. Then her infatuation for Monteith got the better of her quickly born suspicions that everything was not as it should be as regards dealings between herself and Eric.

"I can give you a few minutes," she said, in a low voice, "but——"

She broke off abruptly and looked fixedly at Bond.

The detective took off his hat with a low bow.

"I can wait for you here, Monteith," he said airily; "I don't suppose your business will take you very long."

His eyes turned to the maid who was standing behind her mistress. He looked fixedly at her for a few moments, and then drew aside, but there was nothing in his action to arouse suspicion in the girl that he was other than an ordinary individual.

"Come up to my room," said the Duchess, turning to Monteith.

The young man obeyed her in silence, trying to hide the turmoil that raged within his breast. When they were alone the woman shut the door and turned towards him.

"What is it you have to say to me?" she said in a low voice.

Eric hesitated. It was some few moment before he could find his voice. Then he said:

"The business that brings me here hinges upon the conversation that I had with you a few hours ago. Since then I have learnt something that has put into my hands a terrible weapon, and one that I must use against your Grace in view of what has gone before." He paused. The woman's face went deathly white. Her eyes were fixed with terrible intensity upon Eric's face.

"What do you mean?" she muttered hoarsely.

The position was a trying one for Eric. Words seemed to stick in his throat. It was with the utmost effort that he continued. "When I last saw you you told me that you did not know where Hazel Harlow was. Do you still adhere to that statement?"

"I do," came the answer, faint yet defiant.

"Then there is no need for me to beat about the bush further. To put the blunt, terrible truth before you, you are on the eve of being arrested for being concerned in the death of the late Duke of Stanchester!"

A cry of horror fell from the woman's lips, and an expression of deadly fear came into her face.

"What do you mean?" she gasped.

"What I say; and I tell you that unless you reveal to me the whereabouts of Hazel Harlow steps will be taken to have you arrested immediately."

"What proof have you of this? It is merely a trumped-up story to get me to renounce once and for always every chance of winning your love," and the infatuated woman gazed despairingly at the pale, stern face before her.

"The proof is incontestable," answered Eric firmly; "but it is not for me to dwell any more explicitly on the dreadful facts that have been adduced as evidence of your guilt. It is not for me to judge whether you are really guilty or innocent. What I am concerned in is to see justice done to one who has never done you an atom of harm--I mean Hazel Harlow!"

A moan came from the lips of the Duchess. For a minute or so she made no answer. Her eyes were fixed on the man's face. She seemed to be reading his very soul. At last she spoke.

"Heaven knows," she said, "how you have found out anything at all about the past. I will not deny or admit that I am guilty, but this much I will admit. I do know the whereabouts of Hazel Harlow, and I will take you to her. Believe me or not as you like, I only played this desperate game to see whether I had absolutely and utterly lost your love. The scheme of impersonating Hazel Harlow was mine. It was my money that bought over Henderson, lock, stock and barrel, to fall in with my plans; but I see that it was all for nothing, and remember, Eric, that whatever happens, it was all for love of you. I was ready to go to any length to obtain your heart." Then a slight shudder shook her frame. "I only married Stanchester out of pique and attracted by the wealth and position he could give me; and now I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll take you this moment to where Hazel Harlow is."

Eric could hardly believe the evidence of his own senses. He had expected defiance, scorn, perhaps tears, but that the woman should have thus capitulated so easily must point to one of two facts: either that there was truth in the accusation preferred against her that she had been party to the death of her husband, or that she realized that the mad scheme she had conceived to oust Hazel from the public eye and from Eric's affections was doomed to failure. Yet the denouement of her surrender was yet to be enacted.

"Who is that man below?" suddenly asked the actress in a low voice. "Ah, you needn't tell me. He is a police agent. Well, what does it matter? The game is up. I've had my fling. Let's go at once." Then she laughed mirthlessly. "We'll leave Henderson to make what explanations he can, for I shan't come back here to-night, there is no fear of that."

She went to the door and bade Eric follow her. On the threshold she paused, and, turning, fixed her brilliant eyes upon his face.

"Eric," she said brokenly, "will you give me one kiss in token of forgiveness? It's all I ask, and Hazel Harlow need never know." The last words were spoken in a tone of unutterable bitterness. Before Eric could answer she leant forward and throwing her arms round his neck, imprinted a burning kiss upon his lips. Then she hurried down the stairs closely followed by Monteith.

Kempton Bond was waiting quietly outside the stage-door smoking a cigarette. He expressed no surprise as he saw the two issue from the theatre. The Duchess, without a glance in his direction, set off hurriedly, walking down the murky street, the two men following closely at her heels. She kept on for some time and then turned down a side street. At a house at the end of this she stopped, and taking a latch-key from her pocket, inserted it in the lock of the door and preceded her companions into a dimly-lighted hallway.

Without a pause, as though desirous of getting through with the business before her with all possible expedition, she mounted the stairs that led up to the higher parts of the house, and at last stopped before a green baize door on a landing upon the topmost storey. This door opened into a small passage-way with another door at the end of it. This was locked, and the Duchess knocked smartly upon its panels.

"Come in," said a quiet voice that Eric recognised in a moment as Hazel's. The Duchess threw open the door and admitted the two men into a long airy apartment tastefully furnished with a skylight of frosted glass upon a sloping ceiling above. A standard lamp with a red shade was lit in the corner, a cheerful fire gleamed in the grate, there were books scattered about. In fact, a more cheery, cosy prison, for a prison indeed it was, it would have been hard to imagine.

"Miss Harlow," said the Duchess, in a firm voice, "I have brought some friends to see you. Your imprisonment is over."

Hazel uttered a cry of joy and ran towards Eric with outstretched hands.

"Again my saviour!" she cried gratefully.

Monteith took hold of the girl's white supple hands with a thrill of pleasure. The Duchess had thrown herself into a chair and sat regarding the young couple with eyes that blazed like living coals from out of her pale face. Bond stood near the door with folded arms, his eyes never leaving the countenance of her Grace the Duchess of Stanchester.

Suddenly the latter sprang to her feet.

"Wait a minute," she said, "the last act of the play is still to be played out." She turned with an imperious gesture to Kempton Bond.

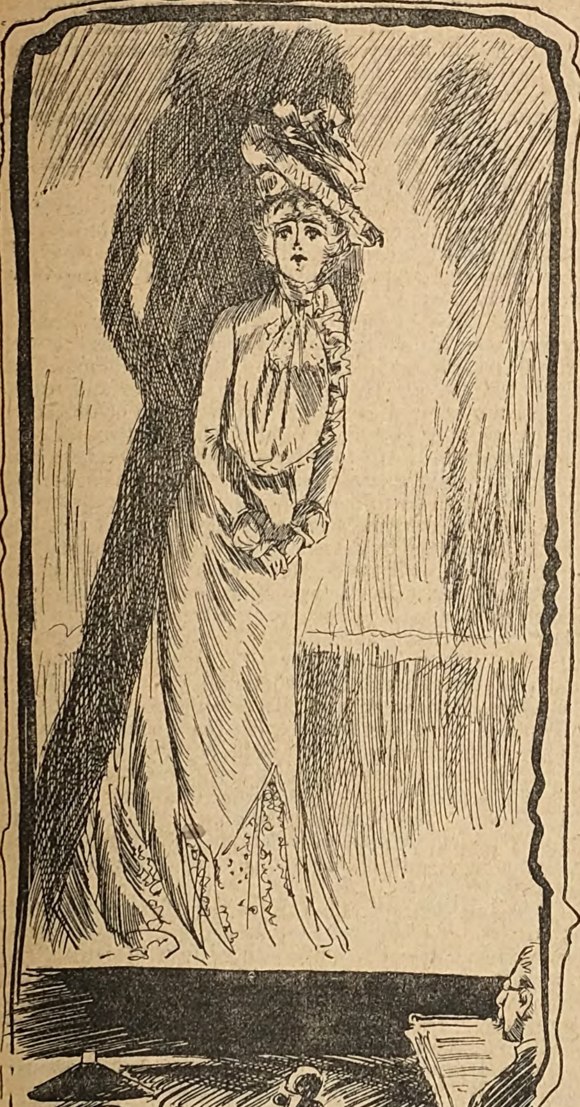
"Mr. Policeman, or whatever you are," she said scornfully, "what I am going to say will probably interest you more than these two young lovers. I believe you are here to arrest me for being mixed up in the death of the Duke of Stanchester. Well, let me save you trouble. I'll tell you the whole story of how the Duke died. He had always been a fast liver, and his system had been undermined by long years of riotous living. He was taken violently ill and the doctor who came to see him said that he might flicker out any moment like the flame of a candle. Needless to say, he did not tell this to the Duke, he only told me. I went to his Grace, informed him that he was suffering only from a trivial ailment, and that the doctor had assured me that with a little careful nursing he would soon be on his legs again. Strange as it may seem"—this with a quick look at Eric—"the Duke doted on me. He was ready to gratify my every whim. I then told him that his son, the present Duke, had contracted a marriage with a person of low descent, and by various misrepresentations induced my husband to make a fresh will leaving practically everything to me, and only the title, as was of course inevitable, and a paltry pittance to his heir. Then—I had been assured, mind you, that the Duke's days were numbered—I sent my maid-servant to purchase some poison. I administered this to the Duke in his medicine. My servant was absolutely guiltless. I say this before witnesses so that there can be no possible mistake about my statement."

A low cry of horror burst simultaneously from Hazel and Eric, Kempton Bond alone remained perfectly unmoved.

"Is your Grace ready to put your signature to a written confession?" he said in a low voice.

"Perfectly," answered the Duchess, with almost incredible coolness.

Kempton Bond took a stylographic pen from his pocket, and with the pen of a ready writer, transmitted the deposition he had just heard to writing.



It was Hazel herself who went before the curtain.

"And now your signature here," he said. When his task was done with unswerving coolness, "and then I'll get Mr. Monteith to add his signature to mine as witness of the deposition."

The Duchess glanced quickly down the lucidly written statement. At a blank space at the bottom of the page she signed her name, "Katharine Stanchester," and not a stroke of her pen showed the faintest indecision or hesitation.

Kempton Bond then took the pen and prepared to add his name to the document. Suddenly the Duchess turned her back and her hand went to her face. Then came the sound of breaking glass, and it was seen that she had hurled a little bottle across the room which struck the wall sharply and fell in fragments on the carpet. With a cry of horror Eric sprang forward; there was a smile on the woman's lips.

"I have cheated the gallows," she murmured faintly. Then her whole body swayed like a tree in a storm. With a gurgling cry she fell forward into Eric's arms—a lifeless corpse.

CHAPTER IV.

Strange as it may appear no one at the Prince's Theatre had noted the disappearance of the Duchess of Stanchester from her room, and until within a few minutes of the rise of the curtain everyone believed she was in her dressing-room. A fact that added colour to this was found in that her maid who acted as her dresser had been seen to enter her apartments some time before. The call-boy was sent on his round, and the stage was at last kept waiting for Isabel, who, it will be remembered, was billed as being enacted by Hazel Harlow. The theatre was crammed, as was indeed the rival house, the Queen's, for the knowledge that there were two Hazel Harlow's in Manchester had acted as a powerful spur to the citizens to investigate the meaning of so extraordinary a coincidence.

Venables had frankly given out that his Miss Hazel Harlow was indisposed, but Henderson had no such statement to fall back upon. He was too far involved for that. His unscrupulous conduct was, indeed, to be the means of his reaping the whirlwind. It was speedily discovered that the Duchess of Stanchester's dressing-room was empty. Here was a terrible quandary. Henderson was at his wit's end. The substitution of the Duchess's understudy as Hazel Harlow would spell absolute failure to the deception, for the Duchess was a woman of undoubtedly fine presence and wonderful acting powers. It was by reason of this that the *East Lynne* Company had pledged themselves to so unscrupulous an undertaking. Henderson tore his hair metaphorically, and gave wild orders for the orchestra to perform yet another selection in view of the possible return of the lost Duchess.

Suddenly a cab dashed up to the door of the theatre, and a man leapt out. It was Kempton Bond who demanded to see Henderson without a moment's delay.

The manager, clutching at the last straw of hope that the detective's arrival gave him, took Bond into his private sanctum.

"A pretty kettle of fish you've prepared for yourself," said the detective grimly, "and when you've heard me out you will be the best judge of what you're to do in the matter. How you could have been such a fool as to try and palm off her late Grace the Duchess of Stanchester as Hazel Harlow surpasses my understanding, as it must surpass the understanding of every sane-minded individual."

"But where is the Duchess?" muttered Henderson hoarsely, his flustered comprehension failing to take in the detective's ominous meaning conveyed in the words, "the late Duchess."

"The Duchess of Stanchester," came the grave answer, "has been called to a higher tribunal. She has made her last bow on the world's stage."

"Dead!" gasped the manager. "Do you mean to say she is *dead?*"

In answer, the detective flung down the deposition signed by the miserable woman who had gone to her last account.

"The Duchess died by her own hand," he said calmly; "after having first witnessed the authenticity of this terrible confession."

A paroxysm of fear seized Henderson as he read the document.

"What can I do? What can I do?" he wailed. "The stage waits: the theatre is packed; the audience will lynch me if they don't see her. What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Do," came the contemptuous answer; "be a man for once in your life. Tell the truth; admit that you have played a dastardly trick. It's all you can do."

"I daren't!" whined the craven, fear-stricken man.

"Then I will!"

"You!"

"Yes, I."

And without another word Kempton Bond left the room and made his way round to the back of the curtain. Here all was dismay and confusion. Everybody seemed at their wits' ends. At the wings were clustered actors and actresses, scene-shifters and supernumeries, all talking together in low, constrained voices.

"I knew we should get landed over this," Bond heard one of the actors murmuring to a companion; "and now her Grace has gone and let us down nicely."

Bond threw him a contemptuous glance, then, brushing aside those who would bar his path, he made his way to the front of the curtain, and before anyone could raise a hand to stop him, or had, indeed, realized what he was about to do, he had stepped boldly out before the footlights and put up his hand to the leader of the orchestra in token that he should stop playing.

The apparition of this dapper, well-dressed man who had so coolly come forward had its effect upon the crowded house. All eyes were turned to the figure of the detective. The orchestra stopped with a final flourish, and Bond, clearing his voice, began as follows:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I must beg of your forbearance for a few minutes, for I have something to say which will be as painful to me to utter as it will be for you to listen to. In the first place, I must tell you that I am in no way connected with this theatre, or with the lessees of it. I am merely here in the interests of truth and justice. It has been extensively placarded all over Manchester that Miss Hazel Harlow, the actress who won her name in the *Good Samaritan* Company, would appear in this theatre to-night in *East Lynne*. Now the name of Hazel Harlow is not a common one. People on seeing that name would naturally connect it with the young and beautiful actress who has won so much fame for herself in a totally different *rôle*. I am not at liberty to reveal to you the full story of how it comes that I am here speaking to you to-night, but I must tell you this—there can be no performance in this theatre to-night, for the lady who had assumed the part of Isabel under the name of Hazel Harlow is dead!"

The detective paused. A cry of horror went up from the audience, who had listened spellbound to the detective's words. Raising his hand to enjoin silence, he went on: "In view of the terrible occurrence I beg of you all to make no demonstration. The money will be returned to all who have purchased seats for to-night's performance." And, with a final bow, he slipped back as quietly as he had come.

In the quiet room where the Duchess had put the consummation to the follies of her life were the minions of the law. Eric and Hazel had hurried round to the theatre just in time to stop Venables from commencing the performance. It was Hazel herself who went before the curtain as Bond had done at the other theatre, and told the audience that there could be no performance that night for reasons that would be explained in to-morrow's daily paper. It had, indeed, been a terrible conclusion to a terrible day.

The *Manchester Guardian* of the next morning devoted nearly three columns to the tragic story that it was inevitable should become public property. The story of how Hazel was abducted had best be told in the very words which appeared in the paper.

"When Miss Harlow paid a visit to the miserable woman who had so flagrantly impersonated her, it was only to be trapped in the most dastardly fashion. The servant of the late Duchess sprang upon her and ran a needle into her arm containing an injection of morphia. Miss Harlow was smuggled out of the theatre and conveyed away in a cab to a house that the Duchess had taken, and where, later on, the unhappy woman put the crowning end to her actions by committing suicide. The maid-servant had attempted later on to escape, but she was shadowed by detectives who had long wanted her in connection with the death of his late Grace the Duke of Stanchester, and she was apprehended. But what seems to us almost as serious a matter is that a whole theatrical company should have been so easily suborned to fall in with the fell plans of the Duchess of Stanchester to bring about Miss Harlow's discomfiture. We sincerely hope Mr. Henderson and his accomplices will not be allowed to go off scot free. What the Duchess intended to do with her captive we shall never know. In all probability she intended to keep her in durance vile until the conclusion of the *East Lynne* Company's visit to Manchester. Our sympathy is given unrestrainedly to Miss Harlow. We congratulate her most heartily on having come out of her dangers with comparatively so little hurt. . . ."

It was not till some time afterwards that the full story of how the old Duke of Stanchester had met his death transpired. When it did another thrill of horror ran through the minds of the public to think that Hazel Harlow had fallen into the hands of so abandoned a murdress. Yet the Duchess of Stanchester was not all bad. She was one of those strange combinations of good and evil, a woman who knew no half measures. It must be either whole-hearted love or utter hate with her, and there was no doubt at all that the mad infatuation she had conceived and cherished so long for Eric Monteith had a good deal to answer for the final crowning madness with which she consummated her stormy life.

Yet in this surely Eric must be held blameless. There is probably no young man in the world who has not at one time or another been attracted solely and simply by the face of a beautiful woman without probing deeper for those attributes that must be present if the heart is to be given to a worthy object.

Henderson took refuge in flight. Manchester speedily became too hot to hold him. The company broke up and drifted Londonwards, to hang about outside the doors of agents, and to pick up what crumbs they could that fell to their lot as actors and actresses who had been connected with a company that had come to so ignominous an end.

Can you play "Hunt the Fiver"? See Photo Competition.

TEST OF THE HEART.

JONES advised me not to marry her—he said that she was too young and pretty.

Farnum advised me to remain an old bachelor—told me a man past forty simply made a fool of himself by matrimony.

Tewksbury—a man who is notorious for never minding his own business—told me she had had a love affair with Harry Birmingham before he went south.

Allen shook his head and said Clara Myers might be very pretty, but he liked somebody maturer and more settled. (N.B.—He married his housekeeper the next week, and she is mature enough for Methuselah himself!)

Everybody thought I was trying a dangerous experiment, but I didn't pretend to suit everybody, so I simply suited myself. I went quietly to church with Clara Myers and married her one glorious January morning, when the eaves of old St. Paul's were fringed with glittering icicles. She was nineteen and I was nine-and-thirty. She was as beautiful as a rose-bud, with a shy, pretty way, like a timid child, and I am a rough old codger, sound enough at heart, but, like a winter apple, unpromising on the exterior. In short, we were as unlike as May and November. The next day I made a will and bequeathed all my property unconditionally to my wife.

"Are you sure you are doing a wise thing, Mr. Folliott?" said Mardyn, the lawyer, pushing his blue spectacles up on his forehead, until he looked like a bald old gnome with a double pair of eyes. "You see, she is very much younger than yourself, and——"

"Please be so kind as to mind your own business," said I brusquely. "Don't be offended, Mardyn; but really people seem to suppose I am not able to attend to my own affairs!"

"Just as you please, sir—just as you please," said Mardyn, in a rage. "I am a mere tool in your hands!"

"That's it, exactly," said I. So I signed the will and went home to Clara.

"Oh, Paul, you must not die!" said Clara, with a scared look, when I told her what I had done. "Nobody ever loved me as truly and generously as you have done, and I don't know what I should do if you were taken away!"

"There was young Birmingham, if all reports were true——" I mischievously remarked.

"A mere butterfly," she said, haughtily, "without either brains or principle! Paul, Paul, I have found a shelter in your true, loving heart, and I mean to nestle there always!"

And then she cried—this foolish, soft-hearted little wife of mine.

So things went on until the firm of which I was managing partner needed to send someone to Calcutta to see after a turbaned scoundrel of an agent, who had absconded with more money than we could well afford to lose. Morrison was old and feeble. Hewitt's wife lay very ill, so I was the one to go. I kissed Clara good-bye as cheerfully as I could, fully expecting to be back in three months or so. But you know the old French adage: "L'homme propose et Dieu dispose!"

I had to follow the agent up into the mountains of India. I fell ill of one of those burning climatic fevers in the bungalow of an old native priest, and the months flew by until it was more than a year before I found myself on the deck of the *Blue-Eyed Mary*, steaming up the dear old Thames. And all this time Clara had never heard a word from me.

I had written to her to prepare her for what seemed almost like my rising from the dead, but I had afterwards found my letters in the pocket of the neglectful native servant who had undertaken to deliver the mails to the Calcutta office.

"But it doesn't matter so much now," I thought; "she will be more than delighted, poor little girl!"

And then a cold chill seemed to creep through my veins, like November's wind breathing across a bed of flowers!

I turned into a restaurant, where I had been wont to go in the days of my bachelorhood, and slunk into a dark corner; the twilight was just falling and I was sheltered by the partition.

Hush! That was Tewksbury's voice, harsh and jarring as of old.

"Just what might have been expected," said Tewksbury. "Pretty young widows don't go begging in this market."

"Folliott might have known it," growled old Farnum. "Poor Folliott! There were some very good points about him, too. Sad thing that—very sad thing."

"We must all die," said Tewksbury, gravely.

"Yes; but a fellow would naturally prefer dying in his bed to being carried off by an East Indian fever and buried in the jungles."

I shuddered. Had I then come home to my own funeral, as it were?

"And she's going to marry young Birmingham, after all!" added Farnum.

The paper dropped from my hand.

"I could have told Folliott so when I heard what a confoundedly idiotic will he had made!" said Tewksbury. "So gold has fallen again. Just my luck; I sold out to-night!"

I stayed to hear no more, but staggered out into the darkness with one idea whirling through my dizzy brain—my Clara was mine no longer!

It was quite true what Tewksbury had said. I might have anticipated some such end. She was too young, too lovely for such a rough old fellow as I was. My widow—what a curious sensation the words gave me as I mentally pronounced them!

Under my own windows, with a ruby-red light shining through wine-coloured damask curtains, I stood feeling as Rip Van Winkle might have felt in the play—like a dead man walking the earth once more. Voices and lights were within.

The drawing-room door was ajar. Clara herself stood before the fire, in deep black robes. Directly opposite stood Harry Birmingham.

"Clara, Clara!" he cried. "You surely are not in earnest. You will reconsider."

"My answer is final," she responded. "The time might once have been when you fancied I had a childish liking for you, Harry Birmingham; but that time has long since passed away. I gave my heart to the best and noblest man that ever breathed—Paul Folliott—and in his grave it is forever buried. I loved him once; I shall love him into eternity! I never was half worthy of him——"

And Clara's voice was choked with sobs.

How I ever got into the room I cannot tell to this day—neither can she. But I know that young Birmingham somehow disappeared, and I was standing with Clara clasped to my breast—the happiest man that ever breathed God's blessed air.

MISTRESS OF HIS FATE.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," &c.

CHAPTER I.

A Triangular Discussion.

"It's no use arguing, Hammond, you've got to turn out; your lease of the ground is up, and I want the mill for a tenant who will put some life into the business and not go to sleep over it. Why should you grumble? You've had a couple of renewals since my uncle joined the majority seven years ago."

"You're hard, Mr. Mostyn," was the answer; "very hard! I've run the place for a quarter of a century—Rufus there was a weanling babe when I first got possession. My wife died here, sir, and lies buried in yonder churchyard; it will be like losing her again to bid Oakenarch farewell, for that's what it means."

Jasper Hammond's strong palms clenched, and his quivering mouth set under his grey beard. He was a stout personage in dusty-white garments, with a square linen cap on his sparse locks. He had uttered his nervous, almost tearful, sentences to an accompaniment of splashing water—the murmur of the great mill at work in the pent current of the mill stream.

"I can't establish another mill, you see, sir," he continued, "even if I could secure a water-right—rebuilding this after the fire nigh beggared me. Twelve months back, come Hallow E'en, I paid the last of the money I borrowed, and not a penny have I been able to save in addition."

"That's your own fault," he was told bluntly; "had you taken care to be insured you would have been better off, not worse, for your blaze. I am quite decided, Hammond—you will leave by Christmas." And the speaker twisted on his heel, as though to cross the small paddock on the river bank, and make for the horse that was tethered to a post of the entrance-gate. But a hand was laid on his shoulder and he halted.

Thus checked, the implacable Mr. Mostyn beheld a figure taller and slighter than the miller's, yet giving promise of a superior strength and activity. The countenance of this new participator in the dispute was clean-shaven and intelligent, his gaze cool and resolute. An air of cultured independence seemed to hang about him. Nevertheless, he bore a marked resemblance to the dusty, grey-bearded man at his side.

"A moment, Mr. Gerald Mostyn," he observed; "is yours the final word on the subject? Does Miss Brereton know we are being sent adrift, that were her father's tenants before her, and have paid the Breretons many a hundred pounds in honest gold? Rumour says she is a kind-hearted young creature; was it she who refused us a proper renewal of our lease, so that the ground-rent might be raised on us twice in six years, till it stands at double what satisfied Mr. Brereton? I judge it rather to have been the act of a grasping, egotistical jack-in-office."

"Rufus! Rufus!" exclaimed the miller, horrified; "you forget yourself, my son. Pray pardon him, Mr. Mostyn—he loves me and the mill, and has his mother's quick tongue and hot temper. She was a bit above me, you may have heard, sir, and the lad has good blood in him."

Gerald Mostyn sneered. He was a familiar type, spare, smartly dressed, precise, with a reddish-brown moustache and an insolent half-smile.

"A truce to apologies, Mr. Hammond," he said; "it is sufficient for you to appreciate that I act on Miss Brereton's account. Your son is not her tenant—let him stick to his wood-carving hobby; I care nothing for his long tongue, be it his or his mother's. As you appear to have suffered from it in both cases I wonder you did not tame the lady, and teach the cub manners."

The warm flush ebbed from Rufus Hammond's cheeks, their pallor showing darkly through his tan. A fist closed, and a right arm shot out; Gerald Mostyn was caught on the point of the jaw and lifted into a patch of nettles that filled a corner of the paddock. A spring, and Rufus had stooped over his prostrate critic.

"You insulted my mother," he declared, "and, but for soiling the water that the village folk have to drink I would fling you in the mill-race. Up with you and off our premises—for they are ours till the Christmas bells ring out. Then—should Miss Brereton support your infamous proceedings—you shall have Oakenarch Mill to tempt some poor fool into and rack-rent him as you have rack-rented us."

Mostyn dragged himself to his feet, muttering ominous prophecies. Rufus Hammond regarded him disdainfully.

"Be off," he concluded, "and—if you choose—prosecute me for assault, so that, at the price of a nominal fine, I may expose you in a court of justice."

The recipient of this advice slunk towards his horse, freed the rein from the gate-post, and, mounting with an oath, vanished at an angry gallop down the unfrequented road.

The miller propped his thick palms on either side of an ample waist, and shook a regretful head.

"That was my boy all over," he sighed; "but it's done no good, Rufus, it's done no good. Mostyn wasn't far wrong in recommending you to hold by the wood-carving—you're not fit for business, my son; you're what your mother wanted you to be—an artist. Artists have proud stomachs, and a tradesman must eat humble pie when there's anything to be gained by it."

"Nonsense, dad," retorted Rufus Hammond; "the scoundrel is determined to oust us—no humouring would have persuaded him to alter his mind. Besides, he insulted the little mother; I'd have punished him for that it he'd been a belted earl."

He glanced thoughtfully to and fro. A certain rich and quiet beauty lent the scene an irresistible charm. Before him the river, barred by a weir, spread a glossy sheet, reflecting the dull browns and reds of the autumnal foliage. Its current, confined to the mill-race, swept in a silent volume by the bank to operate the big wheel, dripping and moss-grown.

The scarlet roofs and the blackened walls of the mill and the mill-house nestled among the alders and willow

Read "Dead to the World."

and the rumble of the rotating stones smote vaguely on the ear. Close to, the stream was spanned by an ancient bridge of oak, forming a single curve—the "oaken arch," that had served to christen the locality.

"But we'll not lose the mill without a fight for it, dad," promised Rufus, after an affectionate survey of the prospect; "there was more than a trifle of truth in what I said just now. It isn't Mostyn who is responsible to the law for our going or stopping; it's Miss Brereton up at the Abbey. She shall be asked her view, or my name's not Rufus Hammond."

Having so pledged himself, Rufus buttoned the cuffs of his woollen shirt, and stalked in the direction of the house. He was a comely fellow, frank, clear-skinned, and supple.

"It's not worth while seeking a snub, lad," moaned the miller; "people in her station don't interfere with their deputies over tenants of our class. And Mr. Mostyn's mother is Miss Brereton's aunt; they are cousins—gossip hints that they may strike up a match, Mr. Mostyn being the next heir until Miss Brereton marries. At all events, he manages the estate for her, and she won't fancy your knocking her representative about like a sack of flour."

"She is a woman," replied Rufus curtly. "I will explain that he insulted my mother."

With which intimation he strode into the picturesque dwelling that stood landward of the mill. Climbing a steep staircase, he gained a tiny bedchamber and unhooked a rough frieze jacket from the nail.

In the window was a bench littered with delicate steel tools and fine wood chippings. Rufus Hammond paused by it to don his coat. This done, he picked up a small block, exquisitely carved and curiously polished. It had the shape of a human form—plump, cheerful, with a bearded face and the slight stoop of age. Apart from the vigour of the portrait, its square cap and loose garments identified it as that of the old miller.

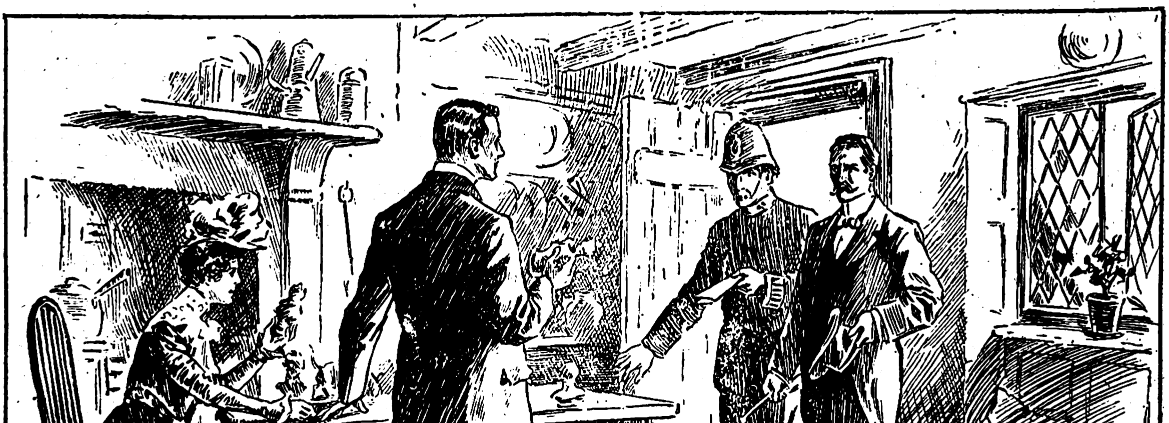
The wood-carver sorted out a scrap of cloth, dipped it in a jar of fluid, and rubbed the block carefully here and there.

"It isn't bad," he said at length, studying it with a smile. "I'll take it round to the Abbey, dad may get a chance to plead his cause in dumb show. Oddments of this kind are supposed, I believe, to amuse the rich and idle—we will try the experiment."

Wrapping the fragile article in a handful of tow—his solicitude for its safety an eloquent comment on his disrespectful reference to it—he drew his soft hat into a less negligent position on his dark curls, and descended to the kitchen. A buxom country girl was cooking at a cavernous grate.

"Lettice," remarked Rufus Hammond, "if I'm not back to dinner mind that father gets his."

"Yes, Mr. Rufus," assented the maid coquettishly, and casting a bashful glance at her young master;



A shadow fell athwart the threshold of the kitchen.

Is your photo on page 530?

"have you finished that likeness of me you was a-doing in the pearwood I soaked for you?"

"Dear! dear!" was the answer; "I'm afraid I haven't. But it shall be completed, though I mustn't neglect the mill for my hobbies, Lettice."

"No, sir," said Lettice; "but I be rare anxious to see it ended. Shall I brush your coat, sir?—it's main floury."

"Thanks," rejoined the wood-carver, and held the figure of the miller in security for Lettice to perform the suggested office. He was slipping it into his pocket again when the original entered.

"Where are you bound, my lad?" he queried. His son passed him to the door—the withered leaves of the advancing autumn had blown over the threshold and rustled beneath Rufus Hammond's tread.

"To the Abbey," announced the wood-carver, "to ask Miss Brereton a few questions."

He stepped on to the cobbles of the forecourt, walked across the paddock, and went up the road.

"Well!" exclaimed his father; "I'll be jiggered!"

CHAPTER II.

A BITER IS BITTEN.

"It is quite impossible for you to see Miss Brereton now. In any case, she takes no share in the management of the estate—that is all left to my son, Mr. Gerald Mostyn."

Rufus Hammond scrutinized the pale, selfish countenance of the elderly woman before him. He had been ushered into her presence by a supercilious footman, and stood near the luxurious lounge chair in which she sat. The room he had entered was large and old-fashioned, with mullioned windows, commanding a stretch of park and meadow, and the distant tiled roofs of Oakenarch.

"I am sorry to appear persistent, madam," declared the wood-carver; "but I interviewed Mr. Mostyn an hour ago, and it is for that reason I am here."

Mrs. Mostyn looked at him sharply.

"You seem," she remarked, "above your station, Mr.—Mr.—Hammond, I believe your name is. Doubtless you can write a very suitable letter, embodying the purport of this visit. My niece shall give it her earliest consideration."

The visitor's response was a polite gesture of dissent.

"I am afraid such an expedient would not meet the necessities of the case," he objected. "Miss Brereton is the person on whose account my father and I are about to be driven from our home; it is right that she should realize precisely what she is doing."

Mrs. Mostyn rose.

"I perceive, Mr. Hammond," she told him, haughtily, "that you are nothing more or less than a discontented tenant with a glib tongue. However, Miss Brereton cannot see you, and as I am myself occupied at present I shall be unable to spare you any further time. Permit me, therefore, to wish you good-morning."

She put out a thin arm in a black silk sleeve and touched the bell. The door from the hall opened instantly. Yet it was not a servant who stepped into the apartment, but a girl of some twenty summers. She wore a sweeping gown of grey cloth, with a collar of cobweb lace, and a big and feathered hat. Her hair was nut-brown, and had faint golden lights in it. Her eyes were blue, her lips smiling.

"Ah, there you are, auntie," she cried; "I'm just going to drive into the village—the Abbey is as dull as a tennis-court on a wet day. But perhaps I disturb you?"

"No, dear," said Mrs. Mostyn, "this—this gentleman was leaving." And she motioned to the liveried figure that had answered her peal.

Rufus Hammond did not offer to make his exit; instead, he turned to the newcomer.

"I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Brereton?" he asked.

The girl bowed, an expression of surprise crossing her face at the cultured tones and quiet ease of the speaker.

"Y—yes," she responded hesitatingly.

The young man's gaze dwelt on her with obvious admiration.

"I am Rufus Hammond," rejoined the wood-carver, "the son of Jasper Hammond, of Oakenarch Mill; we have been tenants to you and yours, Miss Brereton, five-and-twenty years."

Stephanie Brereton threw her gloves on to a cabinet.

"How interesting!" she exclaimed; "I often wish I knew the Oakenarch people better. But Gerald—my cousin, Mr. Mostyn, who does my business for me—says you would think me inquisitive. Would you, really?"

"Mr. Mostyn is in error, Miss Brereton," asserted Rufus, ignoring, with a stern directness, Mrs. Mostyn's demonstrations of irritability and the stolid patience of the servant; "we should rejoice to know you and for you to know us. Destiny has placed you where you are, and us where we are, but it would be a brave and womanly thing for you to bridge the gulf. As for Mr. Mostyn, pardon me if I confess that he is widening it."

The girl knitted her brows, and Mrs. Mostyn interrupted the wood-carver's grave sentences.

"My dear," she urged, "do not allow yourself to be fatigued. Hammond is merely a dissatisfied leaseholder, possessed by a grudge against Gerald."

"That is not true, madam," replied Rufus Hammond; "we were but concerned with Mr. Mostyn in his character of agent to Miss Brereton, and as such we have dealt honourably by him. But when my father and I are threatened with eviction from the mill that has been our home for a quarter of a century, that we have rebuilt after a disastrous fire, and upon which we have paid, since Mr. Brereton's death, an extortionate ground-rent, we feel it necessary to appeal from Mr. Mostyn to the real owner of Oakenarch manor. It is you, Miss Brereton, who are the mistress of our fate, and it is you who must deliver the verdict."

Stephanie had caught up her gloves and was fingering them abstractedly.

"Has Mr. Mostyn no explanation?" she inquired, colouring at the exercise of her authority.

"Yes," said Rufus, his dark orbs fixed on the fair, sensitive features of the querist; "he wants a higher ground-rent than we can pay, a higher one than the mill could earn—honestly—if it ran double shifts. But there are fools and rogues enough, so Mr. Mostyn has decided to oust us."

"Must I endure this?" gasped Mrs. Mostyn. "Stephanie, have you no consideration? The fellow ought to be removed immediately."

Her niece's mouth twitched, and she took stock of Rufus Hammond's athletic form.

"We haven't anybody who could do it, auntie," she observed; "but I should like to ask Mr. Hammond why his father is not here to state his own case?"

Rufus glanced down.

"He—he is a simple, modest soul, Miss Brereton," was the answer; "he would have been tongue-tied with alarm. But I have brought him in miniature, if not in person. If I am a miller by trade, I am a wood-carver by taste. Miss Brereton, this is my father."

So saying, the visitor groped in his pocket, disengaged the study of the miller from its tow envelope, drew it forth, and set it on the palm of his hand.

Stephanie regarded it at first with amusement, then with appreciation.

"Did—did you do that?" she demanded. "Why, it is wonderful! How did you get your training?"

"Tried to copy what I saw, Miss Brereton," said Rufus Hammond, "as far as the material could be coaxed to permit. Some carving in the parish church—by Grinling Gibbons, I have heard—put me on the right track, and afterwards I experimented."

"You—you must have genius," commented Stephanie; "how splendid! You—you will let me help you? I have powerful friends in London—Royal Academicians and newspaper men. Have you done other pieces?"

"A—a few," stammered Rufus, overwhelmed by the praise which the enthusiastic girl poured out to him.

"I will come and see them," said Stephanie Brereton, restoring him the carving of the miller; "that is, if I may? I am driving into the village; can't I give you a seat in my victoria?"

"Great heavens, Stephanie!" ejaculated Mrs. Mostyn, oblivious of Rufus in her excitement; "are you mad? His—his clothes!"

Her niece laughed.

"It's nothing worse than flour, auntie," she retorted. "Now, Mr. Hammond, the victoria is waiting. And don't worry about the mill. Mr. Mostyn desires to serve my interests of course; but I fancy I can convince him that they don't require your exile."

She signed to the footman, who flung open the door. Rufus stepped to Miss Brereton's side as she passed out: she noticed, with feminine astuteness, that he was not in the least embarrassed or disconcerted. They crossed the hall, preceding the severely-unconscious servant, and gained the sombre porch of the Abbey.

A smart victoria was, as Miss Brereton had stated, in readiness. Rufus handed her to her seat, followed himself, the footman transmitted the direction to the coachman, and they were whirled away. Mrs. Mostyn, gazing from a window, pinched her thin wrist to make sure she was not asleep.

"Pardon me an impertinent question, Mr. Hammond," said Stephanie Brereton, "but have you always lived here?"

"Always," assented Rufus, rolling the tow more securely about his carving.

"Your father is a—cultured man, then, for a miller?" hazarded Stephanie.

Her companion flushed.

"My father has a heart of gold," he faltered, "but—but it was my mother who educated me. She was what the world calls a lady, but she loved Jasper Hammond, and she married him."

Stephanie Brereton was silent, and the carriage dashed along to the chiming of harness and the rhythmic beat of hoofs. At last the victoria stopped—they had reached the gate of the paddock. Rufus alighted.

"We walk through the meadow," he said, and aided her to descend.

Side by side they strolled down to the mill-house—the sturdy, frieze-coated son of the soil, and the daintily-gowned daughter of the "classes."

Lettice stared when they appeared in the kitchen, but Stephanie grew enraptured over its huge grate, its antique, pewter-laden dresser, its cool flags and gleaming brasses. Rufus sent for his father, and, with an apology to their pretty guest, hurried up to his bedchamber for some further specimens of his work. His pulses throbbed and his brain reeled—a thousand impossible hopes had suddenly taken shape and form.

The wood-carver returned to find that his father had arrived upon the scene, and now stood twisting his cap and pumping out monosyllabic answers to Stephanie's friendly compliments on his son's skill.

She hailed the younger man's advent with relief, and began to discuss the carvings. All were animated subjects, a wrestling match between country youths, a bull attacked by a dog, a village fiddler tuning his instrument. Stephanie knew enough to gauge the rare vigour and dexterity of this obscure artist.

The unfinished study of Lettice attracted her attention, she picked it up and looked from it to the original. "You will make something of this, Mr. Hammond," she told him curtly.

Rufus winced. "I have not touched it for a month," he responded. "I had begun to idealize it too much. Lettice wants a likeness of herself, not a fancy portrait."

The words were casual, yet they meant more than reached the ear. Stephanie smiled again. She had been vaguely conscious of a feeling that the splendid craftsman, with the world at his feet, might do better than ally himself to a plump, good-tempered country lass, whose ignorant adoration would have to console him for her lack of brains.

While she sat over the carvings, her arms on the scrubbed table-top, and her graceful head poised to criticise, a shadow fell athwart the threshold of the kitchen, and Stephanie looked up, astonished, to encounter the equally astonished gaze of Gerald Mostyn. By him was a constable, with a blue paper, folded.

"I've a summons for you, Mr. Rufus," said the latter, assuming an official demeanour, yet speaking as one who meets an intimate acquaintance; "it's a summons for assault, *and* battery, against the person of Mr. Gerald Mostyn, on your premises, this morning."

And the blue paper was thrust into the wood-carver's fingers.

Stephanie started up.

"Gerald!" she cried, "what freak can you be contemplating. Mr. Hammond, surely my cousin has exaggerated your conduct?"

Rufus stiffened himself, and his dark pupils were raised to hers.

"He—he sneered at my—mother," she was answered, "and I knocked him down."

"Assault *and* battery," said the constable; "but you needn't have admitted it, Mr. Rufus, in my hearing."

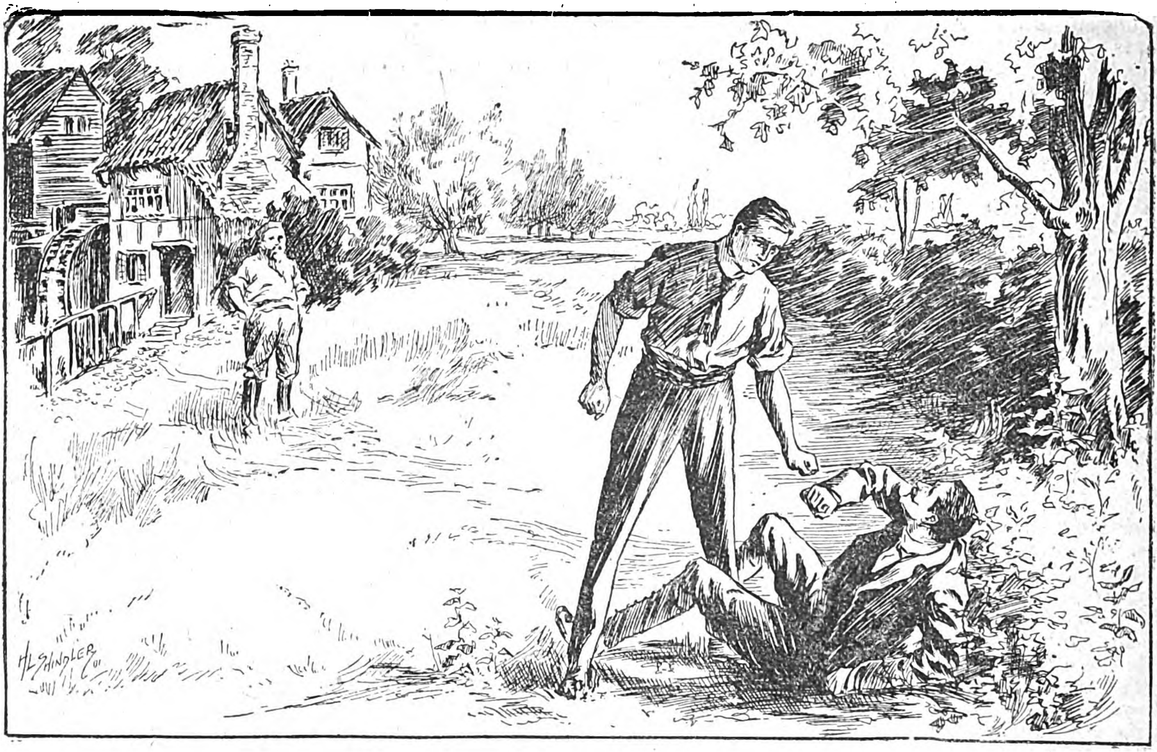
Stephanie Brereton sprang to Gerald Mostyn's side, a disdainful fire in her blue orbs.

"We will discuss the whole affair at once, Gerald," she remarked coldly, "and in private. Mr. Hammond, if this summons is pursued, and you are fined I will pay the fine publicly in court to show Oakenarch what I think of my cousin."

She moved towards the threshold of the kitchen, and Gerald Mostyn went with her, whispering unavailingly. Stephanie turned, oblivious of his murmured protests.

"Mr. Hammond," she continued, addressing herself to Rufus, "I will call another day and enjoy your wonder-

Read "Dead to the World."



A spring, and Rufus stood over his prostrate critic.

ful work, and—and get your father to take me round the mill, which he will *not* leave. For the present, good-bye."

And she swept out into the autumn sunshine with the air of an empress. Gerald Mostyn glanced back at the wood-carver, to snarl an unintelligible sentence of hate.

CHAPTER III.

A MODERN DUEL.

"I've got it lad, and you were right, after all; I thought you a bit of a fool at the time, but you've saved the mill for me, that you have!"

Jasper Hammond spread out the stiff sheet of parchment, engrossed with the formal phrases of the law-writer—it was a ninety-nine year lease of the land occupied by Oakenarch Mill.

"Called on lawyer in town to-day," said the miller, "and he had it ready for me. No costs, either; Miss Brereton had done the thing free and generous. Though I'll be bound," he added, "it's more for your sake than mine, Rufus."

His son looked up from the bench over which he leant, plying a thin steel blade about a bust of boxwood. It was the head and shoulders of a woman, arch and yet sedate, with waved locks on the low temples and dainty neck. The eyes—by some trick of the carver's art—seemed to smile, and the delicate lips to tremble in sympathy.

"Nonsense!" cried Rufus Hammond; "she acted from a rare and chivalrous instinct of justice. Mostyn plundered you for years in her name—this is her way of repaying you."

"And that," remarked his father, contemplating the boxwood bust, "is your fashion of thanking her. You've a master hand, my boy, and she'll be main pleased, no doubt. Is she to give you some more—what you call them—sittings for it?"

"One," said Rufus, abstractedly, working at a mimic tress of hair, so light it might almost have been stirred by a summer breeze; "this afternoon."

The miller folded and pocketed his precious parchment.

"I heard a bit of good news from lawyer," went on Jasper Hammond. "Mr. Mostyn is not to be Miss Brereton's agent any longer. Folks were saying at the 'Green Dragon' ordinary, there'd been a quarrel between him and her, and she's to manage her business herself in future. Time enough, too, for Mostyn was getting the name of Brereton as much hated as his own. But she's changing that, and fast—others than us, my lad, have had a lift from her in the last month. Oakenarch is wild in praise of her."

Rufus selected a fresh tool, and sliced at the close, even fibres of the boxwood.

"Mrs. Mostyn's leaving the Abbey also," pursued his father; "she's lost her chance of being Miss Brereton's mother-in-law as well as her aunt. Another relative is going to live with Miss B—a different sort to Mrs. Mostyn, the gossips have it."

A clock in the lobby below chimed the half-hour after two o'clock. Rufus Hammond began to collect his implements.

"I must take these down," he said, "Miss Brereton will be here soon."

Is your photo on page 562?

The miller held the door for him. The wood-carver carried off his unfinished subject and a sheaf of shining blades in worn hafts, descended the dusty staircase, and deposited them in the immaculate kitchen.

Lettice was baking bread in the great oven. She glanced at the bust and sighed—a certain daring hope in the little servant's heart had recently received a mortal wound. Rufus had not laboured over her counterfeit presentment as he was labouring over that of Miss Stephanie Brereton.

A footfall sounded in the cobble-stoned courtyard without, and Lettice turned to see, at the entrance of the shadowy apartment, the sullen visage of Gerald Mostyn.

Passing her his gaze travelled to the wood-carver.

"Hallo, Hammond!" he exclaimed, "so you're there —I—I want a word with you."

Rufus laid the last of his chisels in order and crossed to the threshold by which the visitor stood. Mostyn retreated to the short turf of the mill-paddock, motioning mysteriously to the wood-carver.

Puzzled, Rufus followed him. A sudden spring brought Gerald Mostyn between the house and his companion; he flung off his felt hat and unbuttoned his tweed coat—he had come in walking costume.

"Now, my cockerel!" he said, "you and I have a game to play out. A month ago you struck me unawares and I chose to stomach the blow, rather than scuffle with a country dauber. But as I am parting from Oakenarch—an inconvenient development for which you are responsible—I have determined to settle up the two accounts in one. If I am no novice with the gloves, you are a stone heavier and in better training, so we fight fair. Off with your jacket and choose your ground."

The wood-carver remained passive.

"I will not fight you, Mr. Mostyn," he answered; "I am the bigger man and you will get hurt."

Gerald Mostyn sneered.

"Have your drubbing any way you like," was his response, and, freed from his coat, poised himself dexterously and sprang in. Rufus Hammond's head moved—he had avoided a couple of scientific blows, yet his arms hung loosely at his sides. Mostyn's jaw set—the challenged was not lacking in experience. But cowardice was not among Gerald Mostyn's faults, and he rushed in again.

This time a clenched fist attained its destination—a trickle of blood showed on the wood-carver's nether lip. He leapt back, with the agility of a stag, and commenced to slip off his frieze jacket. He had no vest beneath and his waist was belted, his linen shirt fluttered white in the autumn air like that of a duellist.

"You will have it," he said quietly, and, stepping forward with light but firmly-planted strides. Mostyn scrutinized him an instant, and, darted in and sent a double-hammer stroke to the wood-carver's chest and waist. He was away in a second—unscathed.

Rufus Hammond smiled and drew a deep breath.

"Tickle his frontispiece, my lad," called a steady voice —the voice of Jasper Hammond. He had lounged into the courtyard and watched the struggle, one palm on his hip, the other restraining the horrified though fascinated Lettice, his grey pupils contemplating the opponents.

Rufus nodded and in the same moment stopped a hot left-hander. Mostyn pursued the attack, and a vicious half-arm jab sought the wood-carver's ribs, Rufus permitted it to land unnoticed as he recoiled, to deliver his own blows, in quick succession, upon Gerald Mostyn's cheek and jaw. The recipient pitched heavily upon the grass.

Rattled into madness by the shock, Mostyn gathered himself up and dashed at his antagonist just as a piercing cry of "Gerald! Mr. Hammond!" reached the ears of the combatants and announced the presence of Stephanie Brereton, who, escorted by a groom, had ridden unperceived into the paddock. She threw herself from her horse, left the rein dangling, and hurried to the antagonists.

Mostyn—more a bloodthirsty animal than a human being—was fighting a ferocious rally, and Rufus shrank from the madman in a kind of pity, contenting himself with an impassable defence. Inch by inch he yielded ground rather than knock out his opponent under the very gaze of a woman and a relative.

A cry startled him.

"Rufus! Rufus!" warned Jasper Hammond; "the race—mind the race!"

Rufus swerved, he had neared unconsciously the actual verge of the rushing, glassy flood. The action deprived Gerald Mostyn's leaning figure of his previous support, the strong hands and arms of his enemy. His own hail of blows overbalanced him, he tottered, missed his footing, and staggered into the stream, to be borne, with frightful rapidity, towards the wheel.

The wood-carver filled his panting lungs, dashed a red stream from his brows, and dived into the mill-race. The miller, flying to the bank, saw him glide under the surface, his body straight, his legs closed, his palms together. Driven by the impetus of his lungs, he was already beyond the drifting, floundering figure of Gerald Mostyn, who swam, but swam badly.

A second later and his brown locks emerged as Mostyn lurched by in the grip of the current. The wood-carver clutched his quondam enemy, seized a vest-collar in his teeth, and struck out, fiercely, Titanically, for the edge of the race. His fingers snatched the bank and he stayed, the water sucking at him greedily, and the drops from the revolving wheel beating on his head.

A warm clasp fastened on his wrist and hauled him up—it was that of the miller, who, shaking in every limb, but resolute and speedy, had consummated the rescue. Hanging protectingly to Jasper Hammond's loose clothing were Miss Stephanie Brereton's groom and his mistress. As the wood-carver lifted the senseless frame of Mostyn from the defeated current he had a glimpse of Stephanie's eyes; the undisguised admiration in them made his pulse dance.

* * * * * *

"Hammond, I've behaved to you like a cur," said Gerald Mostyn that evening to Rufus, "but you—you can imagine why. I—I love Stephanie, and I was jealous. Folks were coupling her name and yours because of her visits to the mill. And before that I—I didn't understand you or I'd have treated you better over the lease."

He paused, apparently communing with himself.

"To—to be honest, Hammond," he added, "you've saved my life, and—and I—I know she cares for you. You're an artist and therefore a gentleman—ask her to marry you; she'll say 'Yes.'"

And Stephanie Brereton did—to the lasting delight and profit of Oakenarch. The bust of Miss Brereton was finished by her betrothed husband and exhibited in the Academy of the ensuing spring. It was marked "not for sale." Gerald Mostyn went to Argentina in June, and in the following month Stephanie Brereton became Mrs. Rufus Hammond.

Can you play "Hunt the Fiver"? See Photo Competition.

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We have in our possession a considerable number of photographs of men, women, and children of all grades of society, secured for us by our agents, who have scoured the United Kingdom for this special purpose.

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All claims in connection with the portraits below must reach the address already given above by Tuesday next, November 5th. Full names and addresses of the correct claimants will appear in succeeding numbers.

HOW TO MAKE A CLAIM FOR A £5 NOTE.

Simply write on a post-card these words:

The Portrait No.......... (here put number of portrait) in the current number of SHORT STORIES is mine. Please forward a £5 note.

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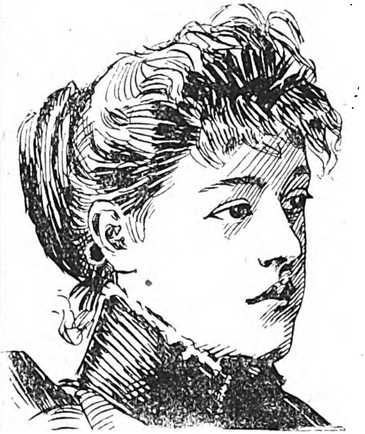

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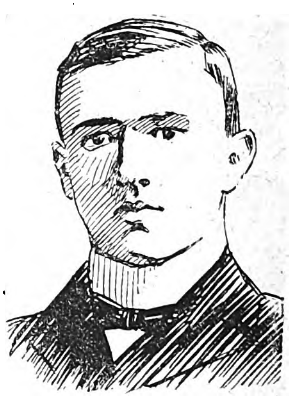

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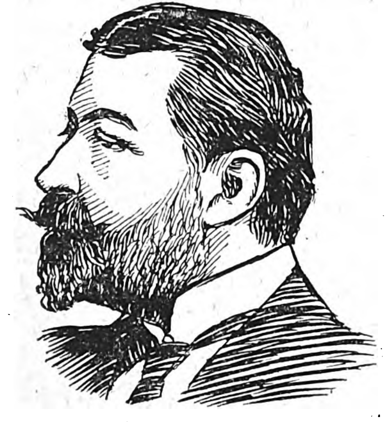

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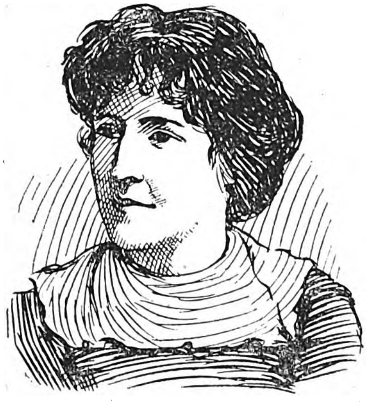

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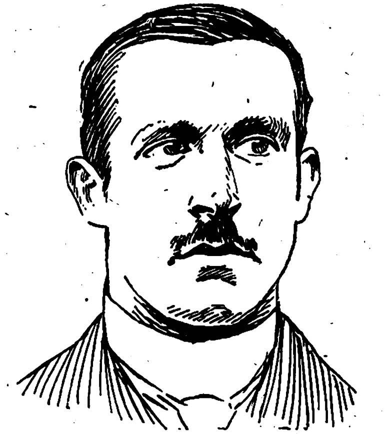


No. 30.

Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a *P.W.* penknife to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, November 4th. Postcards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Mr. A. Hutton, of 3 Lapage Street, Bradford, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

Adele: "What do you think is woman's real mission?" Edna: "To get her name changed."

The following notice appeared recently in a shop window of a tailor in Cork: "Wanted, two apprentices, who will be treated as one of the family."

Yankee, standing on the stern of a steamer as she leaves Liverpool, and holding a shilling aloft: "If there's a man, woman, or child on this blessed island I've not tipped, come forward now, for this is your last and only chance!"

Tourist: "These are beautiful mountains, but how much more picturesque would they look if there was an ancient ruin on the summit." Hotel-keeper: "Yes, I believe an ancient ruin would draw more tourists. Next year I am going to have one built."

Young Lady: "I am tired of living on my relatives and want to be independent." Employment Agent: "I might get you a place in a shop." "That won't do. I should be under someone's orders continually. I want to be independent of everything and everybody." "Ah, I see. I'll get you a place as a cook."

Passenger (angrily): "Why didn't you stop the car for me?" Conductor: "How was I to know you wanted to get on?" Passenger: "Didn't you see me swinging my arms and jumping up and down and waving my umbrella?" Conductor: "Of course. Could anyone help seeing you? The whole street was looking at you." Passenger: "Then why didn't you stop?" Conductor: "I thought you were dancing to that organ."

* A certain gentleman who served with the Imperial Yeomanry in South Africa, is rather fond of drawing the long-bow when referring to his personal experiences. This fact has not escaped the notice of the gentleman's faithful man-servant, whom we will call Donald. The other afternoon the returned warrior had been relating to Donald a particularly startling story of heroism and deadly peril, when the canny Scot gravely observed: "It's a peety ye didna tak' me wi' ye." "Oh!" went on the narrator, "I daresay you would have done your best, but, really, you couldn't have assisted me much. I was completely hemmed in, and there was nothing for it but to cut my way through the serried mass of furious burghers. If you had been there, Donald, I'm afraid you would only have been in the way." "Aweel," said Donald doggedly, "mebbe ye're richt; but for a' that, I would ha' been useful as a witness when ye telt that story tae your friends."

Blank books possess no literary merit, but they are bound to sell.

Bridget: "Me mistress has been presented at court, Mrs. M'Flab." Mrs. M'Flab: "Ye don't say so! Phwat was the charge?"

Gentleman: "That looks a well-bred dog." Owner: "I should think he was well-bred. Why, he won't have a bit of dinner till he's got his collar on!"

"Physical culture is so helpful; it teaches the children to go upstairs properly." "How about coming downstairs." "Oh, they generally slide down the balusters!"

Bobby: "Dad, what is a mutual friend?" Mr. Fogg: "He is generally one who makes it his business to see that you don't miss hearing the nasty things your friends say about you."

Husband: "I have made all sorts of sacrifices for you. Now, what did you ever give up for me?" Wife: "What did I ever give up for you? Well, you astonish me! Why, I gave up half-a-dozen of the nicest young men in town."

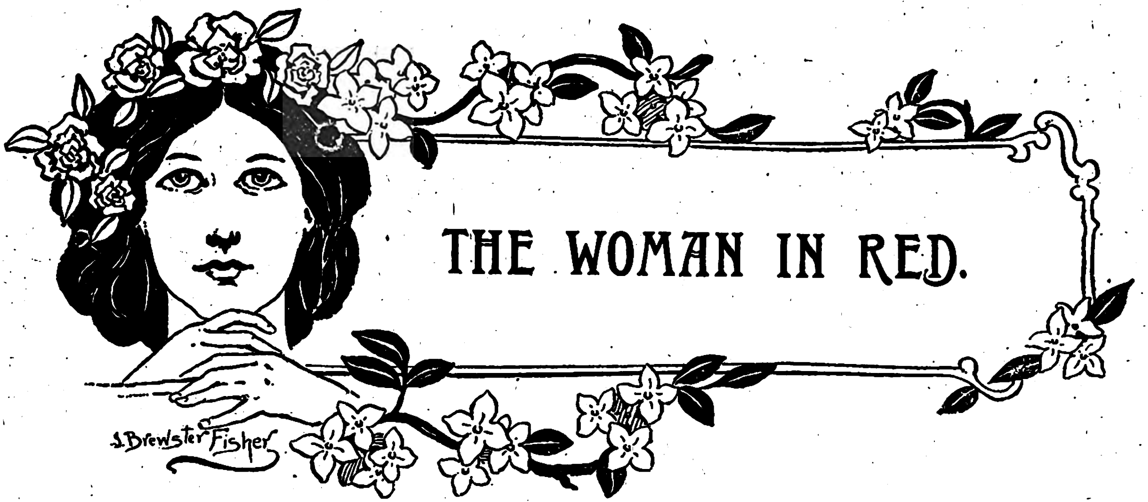
Infallible: "Is your partner a man of good judgment?" asked an old friend who is in town on a visit. "You will find in him," was the unctuous answer, "a man of infallible judgment. He never makes a move without taking my advice."

A poor woman who kept a small shop in a northern village, and who was troubled with a husband who could scarcely be considered a credit to the family, one day found herself a widow through the sudden demise of her spouse. A lady, who often made small purchases at the shop, called to offer her sympathy. "I am sure, Mrs. G——, you must miss your husband very much," said the lady. "Well, mum," was the widow's reply, "it do seem queer to go into the shop and find something in the till!"

Teacher: "If your mother had twenty-five yards of stuff and made a dress containing eighteen yards, how much would she have left?" Little Girl: "Mamma can't make her own dresses. She has tried often, and they are always either too——" Teacher: "Suppose she sent it to a dressmaker, how much would the dressmaker send back?" Little Girl: "Depends on which dressmaker she sent it to. Some wouldn't send back any." Teacher (impatiently): "Suppose she sent it to an honest one?" Little Girl: "Some of the honest ones cut things to waste, so that there is never anything left, no matter how much you send 'em."

The curious manner in which various members of the same Boer families have ranged themselves on opposite sides in the present war recalls a story attributed to Frederick Locker. In one of our frontier wars with the Afridis we were considerably assisted by several members of the hostile tribe. An officer on duty chanced one day to point out to a native sentry a certain black fellow whom he had observed skulking with others round the fort, evidently with sinister intentions. "I see him, sar," said the sentry; "had two shots at him a'ready, him hard to hit, he hardest man to hit I know." "Oh, you know him, do you?" said the officer. "Oh, yes, sar; I know de rascal. I been trying to shoot him all de week." "Why, who is he?" "Oh, de rascal—he's my father!"

Read "Dead to the World."



THE WOMAN IN RED.

WINTER reigned throughout Europe, but on the Riviera spring and summer bloomed together. Overhead the sky was infinitely blue, below the sea was green and purple and amethyst. Everywhere the sun, everywhere the scent of geranium and mimosa, the fragrance of rose and violet. Always the deep boom, boom of the waves thundering against the tall cliffs of Monaco, always the cry of the sea gull, forever the chimes of the church of Sainte Devote.

At Monte Carlo, that paradise of the gamester, the season was at its height. The Hotels de Paris and Beau-Rivage were crowded, those of the quarter La Condamine were full, and well-dressed people, finding shelter in some cheap lodging-house over in Monaco, gave the name of some more fashionable resort when applying for a *carte d'admission* to the "Cercle des Etrangeres," the euphemistic title of that institution which draws hither the avid and the inquisitive of all the nations. Day after day, night after night, the Casino overflowed with those who came to tempt Fortune. Everyone laughed and sang and was gay. Heavy hearts are hidden at Monte Carlo.

It was at a concert that she first appeared—the Woman in Red. The French tenor was just beginning his number when the doors of the middle box of the right-hand tier swung slowly open and closed behind her. She stood for just a moment outlined against the ivory background. Very tall she seemed, dressed from head to foot in red—not cardinal, nor crimson—but the most intense and glowing scarlet. From out this mass of colour her bare throat rose vividly white, and down the satin of her skirt her ungloved arms hung, soft and round as those of a child. Her hair, too, fine and fair, gave her head a rather childish look. And then—no wonder fans stopped fluttering and silks began to rustle—her face was entirely concealed by a mask of dark red velvet!

The lady seated herself quickly, with a curious grace in every movement, and the red of her dress spreading out around her stained as with blood the whiteness of the box. She raised her glass and insolently swept the house, moving her head so that the jewels in her hair blazed and flamed into the faces turned in her direction. A laugh floated from above as a woman in the gallery, with her programme twisted into a little roll, mocked the motion. The Woman in Red turned away her face with a shrug of her white shoulders, and sat through the performance quite still and indifferent. At the beginning of the last number she rose slowly, and gathering together her shimmering scarlet left the box. That was the introduction to the world of Monte Carlo of the Woman in Red.

After that interest centred about her, increasing as her peculiarities became known. She never wore a suggestion of any colour but red, and that alone was enough to make her conspicuous. Then the mask, thought to have been merely a caprice on the night of the concert, was never removed. That rendered her mysterious. She talked but little, going about silently, with soft, light step. One might be quite alone, and the next moment suddenly aware of the Red Woman's presence. When the tall young Englishman who lost everything at a turn of the wheel went out into the Casino garden and, cocking his pistol in the shadow of the cacti, muttered, "I'll end the whole cursed business!" the Woman in Red murmured persuasively beside him, "Oh, I wouldn't—" and he didn't, and when a lady knelt one evening before the image of the Virgin in the church of Sainte Devote, and whispered wildly, "Oh, blessed mother, forgive me my sins!" it was the Woman in Red, who finished softly for her, "and those who sin against me." This made her something more than conspicuous and mysterious—it made her awesome.

No one ever saw her smoke, but her scarlet garments always exhaled a faint odour of cigarettes. Every night she came into the roulette room and sat there in her scarlet dress, with a red flower in her hair, and put down her stakes with as much emotion as though the gold and notes were worthless. Consistent in her colour scheme, she invariably placed her money on the red, and nine times out of ten she won.

To make her a trifle more conspicuous, mysterious and eerie she had for her chaperon a woman so thin and wrinkled and old as to seem hardly capable of life. When some one ventured to ask her a question about the

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Woman in Red the creature cackled, "Oh, the Devil, the Devil, the Devil. How should I know?"

"No wonder the men like her," chattered a lively little French woman. "They'd like us if we'd muffle our faces and wore clothes like that. I'll wager she has the face of a blanchisseuse—any one could be fascinating behind a velvet mask."

"She is, certainly," said a bystander, dryly.

"Peste!" exclaimed the sallow critic, angrily. "No one wants that old Count or that stupid Baron, or that pink-cheeked English boy, anyway."

It is true that the Woman in Red found ardent admirers in the old Count and the stupid Baron and the English boy—the one to whom she had whispered that night behind the cacti—and the rivalry between them increased as the season passed. To-day one was in favour, to-morrow another, and the frequenters of the Casino got to betting on the chances of the several suitors till it became almost as exciting as a game at one of the tables.

But throughout it all the woman remained calm, inscrutable, mysterious. Neither of the three could persuade her to tell her name or take off her mask.

"I answer to any name," she said, "I have forgotten my own, and as for my face, what makes you think it beautiful?"

"Oh, you," said the courtly old Count.

"Your hands," said the stupid Baron.

"Your hair," said the blonde young Englishman, with British egotism.

In answer to each she only laughed a hard little laugh, not altogether pleasant to hear.

To be much talked about and to say little appeared to suit her. A month after her advent no one in Monte Carlo or Monaco knew a whit more about her than at first, and no one would have hesitated to give half his fortune—had he one—to know everything. The mystery of the masked woman was exasperating—the theories concerning her innumerable. Perhaps the majority of the women believed that, being very ugly, she had adopted this means of attracting the attention rightfully belonging to beauty. She was a problem which might be studied for weeks without arriving at a solution.

The warm southern days crept lazily along, and, as sometimes happens even in that sheltered paradise, began to grow oppressively hot. It was on the languid evening of one of these scorching days that the Woman in Red and the young Englishman were gaming side by side at the roulette table. The air of the Casino was heavy and scented, there was a murmur of laughter and talk, and the frequent click-clack of the roulette balls. The woman pushed back her chair impatiently and said to the man:

"Do come out into the garden—it is insufferably hot in here!"

"I should think," said the young man at length, as they strolled through the shrubbery, "that your mask would be unbearable."

"It is."

"Then why not take it off?"

"I did not come out to talk of that."

"But perhaps I did."

The Britisher's shoulders squared themselves aggressively.

The woman made no reply, but continued her occupation of listlessly slipping a ring up and down her finger.

"Oh, I have dropped it," she suddenly cried, and stooped quickly to search for it. The low branches of a tree caught in the coils of her yellow hair. To free it she impatiently drew up her head. There was a sharp click, as of the release of a metal catch, and the velvet mask, loosened, fell softly to the ground. She made an inarticulate noise in her throat, and her hands were thrown upward in an ineffectual attempt to conceal her face, but the young man was too quick for her. There in the bright white moonlight, he looked full at the face of the Woman in Red and, with a terrible cry of horror, fell like one dead upon the grass.

It was a long time before he opened his eyes and felt the touch of the woman's hand upon his brow and the cool trickle of water over his face. He lay passive, thinking of nothing. Then suddenly it all came back.

"Oh, don't, don't touch me!" he gasped. "Keep away from me."

He staggered to his feet, and pressed his hands to his eyes to shut out the vision that would return. His knees trembled and his teeth chattered. Something as white as the moonlight gathered at his lips.

The woman made an imploring gesture.

"Oh, see, I have put it on again," and she turned her head that he might behold the velvet mask.

At the sound of her voice he shivered in terror and, without a word, but making a strange moaning noise, he ran, like one demented, in the direction of the lighted Casino. And in the still, white moonlight the Woman in Red stood like one of the statues of the terraced garden, its marble purity turned to scarlet.

The next night she was in her usual place at the roulette table, but it was the stupid Baron who sat beside her.

"Why don't you play?" he asked, as she sat motionless and indifferent, eyed curiously by the spectators of the game. She sat up wearily and pushed a pile of gold and notes upon the red, No. 12. The croupier started the wheel revolving rapidly in one direction and sent the ball deftly rolling in the other, and there was a little buzz of conversation. Tongues wagged briskly while eyes were fastened on the whirling wheel.

"What has become of our English friend?" asked one.

"Gone home," was the answer from another across the table. "Perhaps the heat went to his head." He tapped his forehead significantly.

Gradually the wheel slowed down, and the ball was about to settle with its customary click. Gamblers leant over the table to see the result of their bets. The slowly rolling sphere was just dropping into No. 12! No, it has settled into the adjoining compartment.

"*Vingt-huit, noir gagne!*" calls out the croupier with shrill monotony, and the shining heaps are distributed to the winners.

"And Madame has lost!" exclaimed the stupid Baron in surprise.

The Woman in Red made no reply, but stood up and, with an imperious motion not to follow, walked steadily from the salle de jeu, a vivid bit of colour under the glittering lights of the splendid apartments.

Early the next morning she was found lying on the marble steps of the Casino dead in her scarlet dress. The stain trailing along the snowy marble had been scarlet, too, but was now turning to a reddish-brown. In one fine, strong hand was tightly clutched a folded note. The servants and people who gathered in trembling awe sent for the priest of the church of Sainte Devote to read it. He came quickly, panting a little for breath. Taking the paper from the fingers of the dead woman he glanced over it nervously, while the people looked on in breathless silence. It was written in French.

"I will read it," the priest said slowly, and he translated the writing in trembling tones—

"I have taken my own life—let that pass. Let no one lift the mask from my face but the priest of the church of Sainte Devote, and I pray him, when he knows my secret, to say mass for my soul. By all that is holy, respect these words."

As his solemn voice ceased those crowding about shuddered and fell back in nameless fear. They at once carried the body of the woman to where she had lodged, the early morning sun gleaming strangely on her scarlet garments and yellow hair. The priest entered the house and closed the door upon the crowd.

When he again emerged he was hardly recognisable. His face, deadly white, twitched and quivered spasmodically, his eyes protruded and rolled wildly from side to side, and his lips were parted in an awful, unholy smile. His trembling hands could scarcely hold the crucifix. To those who spoke to him he made no answer—he did not seem to hear.

They buried the woman that evening at sunset, among the nameless graves on the hill behind Monte Carlo, as speedily as possible. When the grim, grotesque companion of the dead was asked if anyone should be sent for, the only answer she would give was—

"Oh, the devil, the devil, the devil. How should I know?"

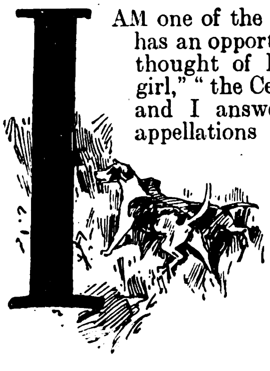
The priest from the church of Sainte Devote mumbled the service rapidly and indistinctly over the grave, with one shaking hand raised in a defensive attitude, as though to banish something or still the quaking terror that shook him from head to foot. When the ritual was ended he turned to the dense crowd which no secrecy or word of authority had been able to keep away, and said so sternly and distinctly that his voice echoed in the silence:

"Whosoever as much as dares to touch this grave, upon him I pronounce the everlasting curse of the Holy Church of Rome!"

Down the sloping hillside back to the town he led the procession, all the way shaking like a leaf. When they came again to the narrow streets he suddenly stopped trembling and began to laugh, and at the sound of such laughter the people stumbled over each other in their anxiety to get away.

The commissaire special and the administration acted promptly and with energy. There was an extra concert that very night, a grand ball on that succeeding, followed by a comic opera. At Monte Carlo it will not do to encourage reminiscence. And so, by-and-by, people stopped thinking, and began to talk of other things. The old Count and stupid Baron were among the first to drop the subject. But when to the mad priest in his cell there came continually the deep boom, boom of the sea, the cry of the gull and the chimes of the church where he should say no more mass, he laughed, and laughed, and laughed—though he could not remember why!

OVER THE WIRES.



I AM one of the few women in the world who has an opportunity to know exactly what is thought of her, for I am the "telephone girl," "the Central," "that stupid operator," and I answer to numerous other tender appellations which come to my ears over the wires, when business is brisk and my patrons in a hurry. It is a hard life, often an unpleasant one, but it has compensations; for instance, if one considers a kindly interest in the affairs of one's townspeople legitimate, it must be admitted that I have exceptional advantages in that line.

Just the other day I concerned myself in an odd little affair, which turned out so well that I am tempted to confess my part in it. That nice chap, Alec Andrews, rang up some weeks ago and asked me to give him Miss Frances Cary's line, which I did with haste and no little interest since the flirtation has been town talk for some weeks. No sooner did I hear Miss Cary's cool "Well, Mr. Andrews," than I knew love must be running its proverbial rough course, and I could almost see him stiffen up at his end, as he said abruptly: "Oh! I beg your pardon for disturbing you, Miss Cary, I merely wanted to make amends for anything I may have said last night that needed an apology. I was vexed, and I may have been hasty——"

His voice dwindled into a sort of expectant silence. But that stupid girl, instead of meeting him half way, wrapped her mantle of injured dignity about her, and gave him to understand that the less said about their differences of opinion, the better. I hardly needed the signal to disconnect their lines, after the last chilly words, but I drew a sigh of regret that there were to be no more daily conferences between them over walks and drives and good times generally.

"You have sent a nice fellow about his business, Miss Frances Cary," I said to myself, vindictively, "and you may be sorry by the time you have forgotten what the foolish quarrel was about."

But while I like Mr. Andrews for his courtesy to me, in my small connection with him, and was really sorry for his bad fortune in the direction of his ladylove, I am much too busy for prolonged meditation over the affairs of the town, and I hardly gave him a thought for the next few weeks. Occasionally I caught echoes, in the talk of Miss Cary's girl friends, of the unhealed breach between Mr. Andrews and herself, but it was quite a month later that I recognised his voice one morning asking for 930, the town florist.

Mr. Mays didn't come to the 'phone himself, but sent rather a raw hand, judging from the extreme uncertainty of his replies. Finally, however, Mr. Andrews succeeded in ordering a dozen American beauties to be sent before the dance the following night to "Miss Um-m-mn."

"What was the name, sir?" asked the clerk.

"Miss Leary," answered Mr. Andrews impatiently, "Miss Frances Leary."

There was a moment's silence, then, adding, "Put in my card, which I'll send down," Mr. Andrews rang off before he heard the perplexed murmur from the timid salesman at the other end.

"Miss Frances—what? Why can't they stop long enough to make a fellow understand? I didn't hear—oh! yes! Miss Frances Cary—that's his particular admiration."

I smiled grimly to myself, but it wasn't my business to run Mr. Mays' shop, and no doubt Mr. Andrews would straighten it out later. I confess I did feel some slight twinges of conscience about not correcting such an obvious mistake when Fanny Leary rang later in the day and asked her married sister, Mrs. Johnson: "Ella," she said, "I want your long white wrap for the dance to-night; I am going with Alec Andrews, and he always sends me flowers, and is so nice that I want to look particularly well."

"Certainly, my dear," came back in placid tones from bland Mrs. Johnson, whose evenings are spent before the fire with Will and the children, and who hardly needs opera cloaks any longer. "Send Mary for it. So you are going with Alec? That's nice. Sends flowers, does he? What are they this time? I hope not red; with your pink gown. Is he still at odds with Fan Cary? I heard her cousin Anne say the other day she thought they were both tired of the row, and if Alec would only make some advance, Fan would respond. Young people are so haughty these days. They never are willing to take the first step. Yes, Will, I'm coming now! Good-bye, child, have a good time."

As I belong to the great army of work-women, my paths don't lead me to dances and festivities, so my knowledge of the events of that evening I gleaned from broken sentences over the 'phone, next day.

Fanny Leary rang her sister up again by breakfast time, and I fancy she sounded a trifle hurried and constrained: "Thank you ever so much for the cloak, Ella. Yes, I had a very nice time. What? Oh! Flowers? No! my dear. It was the oddest thing, none ever came. Alec came late himself, and bundled me into the carriage without ceremony. The dance had begun when we got there, so there was no chance to look around, even. What? No, he didn't say anything one way or the other. Most of the girls had flowers, but not all. Yes, a little queer, as he always did it before. Thank you again, good-bye."

Now for explanations, I thought, and, sure enough, presently Mr. Andrews called up the florist and asked in no gentle tone if he had sent the roses to Miss Leary, as ordered.

Old Mr. Mays himself was answering, but he became rather bewildered, had to send for the assistant, and finally it all came out—the flowers had gone to Miss Cary, as I had known all along.

Mr. Andrews indulged in a pretty expressive exclamation of displeasure, and advised Mr. Mays to change clerks, but the mischief was done.

By-and-bye Frances Cary's mother called for Mrs. Johnson, to ask for some recipe, and I held my breath to hear what followed the business talk.

"Frances isn't going out, I believe, Mrs. Cary. So she wasn't at the dance last night?"

"No; she stayed at home; but she had rather a pretty surprise in a big bunch of lovely roses which came in the afternoon."

"Oh, indeed!" A pause, while I fancied Mrs. Johnson gathering herself up for a question. "I suppose it would be indiscreet to ask who sent them?" she laughed.

"Yes, rather," answered Mrs. Cary. "A very unexpected source; but I won't tell on her. Two spoons of butter and one of oil, did you say?"

Of course it wasn't long before Mrs. Johnson wanted to speak to her sister Fanny, and in the interval she had quite settled in her mind that the roses had gone astray. In fact, she hit the truth almost exactly.

Now, Fanny Leary is a nice girl, but I suppose it isn't in girl nature to sit still and see another girl come in for one's own favours. I resolved to do a very unwarrantable thing. When Mrs. Johnson finished her story, and was hanging up her receiver, I spoke to Miss Leary myself.

"I beg your pardon," I said—and I confess I felt rather shaky—"but, Miss Leary, I unavoidably heard your sister and yourself, just now, and I feel as if I must put in a word, though it's none of my business." She started to answer, but I did not give her time. "I heard Mr. Andrews order those roses, and they were for you; but Mr. Mays' man misunderstood, and they have gone to Miss Cary by mistake. But, Miss Leary, don't you think it may smooth matters over between those two—and—I know I am impertinent, but I am so anxious for Miss Cary not to know!"

I gasped a little at my own boldness, but Fanny Leary laughed good-naturedly, and said: "Oh! very well, Miss Duncan, she shan't learn it from me!"

As I am neither messenger boy nor letter carrier, I can't say what Frances Cary wrote in her note of acknowledgment to Andrews. My part of the story ends with a telephone call, two days later, and it seemed to me that ring had a peculiar vibration, but that may be too fanciful a notion for a sedate public official, like myself.

"Give me Miss Cary, please. Oh! Good morning, Miss Frances. Thank you so much for your note—ah!—what did you say? Not at all; not at all; it was worth a whole garden of roses! And may I come to see you this evening, and apologize for past sins, and be taken back into——"

But here she interrupted him gaily. "Of course you may. This—this—oh! well, this would never have happened if that telephone girl hadn't cut us off so quick one day several weeks ago, when I was about to explain that perhaps I was too quick in saying what I did. Yes; these 'Centrals' are unfeeling creatures. Good-bye, then until to-night!"

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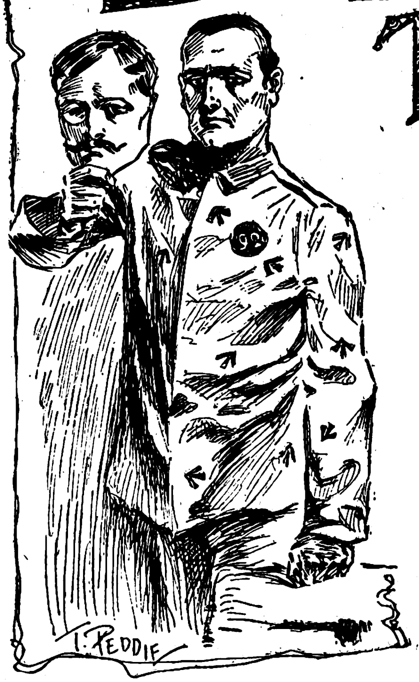
DEAD TO THE WORLD



By

Henry T. Johnson.

Author of "Cruce Vincit," "The Pride of the Ring," etc., etc.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST CHAPTERS.

Richard Seldon, a convict, escapes. In a train he meets Cyril Roylance just back from Australia, whom he murders and impersonates. He assumes the rôle of squire, and pays attention to Doris Dale. One day he encounters two old criminal acquaintances and agrees to meet them.

While on a visit to Squire Dale's, the latter's old butler talks of Cyril Roylance's younger days to the annoyance and discomfiture of Richard Seldon.

CHAPTER IX. *(continued.)*

The blood rushed to the manservant's face, he being man as well as servant.

"I beg pardon, sir," he said quietly. "You see I forgot myself; only I thought you might have remembered Rex——"

"Of course, my good fellow," said the other. "Rex the terrier, let's see, Skye terrier, or fox terrier?"

Barker paused a moment, then inquired, "Wasn't he a black and tan, sir?"

"Of course—of course; used to kill rats. And now, my good fellow, run away, you're making my head ache with your chatter."

"Very well, sir, I wish you good-night, sir."

"Oh, go to the devil!"

"Shall I give him any message, sir?"

"You insolent scoundrel, how dare you!"

"Scoundrel yourself, and to the devil with you!"

"What!"

An evil look blazed in the younger man's eyes; his face was livid.

"You hound!" he hissed, "if I were not a guest here and you a servant of the house I'd throw you down the stairs. Leave this room, and I'll report you to your master in the morning."

"And I'll report you too," said the other. "I'll report you as an impostor; you're no more Cyril Roylance than I am, whoever you may be. You might have forgotten the dog's name, you might have forgotten his breed, but you could never have lost the scar he left upon your neck when I throttled that bull-terrier off and saved young Cyril's life, and you couldn't have lost the scar on the left forehead that the doctor said Cyril Roylance would carry from the day he fell down our brass-bound stairs to the day of his death."

The other man stood silent! He was remembering that the man who had lain there face upwards on the railway-carriage floor carried upon his forehead the scar of an old wound—besides the new ones! When he had roused himself from his reverie the door was closed, Barker had gone!

What should he do? Mechanically he went to the door and, holding it ajar, listened to the man's retreating footsteps on his way downstairs, heard the pantry door open and shut. What should he do? Make a bolt for it then and there?

Clink! What was that? That sound of splintering glass and that tiny sound like the whistle of a very little saw. He drew a deep breath, his eyes dilated. Crossing the room on tiptoe, he switched off the electric light and waited. Presently a window was raised, a shutter swung back, muffled footsteps moved stealthily around the apartment, and a disc of light fluttered like a butterfly here and there. Dodging this disc, he crept back to the switch bracket; in an instant the room was flooded with white light, and two men with terrified faces made a rush towards that open window, through which the night air came in sweet and cold.

"Hush, you fools!" he whispered, and Barney Plumb ejaculated, hoarsely and excitedly:

"S'truth, it's Dick!"

"Yes," he replied, "you thought you'd work this job without your foreman—I knew!"

That was a lie, but the other two believed it, and wondered what there was he didn't know.

"Curse you," he went on; "didn't I tell you that you were to leave this job till I could work it with you?"

"Why, what's it matter, Dick, so long as we divides the pool?"

"But you never meant to divide, you meant to scoop the lot. I know my work, don't I?"

"None better, Dick."

Can you play "Hunt the Fiver"? See our Great Photo Competition.

"And I've always a reason for what I do, haven't I?"

"That's right, matey."

"Well then, when I'm foreman mind you've got to carry out my orders, not to question them; but as it happens now's as good a time as any. Let's get to work."

"Where's the pick of the swag?" whispered Josh Branner; "there ain't much stuff 'ere 'ceptin' pictures, and our line ain't 'igh art."

He whispered to them. After a while they went out into the corridor and he waited there, listening to their footsteps as he had listened to Barker's, and in the same direction!

Presently the sounds died away, then there was silence save for the ticking of the huge hall clock downstairs and now and then the squeaking and scuttling of mice inside the old wainscotted walls.

Then his strained ears caught another sound like that of a quickly smothered cry, then of a scuffle and quickly of a fall, then, very faint, the sound of a groan. Then he heard a whisper.

"Dick, come on down!"

Kicking off his shoes, he descended into the cold and silent basement of the great house.

"We've had to put him through it," said Branner. "Barney's got him by the throat on the floor, but he's a handful. Come along quick, you're cleverer than Barney."

Some ten minutes later the three re-ascended the stairs carrying a huge bag.

"Heavy enough, ain't it?" whispered Josh.

"Not so heavy as—what we've left behind."

They reached the room through which they had entered.

"Where's the trap?" whispered Tiger Dick.

"Round the bend of the lane beyond the meadows."

"Well now, get away quick, and here—leave me that pistol!"

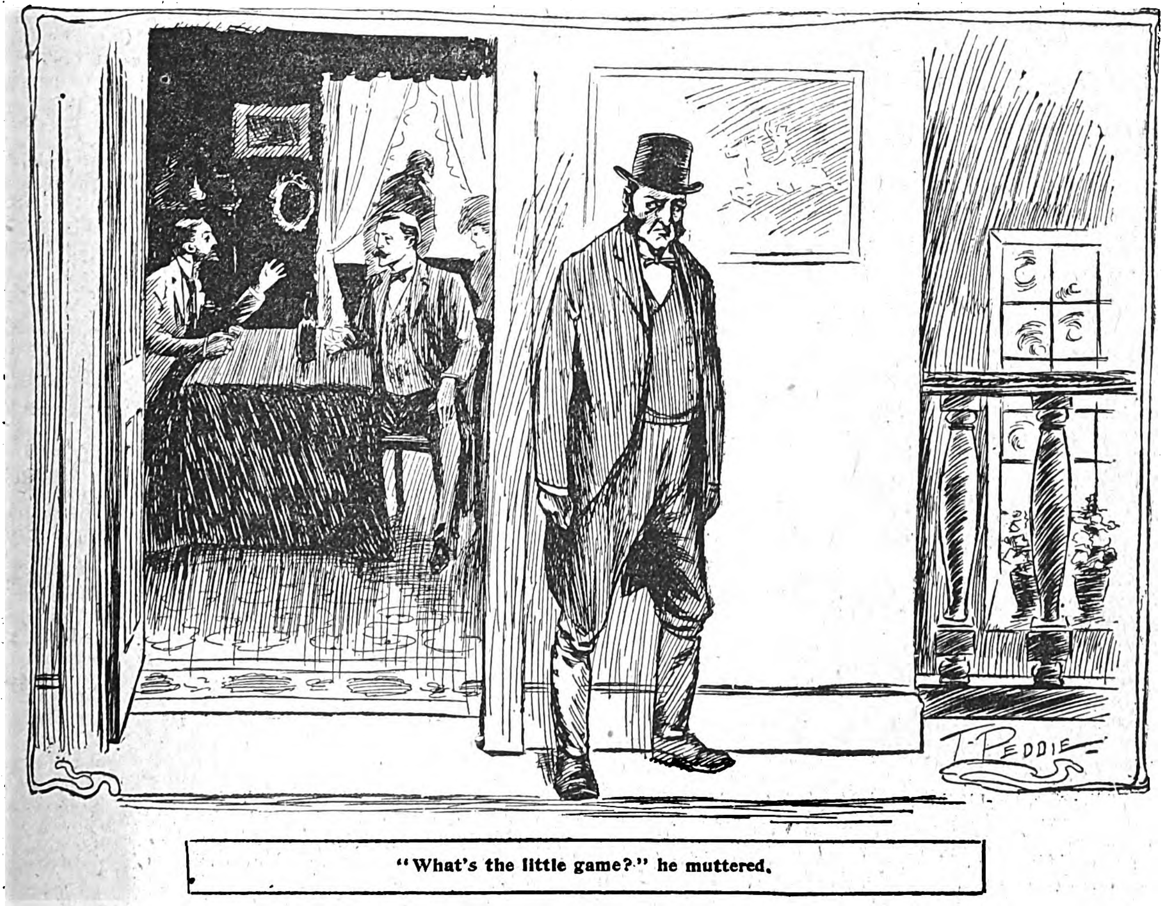
The pair clambered through the open window and down the rope ladder, which, when they had descended, Tiger Dick detached and threw down to them.

"Mind you give us ten minutes start!" That was their parting request.

He waited for a while, his head between his hands, his frame convulsed with violent agitation, a thin stream of blood trickling from his forehead. He partially undressed, and, carefully holding his handkerchief to the contusion on his forehead, got into bed.

He gave them a quarter of an hour; then, methodically, he sprang up and began pitching the furniture to and fro. He might have been a madman in a fit of frenzy, so strange were his antics. Tables, chairs, couch, washstand he turned them over, tugged at the bell and shouted "Help!"

He heard voices. Baug! bang! He fired the revolver through his own shirt sleeves, grazing with one bullet the skin of his forearm. Then he flung the revolver into a corner and threw himself across the overturned washstand.



"What's the little game?" he muttered.

"Quick! quick!" Harcourt Dale's voice sounded along the stairs, "they're in Mr. Roylance's room!"

He opened the door, turned on the light, then a cry of horror escaped him and the two menservants who followed him, for there lay the guest across a heap of débris, evidently, if not killed, badly hurt.

"The scoundrels!" groaned Harcourt Dale. "Look! they've fired point blank at him, quite close, his very clothing is singed, and see, he's bleeding from the forehead!"

"That's with the blow, sir," said the footman, "poor gentleman!" Then to the page-boy. "Here—give him some water!"

"Look here!" said their master stooping, "here's the revolver, three chambers discharged. Ring the alarm bell some of you—we'll arouse the countryside."

Doris, pale and trembling, came down in her dressing-gown and busied herself applying restoratives to the wounded guest. He opened his eyes dreamily with a sigh and fixed them on her face. The stake was worth winning at any risk, he said to himself.

The alarm bell clanged out harshly; then, attended by his servants, Harcourt Dale scoured the house to ascertain the further extent of the damage or loss.

In the butler's pantry they found the plate chest broken open and ransacked, and beside it Barker was lying in a heap. He was quite still, for he had died at his post, like the true man he was, defending his trust.

The tragic fate of his old servant grieved Harcourt Dale infinitely more than the loss of his plate, although just then such a loss was one that he could ill afford, and he reflected with a pang that that night, for the first time within his recollection, he had chidden him.

"Poor, poor fellow!" he sighed; "he served us well and faithfully, man and boy, for more than forty years, and now he has laid down his life for us. No battlefield ever witnessed a more loyal death. Oh! if we could only find a clue to the wretched man who did this thing!"

One of the servants following him up the wide oaken staircase, stooped, picked up something glittering yellow and handed it to her master.

It was the gold locket that his dead wife had given to their only child.

CHAPTER X.

Circumstantial Evidence.

Under ordinary circumstances Harcourt Dale would have made the finding of that trinket the occasion for a lecture on the iniquity of carelessness and the folly of wearing châtelaines and such like fal-lals which were always entangling themselves and their wearers with keys, door handles, door knobs, and what not. But in this instance he was far too overwhelmed by the tragic crime that had been committed under his roof tree to even make a note of the chance of giving Doris a scolding. He placed the locket in his waistcoat pocket, simply remarking:

"Thank you, Bell, it is from Miss Doris's châtelaine. It was her mother's. she'll be distressed at losing it and very relieved at its being found."

But there were the police arriving, details to be furnished, search parties to be organized, the doctor to be summoned post haste, so that, what with the bustle and excitement, to say nothing of the horror of it all, Harcourt Dale for the while clean forgot the finding of his daughter's locket. After due reverence had been awarded the dead, there was his wounded guest to be attended to.

"The wretches!" he exclaimed. "It is not their fault that we have not a double tragedy to deplore," and he gave Doris and the servants strict instructions that their injured visitor should receive every care.

In the dead of night, along the dark, deserted, silent roads and lanes a fast trotting pony, his feet cloth shod and muffled, tore along as though he, as well as the precious pair behind him, were eager to get as far away as could be from the scene of that night's wicked work.

"Josh!" whispered Plumb "we've done it this time."

"You're right," said the other, "best not to talk about it."

Jet black against the night sky over the bend of the upland they saw the gables of an old farmhouse.

"That's the place," whispered Branner, "do you think it's safe to stop, hadn't we better make haste and get away as quick as we can?"

"No," said the other firmly, "Dick's plan's the best, and we shall get away quicker in the long run by stopping here."

They turned down a narrow grass-grown lane, there halted their horse, and alighted, and scrambling over a five-barred gate in the shadow of the hedgerows, made their way to the kitchen gardens belonging to the Abbey Farm, and so at length they came to a grass plot studded with tiny flower beds under an old-fashioned lattice window, twinkling in the fitful moonlight just under the eaves of the quaint old thatched roof. And very deliberately Josh Branner marked his footprints in the pliant soil of the flower bed nearest that window, and quietly, but deliberately, scraped the mud from the heavy boots on the sill beneath.

And meantime, Barney Plumb, stooping, took an iron instrument from his jacket pocket.

"Curse it," he said, wiping his hand inside his coat, "it's still wet." Then he thrust it, still wet as it was, as far as his outstretched arm would reach, inside that clump of laurels. From the farm buildings beyond came a deep, ominous growl, then suddenly the rattling of a chain and a clamorous vehement barking, and Messrs. Plumb and Branner, with a frightened look behind them, sped for their lives along the garden and the meadow, never pausing till, breathless, they reached the trap waiting there in the grass-grown lane, for the big, deep-mouthed baying of the mastiff had been taken up by the full, frequent bark of a retriever, and a couple of terriers had in a second sprung up to add their sharper and even more excitable clamour to the alarm.

"What on earth's that?" exclaimed Jack Branscombe, "a fox marauding the henroosts! What a thundering row the dogs are making, confound them! And I was just dreaming of Doris. Hang it! they're keeping it up and old Bendigo's straining at his chain. Perhaps I'd better go and see what's the matter, it's only fair when the dogs give tongue like that to answer them."

Partially dressing, and in lieu of coat taking a thick ulster from a wardrobe close to hand, he stole gently downstairs lest he should wake and alarm his housekeeper and maidservant. He went out into the stable-yard and the mastiff's angry baying gave way to more joyful greetings.

"Down! down! lie down, Bend'go, quiet Neptune! Hold your row, you imps!" to the terriers. Then more in curiosity than caution he strolled round and glanced at the byres and barns and into the cattle shed, thinking that possibly some poor wretch of a tramp might have sought a night's shelter. But no, there was no sign even of any wayfarer who, knowing Jack's tolerance, had sought a night's rest in his sheds. Feeling now thoroughly awake he lit a pipe, walked across to the fold gate, and glanced up and down the high road. No! A fox or hare must have made a short cut across the place, he concluded, and as it wanted a good three hours to daylight he determined to go back to bed. Before doing so, however, he strolled round to the front of the house, glanced at the door and windows, then went round again.

And just as he turned the corner, Ned Fletcher, trudging along in the direction of a certain coppice, which, guessing something of the movements of his former associates, he was watching, glanced casually over the moss-grown wall dividing the Abbey Farmhouse's pretty flower garden from the road.

"Who's that?" he muttered, suddenly pausing, "why it's young Jack Branscombe! What in the name o' wonder is the lad prowling about there for? Dang it! if 'twere not his own house one 'ud think he was after breaking into it, but that's no business o' mine. I mun hurry along, or else the lads will have drawn the coppice."

Meantime, Jack Branscombe, having convinced himself that all was safe, going round to the back of the house, quietly let himself in. There was still time for a few hours rest, and he wanted a clear head for the next day, because he had a lot to do, and it was work that as a rule laymen hadn't much experience in, even such as had finding as a rule one experience last a lifetime. A few hours later he went down to breakfast.

"Did you hear the dogs barking last night, sir?" inquired Nannie, the good old housekeeper who looked after him like a mother.

"Oh, yes," he said, "that's all right. You say everything's quite ready? That's right, tell Jack to put the dogcart to, I'm going to——"

Before the word "town" had left his lips he stopped himself.

"I'm going to see some people on business. I may not be back to-night."

"Really, sir, but suppose any letters come?"

"They'll have to wait."

"And suppose anyone calls on business?"

"They'll have to wait too. The business I'm going on, Nannie, just now, is to me the most important in the world."

Then she observed that he had brought down his kit bag already packed. Finishing a hasty breakfast, he hurried out along the front garden to where his dogcart stood waiting in the road, flung the rug off the mare's back, took the reins from the lad in the cart, and shouted to the other at her head, "Let her go!"

"Steady, mare! How long before we shall see you again, sir?" inquired this latter, giving the mare her head.

"Can't say!" he shouted with a laugh, little guessing how long. "Good lass," and he set the mare bowling along the road, for he meant to catch the 10.15 and he did it.

CHAPTER XI.

A Strange Reticence.

Greatly to the relief of everyone at the Grange, the guest's injuries were trifling, with perhaps the exception of that contusion on the forehead, and even that required no more drastic treatment than the liberal application of vinegar and water, a little arnica, and a composing draught, and at noon the next day the patient was in quite his normal condition and as interested and active as any in discussing and formulating the steps to be taken with a view of the hunting down of the culprits.

It was he who increased the reward Harcourt Dale immediately offered for the apprehension of the murderers.

And when the proof of that bill headed in big black letters, MURDER! TWO HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD!! reeking and malodorous from the local printer's galley was placed in his hand, there was something almost approaching a smile in the lines of the hard mouth under the black moustache which was growing so swiftly and strongly, for he was wondering if such a thing had ever happened before as a man offering a reward for his own apprehension, and the contin-

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Mrs. Gertrude Morley, of Crown Street, Awsworth, Ilkeston, suffered from Anæmia from being eighteen years of age. Speaking of her condition, she says:—"I always felt tired and weary, worn-out, and miserable. I lost all power to digest my food, and became so emaciated that I could only walk a few steps at a time, holding on to the furniture to support me. I began to take Bile Beans, and the result has been marvellous. In a few short months they completely cured me. I am now in the enjoyment of perfect health, and the other day I walked eight miles with ease!"

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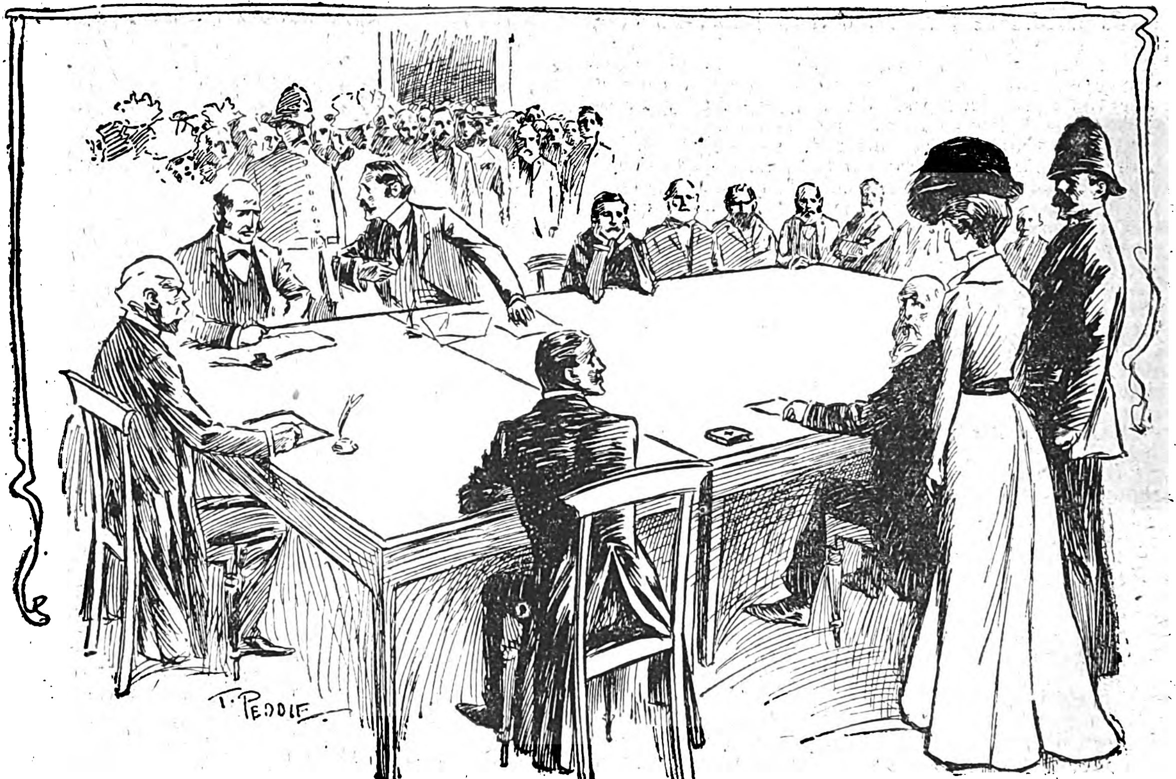


"I gave it to Mr. John Branscombe, of the Abbey Farm."

gency of his having to sign a cheque for the moiety of that reward appealed to his sense of humour. A soft, white vision entered the room. It was Doris, her beautiful face in keeping with her white morning gown, her eyes bright with recent tears, for she had loved the dear old retainer who had carried her in his strong, trusty arms a tiny baby, had taught her her first steps and to ride her first pony. Doris Dale was an English gentlewoman from the sole of her tiny foot to the crown of her golden head, and, accordingly, her old servants were her old friends.

"Are you quite recovered now, Mr. Roylance?" she asked, and a shudder thrilled her frame as she read the letters gleaming big and black on the damp sheet in his hands: MURDER!

"Oh, I'm quite fit, thanks," he replied, "that is except that, of course, it has been an awful jar to me. The dear old chap you know was so good to me when I was a little fellow, and I thought such a lot of him, was so glad to meet him and talk over those very, very early days, and then for this to happen to him just after our meeting again."

"I know, I know," she said, "and I'm so sorry for you."

"Ah, that's very tender and sweet of you. Do you know, Doris, I can't get out of the old way of calling you by that name, it makes a man feel good the very thought of a dear little woman like you taking an interest in him. Oh, Doris, if I could only hope——"

"Oh, no, no," she said hurriedly, "you mustn't talk like that or think like that. Of course I like you, Cyril. I've always remembered you and liked you as my first child playmate, and, of course, I hope we shall always be friends, but you must never think of anything more than that."

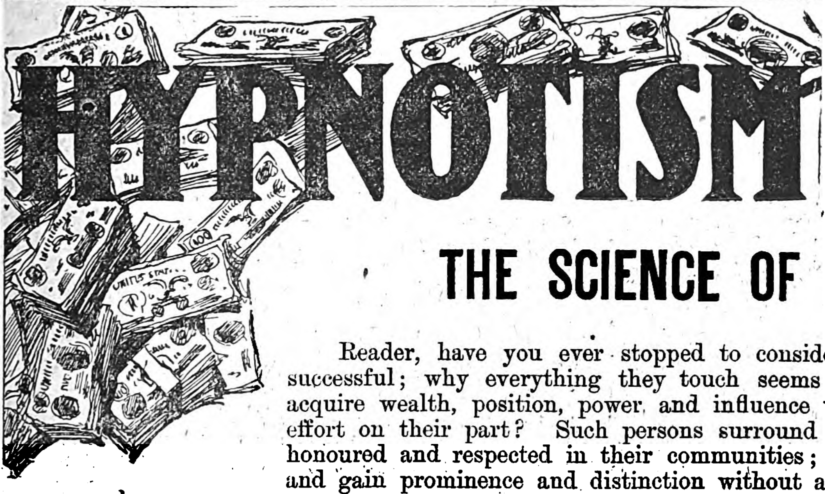
"Doris," he said, fixing upon her a glance that seemed to envelope and to burn. "Strength is my keynote. I'm not a good man, I'm not a great man, I've been told that in a way I'm a clever man" (even as he spoke there flitted through his brain the dim remembrance of a stern-faced man sitting in a wig and gown high up under a canopy adorned with the Royal arms angrily admonishing him on the mis-application of natural talents). "Doris, I'm strong, iron strong, strong in my likes, my dislikes, my love, my hate, most of all in my determination. No, no, most of all now in my love for you, and when a man loves as I do you might just as well tell the tide not to flow or ebb, or the wind not to blow, or the rain not to fall, you might as well tell the moon and the stars not to shine, as tell that man not to think of the passion that has set his very soul aflame."

"I can't hear you, I won't hear you," she said. "Oh, Cyril! since we are friends, spare yourself and spare me pain. Tell me," she went on, changing the subject, "those terrible creatures who attacked you last night, how many were there?"

"Two," he said.

"The cowards! What a mercy that in their haste,

Can you play "Hunt the Fiver"? See Photo Competition.



HYPNOTISM

THE SCIENCE OF SUCCESS

Reader, have you ever stopped to consider why some persons are so successful; why everything they touch seems to turn to gold; why they acquire wealth, position, power and influence without any seemingly great effort on their part? Such persons surround themselves with friends, are honoured and respected in their communities; are sought after in society, and gain prominence and distinction without apparently trying. Have you ever considered these things? Do you know why?

WHAT BRINGS SUCCESS

Not hard work, for the poor work harder than the rich. Not birth, because many of our successful men are of lowly parentage. Not luck, for many a lucky man dies friendless and poor. We will tell you why. The secret of success in life is personal influence—the ability to make others think as you do; to win their confidence and friendship and get them to help you. There is a secret power by which you can wield an irresistible personal influence; by which you may overcome all obstacles, charm and fascinate whom you will; by which you may cure every known disease and bad habit without the aid of drugs, medicines or the surgeon's knife. It is called personal Magnetism or Hypnotism. It is the basis of success in every business and calling.

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and no doubt in their terror, for I am sure you are very brave, they fired wide. Not very wide, but oh! what a mercy it is to think of the old saying of a miss being as good as a mile. Cyril, do you think they'll catch them?"

"I can't quite say?"

"Of course, you hope they will?"

"Well, really!" he said hesitatingly.

"Oh! what a generous nature you are!" she exclaimed impulsively, feeling that, though she never could love him, she really did like him. "But that cruel man who struck you that fearful blow on the forehead?"

"Oh, well, yes!" said he, diving his hands in his pockets and pacing the room studying intently the pattern of the carpet. "At the time I did feel very angry with him. May I light a cigarette?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "But, Cyril, don't you hope they'll both be caught?"

Suddenly he came to a dead stop, wheeled round and faced her.

"No!" he said abruptly, almost defiantly, "no; to tell you the truth I do not."

"But, Cyril, why?" she asked with a puzzled expression, "such monsters when at large are living dangers to honest folks."

"I know, I know; still, I have my reasons."

"How strange," she said, "few would be so forgiving. Cyril, tell me, did you see their faces?"

"One of them clearly," he said.

"Would you know him again?"

"Anywhere."

"Had you ever seen him before?" she asked with growing excitement.

"Yes," he replied, folding his arms, "and that is why, notwithstanding that I have offered that reward, I hope he will escape."

"Cyril, what do you mean; who is he, do I know him?"

"Yes," he answered; "it was for your sake I let him go, for I think I could have held him."

"Oh, Cyril, name him—denounce him; let his name and his infamy ring throughout the countryside, through the length and breadth of the land."

"No, no!" he answered, his face set and stern, and she, bewildered, cried:

"Then in the name of common sense and common justice, why?"

He drew himself to his full height, looked her full in the face, and said in a clear and ringing voice:

"For your own sake."

Then he turned and walked from the room, leaving her amazed.

"What can he mean?" she asked. "Oh! the excitement and perhaps that terrible blow must for the while have injured his brain. And yet he seemed so certain. Oh, dear! dear! my own brain is in a whirl. Heaven send these dark days will soon be over."

CHAPTER XII.

A Verdict of "Wilful Murder."

An air of unwonted bustle and importance pervaded the precincts of the Seven Bells, the principal hostelry in Dalehurst village. The very ostlers, hissing as they scrubbed and rubbed their patient charges, wrinkled their brows with portentous gravity, and ever and anon paused to unbend their backs and gaze wonderingly at the balconied windows of the big room up there. The stable yard was crowded with a variety of vehicles, from the broughams of county magistrates to the cart of the village carrier, and, not only in the loose boxes, but outside the stable doors were tethered various steeds, from the trimly clipped and groomed hacks of gentleman farmers to the packman's shaggy pony and the hawker's donkey.

That big room up there inside the balconied windows was crowded as never before in its history. The jury had been empanelled, had elected their foreman, the coroner's officer had gabbled over the charges, beginning "Oyez, oyez, oyez," and the twelve good men and true had settled down to the task of inquiring into the circumstances touching the death of John William Barker, late of Dalehurst Grange, manservant.

At the press table reporters, armed with sheaves of pointed pencils, were waiting eager as greyhounds in the leash, and there at the back of the room twice as many persons as there was comfortable room for were penned like sheep in a fold. The staircases and corridors, too, were thronged, and the management and the staff of the Seven Bells moved to and fro with the gravity and importance of those who felt that the eyes of the world were upon them.

In a private sitting-room on the other side of the house Doris Dale sat with her maid. It had been deemed advisable for her to be in attendance at hand in case of need, though it was not expected that her evidence would be required.

The Squire of Fallowfield was there, deep in converse with Harcourt Dale and Detective-Inspector Rossiter of the C.I.D., and once or twice, when Harcourt Dale returned to Doris, the master of Fallowfield Hall and the eminent detective hob-nobbed very confidentially and seriously over a glass of the best port that could be found in the Seven Bells' cellar, greatly to the perturbation of Morgan Chandler, who, also loitering about the premises, watched askance the *tête-à-tête* with uneasiness.

"What's the little game?" he muttered. "What's he so chummy with the tec. for. Perhaps it's all right, and it's only this Dalehurst Grange job they're palavering about; only it seemed to me once or twice the detective's eyes were following me, I could sort of feel them on me. I suppose it's only to-day's matter they're discussing, but if it was something else it might be a bit awkward. Hullo, Ned, have a glass of anything?"

"No thank you, sir, I've got to drive over to the telegraph office for the master."

"Will you take a glass of anything, Ned?" said Chandler, who, since Fletcher had been promoted very much into the position of confidential messenger to his master, had exchanged his attitude of tyrannical bully towards the man, after the fashion of his type, and had adopted a policy of conciliation.

"Thank 'ee, Mr. Chandler, can't stop," replied Ned.

"Something important, I suppose? What's it all about, and what's the guv'nor talking so serious to the man from Scotland Yard about. Do you happen to know?"

"Well, I do happen to know," replied Ned Fletcher, "only, like this telegram, it happens to be private. Good-day," and with a nod and grin, which expressed unutterable defiance and contempt, Ned hurried out to where the smart dogcart was waiting, and, seizing the reins and scrambling up into the seat, within a few seconds was spinning along the high road in the direction of the nearest market town.

"Excuse me half-a-minute, Mr Roylance," said Inspector Rossiter, perusing one of the telegrams Ned Fletcher, who had been detailed for that service, had brought him, "I've got a little matter to attend to."

"Certainly," said the Squire, strolling away and leaving the detective wrinkling his brows over the pink flimsy in his fingers.

(To be continued.)

Read Dead to the World."

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

WHAT a lot of money everybody has! It must be so since so many of our £5 notes are going begging. We offer five each week, but in no one week have the whole lot been claimed. Consequently, I can only conclude that money is so plentiful that a mere "fiver" is not worth sending for.

On page 562 you will find another batch of photos, and unless you have a plethora of riches, I should recommend you to see immediately if your portrait is among them. And even though you are a millionaire, you may as well send for the money. It will do to buy your wife a new bonnet. I am authoritatively informed that quite a nice one can be got for £5.

In connection with the third batch of portraits two £5 notes have been claimed. Here are the names and addresses of the successful claimants:

MR. P. INSALL (No. 13),
4 The Parade,
Acton Green, W.

MRS. BLAKE (No. 14),
49 Rupert Street,
Reading.

⁂

ADVICE TO READERS ON VARIOUS MATTERS.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

"WHY do so many clergymen suffer from sore throats?" asks "Curate." According to an eminent specialist in throat diseases, the trouble is mainly caused by the habit of hanging the head. The orator who directs his remarks to the bottom button of his waistcoat is almost certain to have a sore throat. The Bar looks up to the Bench: barristers seldom have clergyman's sore throat. But the clergyman in reading the prayers looks down upon his book; his chin is upon his chest. When he preaches, his eyes are still upon his manuscript or looking downwards at his congregation. Let him lift his eyes, praying with diligent observation of the roof, and preaching, in a physical sense, to the gallery, and he will escape the great clerical malady.

"TYRO" suffers from a very common complaint—that of feeling uncomfortable and ill at ease when in the society of people with whom he is not intimately acquainted. He always feels afraid to join in a conversation for fear of saying something stupid, and he asks me to give him a few hints as to how to overcome the difficulty.

The art of conversation is rather a natural than an acquired accomplishment, but "Tyro" can easily do a good deal to remedy his deficiencies in this respect. It does not require much ingenuity to think of something suitable to say upon ordinary topics. Do not, however, imagine that much talking is necessarily a good thing; there must be good listeners as well as good talkers, and there are rather too few of the former and too many of the latter. At the same time, it does not do to sit still as if one had not an idea in one's head. If "Tyro" makes an effort to conquer his reserve, he will soon gain confidence.

"LOVER" writes complaining of his "ownest own," as I have no doubt he sometimes calls her. It appears that whenever they have a slight disagreement she weeps, and he does not like this, because he has to give in at once. "Lover" thinks her conduct shows weakness. I don't; in my opinion—of course, I am quite inexperienced—the young lady is remarkably clever. She knows quite well that were she to return anger for anger, the little rift might soon become a serious affair. Therefore, she adopts what is undoubtedly the most powerful weapon in the feminine armoury—tears—with the result that the poor male thing is completely subjugated and brought to repentance. In these days, when certain distorted feminines delight in aping the manners of mankind, "Lover" ought to be devoutly thankful that he is beloved by a womanly woman.

IT is "L. L." who asks this question, "Are warm baths beneficial?" to which I reply decidedly in the affirmative. Warm baths will often prevent the most virulent diseases. A person who may be in fear of having received infection of any kind should take a warm bath, suffer perspiration to ensue, and then rub dry. He should dress warmly to guard against taking cold. If the system has imbibed any infectious matter, it will be removed by resorting to the warm bath if the latter is taken before the infection has had time to spread over the system; and even if some time has elapsed, the drenching perspiration that may be induced by hot water will be very likely to remove it. In cases of congestion, bilious colic, inflammation, etc., there is no remedy more certain to give relief than a hot bath.

IN reply to "BILL," before a man can drive a cab for public hire he is compelled to pass an examination at Scotland Yard in regard to his knowledge of London. His examination, like most others, is rapidly becoming more difficult, and is conducted in the following manner: A commissioner sits with a map before him, and the would-be extorter of big fares is asked through what streets he would pass if he were to proceed from certain points to other places. For example, he is asked, "Supposing you were to drive from London Bridge to Paddington, how would you go?" Cabbies complain that this is an unfair test, as plenty of people know their way about without being able to name the streets through which they pass.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I AM open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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can safely Reduce Weight and cure Corpulency permanently by taking TRILENE TABLETS (Regd.) for a few weeks. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to IMPROVE both HEALTH and FIGURE without Change of Diet. An English Countess writes: "*Your Trilene Tablets act admirably.*"

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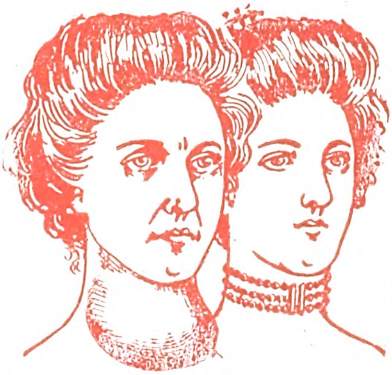

Mrs. Lelina Brown, who was entirely cured of Goitre after suffering for 22 years.

Goitre is incurable Dr. Haig sends a free trial package of his discovery so that patients may try and know positively that Goitre can be cured at home without pain, danger, operation or any inconvenience.

Send your name and address to Dr. John P. Haig, 2826 Glenn Building, Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A., and he will forward the trial package post-paid. Do not fail to get this wonderful remedy.

In Rio Janiero, Brazil, S. A., 60,000 patients in that infected district were cured with this same remedy, and wherever used its success has been marvellous.

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With a guarantee to keep correct time for three years, will be sent to any address on receipt of P.O. or stamps value 2/9, and three stamps extra for postage. To every purchaser during this month we give with it ABSOLUTELY FREE a strong Mexican SILVER CHAIN. All we ask of you is to show them to your friends, as by doing so you advertise our business.

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ANY DOCTOR WILL TELL YOU, "there is no better Cough Medicine." —One gives relief; if you suffer from cough try them but once; they *will* cure, and they *will not* injure your health; an increasing sale of over 80 years is a certain test of their value. Sold in 13½d. tins.

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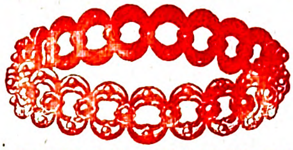

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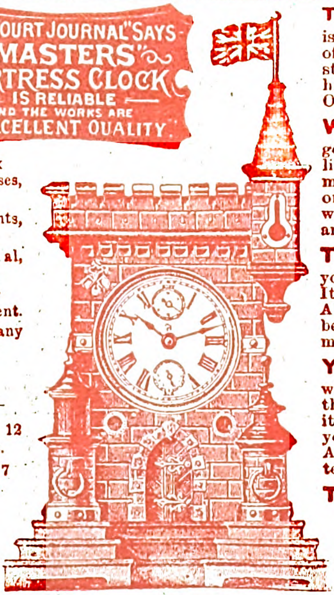

Real Oak Cases,
Brass Mounts,
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Superior Lever Movement.
Goes in any position like a Watch.

Height, 12 inches.
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THIS CLOCK is a perfect model of a Fortress and stands one foot high. It has Real Oak case, and **WILL** go in any position like a Watch. You may carry it from one room to another without stopping, and it will **TELL** you the true time. It has a powerful Alarum which can be set to go off any minute **YOU** wish, even early in the morning when it is too dark to see your Watch, the Alarum will ring telling **THE TIME** you wish to get up. This powerful Alarum will awaken the heaviest sleeper. **IN THE** house. It is a handsome addition to any cottage or mansion. Polished **DARK** Oak Case, brass mounts, white dial, lever movement.

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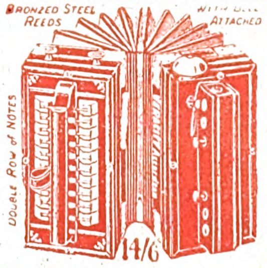

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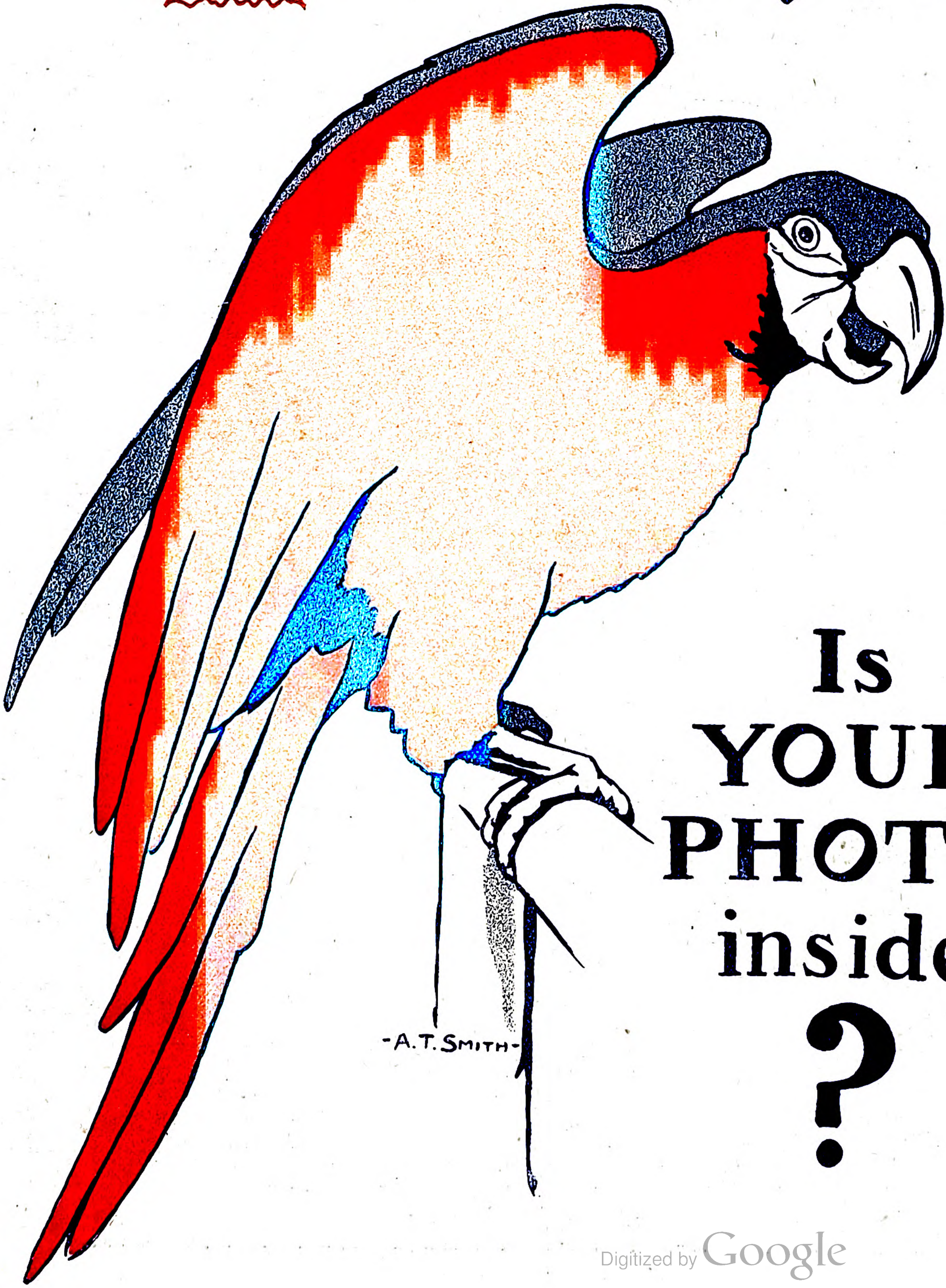
PEARSON'S
SHORT STORIES

No. 671.
For Week
Ending
November 9,
1901.
ONE PENNY



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PACKETS, 1/-. SAMPLES ONE PENNY,

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WORTH A CROWN A DOSE.

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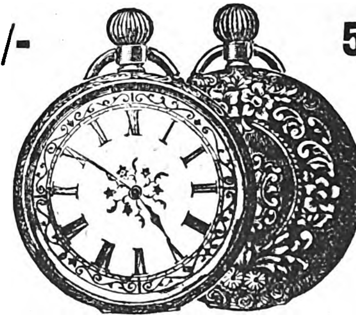

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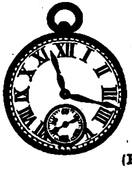

With a guarantee to keep correct time for three years, will be sent to any address on receipt of P.O. or stamps value 2/9, and three stamps extra for postage. To every purchaser during this month we give with it ABSOLUTELY FREE a strong Mexican SILVER CHAIN. All we ask of you is to show them to your friends, as by doing so you advertise our business.

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Prevents decay. Saves extraction.
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Of all Chemists 1/1½.

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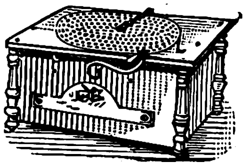
Of all Chemists 1/1½, 2/9, & 4/6 per box.

HAND-ORGANS from 20s.



Made in 3 sizes, black and gold case. Full organ tone. 6 metal tunes. Plays songs, hymns, and dance music. If desired, sent on receipt of P.O. 4s. Write for Terms to pay 4s. monthly.

Lists of Tunes and prices, **ATLAS CO.,** 184D High St., Camden Town; 63 Seven Sisters Rd.; 14 High Rd., Kilburn, London.

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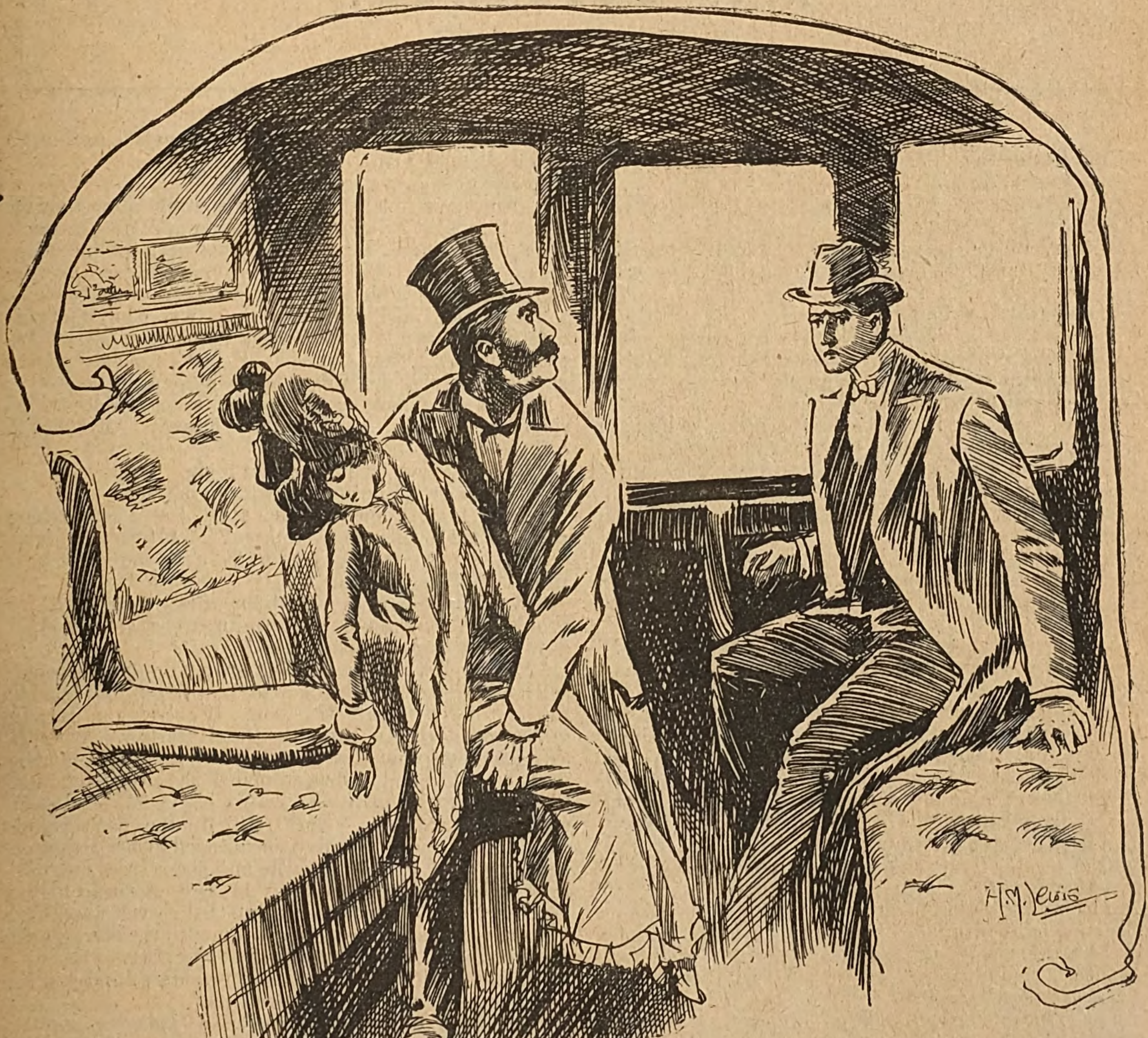
SHORT STORIES.

No. 671.] For the Week Ending November 9th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

Adventures of an Actress.



"She's not asleep," he said hoarsely. "She's unconscious!"

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A THRILLING INSTALMENT.

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

XIV.—OUTLAWED.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

"TREVANNION, by all that's wonderful! What brings you to Manchester?"

The man addressed looked curiously in the face of the individual who accosted him.

"Your voice is familiar," he answered somewhat dubiously; "but I'm hanged if I can remember your face."

A laugh answered him.

"And yet we've rubbed shoulders together often enough before Lucius Trevannion, Esquire, thought fit to take up stage life. Didn't I take nearly five pounds off you at poker one night?"

"Horace Caldecott!" broke in the other, a light of sudden recognition dawning on his countenance.

"Yes; but not so loud, man. I'm incog. here, but I should like a talk with you. Come up to my rooms at the Grand Hotel and tell me how the world has fared with you since last we met."

Somewhat mystified, the other accepted the invitation, and ere long the two men were seated in a comfortable private sitting-room with an open bottle of champagne to cement their friendship.

"And now tell me what you are doing in Manchester?" began Caldecott, handing Trevannion a cigarette and lighting one himself.

"I'm taking a small part," was the answer, "in the *Good Samaritan* Company. I was looking for a 'shop' some weeks ago when an accident happened to a man named Monteith, who was taking a small part in the play, and Venables, the acting manager, asked me to fill the *rôle*. I accepted, and when Monteith came back—which he did at the beginning of the week—sooner than be out of a 'shop' altogether again I got transferred to a part that is nothing more than to walk on."

A curious expression had come into Caldecott's face as he listened to Trevannion's bare story, for it was he who had been responsible for the accident that had caused Monteith to temporarily relinquish his part in the *Good Samaritan* Company.

"You're lucky," he said lightly, "to have got into the Company that boasts such a star as the adorable Hazel Harlow."

At the mention of the girl's name Trevannion's face darkened.

"That's rather a doubtful blessing," he answered curtly, exhaling a huge cloud of tobacco smoke as though to hide his glowering countenance.

Caldecott's eyes glistened.

"From your tone," he said, "one would almost think that there is no love lost between you and Miss Harlow. A pretty business that has been this week, culminating in the death of the Duchess of Stanchester. A fine advertisement for Miss Hazel, if ever there was one."

Trevannion made no answer. It was plain that his companion's mention of Hazel's name had turned his thoughts into a new channel. He sat in moody silence gazing darkly at nothing, a far away look in his eyes.

"What's the matter, old man?" asked Caldecott insidiously. "You seem mighty hipped. Anything I can do for you?"

"I don't know," came the curt reply.

Then suddenly the actor sprang to his feet.

"Look here, Caldecott," he said. "We used to be pretty thick at one time—you and I. If I were to take you into my confidence, could I be quite sure that you wouldn't go back on me?"

"My dear fellow, I am discreetness personified. I should be very happy to help you in any way I could, if only for old acquaintance's sake."

"Very well, then," said the other, plunging into speech as though relieved at being able to at last unburden his mind. "I'll be frank with you. If there's one person in the world that I hate it's Hazel Harlow. When I first joined the company I'll admit I thought she was the most beautiful and perfect woman I had ever seen, and, like nearly every man who knows her, I fell head over ears in love with her. And I thought the jade reciprocated my affection. One day, encouraged by her graciousness, I asked her to be my wife and she refused me, told me she had no idea of giving me any encouragement, and left me with that consolation. And ever since that day my feelings have gone right round to the other point of the compass. I can't stand her at any price. In fact—I'm frank with you, as you see—I wouldn't mind paying her out for her having deceived me."

The speech just made was a good index to Lucius Trevannion's character. He was weak, self-opiniated young man, who had thought that he had only to throw himself at Hazel's feet to be accepted with acclamation, and the fall of his pride when he discovered that Hazel had no other feelings than kindly personal regard for

Can you play "Hunt the Fiver"? See Photo Competition.

him, had been so swelled by the self-fancied blow administered to his pride, that his so-called love had veered round to the opposite extreme.

Caldecott read all this almost at a glance.

"I am indeed sorry for you, Trevannion," he said feelingly; "and I wonder what you'll say when you hear that Hazel Harlow played me a much dirtier trick than that. I knew her in the old days when she was only a simply country farmer's daughter. I was Squire of the village in which he lived. Well, I fell in love with her, and as an earnest of my affections offered to marry her at any time she liked. The father was pleased, and she also consented to become my wife. (What a wilful prevarication of the truth this statement was those who have followed the fortunes of Hazel Harlow will readily admit.) Well, the wedding day was fixed and then she gave me the slip, ran away to London, and wormed herself into the *Good Samaritan* Company. And there the story, so far as the similitude between your experience and mine ceases; but unfortunately I am still madly in love with Hazel Harlow. Yes, I'll admit it, and I have sworn that I'll make her my wife by fair means or by foul."

Caldecott ceased speaking.

Trevannion looked at him curiously, surprised at the sudden turn in events that had proved Caldecott to be also bound up in the life of Hazel Harlow.

"Well, it strikes me," said the actor, after a few moment's pause, "that we might work together in this. I shouldn't at all mind doing you a good turn, and if I could do anything to make Hazel Harlow your wife, and at the same time pay off old scores without actually running any risk myself, I'm perfectly willing to help you, though as to honestly wishing you joy of Miss Hazel—well, I can't do that, and, indeed, I am sorry for the man who ever becomes the husband of such an iceberg."

"Work together," cried Caldecott hoarsely. "Why, I should think we could. I've been waiting for a chance like this for weeks. I'll own to you that I have not been idle ever since Hazel joined the Company, but somehow Fate has always stepped in and snatched her out of my grasp just as success has seemed assured. And another thing. I don't suppose you're particularly flush, if I may ask you the question without offence; and as I've got more money than I know what to do with, well——"

He broke off and looked significantly into Trevannion's face.

The actor coloured and gave vent to a nervous laugh.

"You've hit the nail on the head there," he said; "it was the Turf proved my undoing. There was a time when a fiver was what five bob is to me now, and since I have become an actor I have lost my pride. There is no room for such a commodity in our profession."

"Very well, then," continued the other, "that is settled. I'm perfectly willing to give you five hundred pounds on the day that sees Hazel Harlow Mrs. Horace Caldecott."

"Well, that's all very nice," put in Trevannion; "but surely you're getting on a bit fast. I always thought that one had to catch one's hare before one could cook it. You seem anxious to do the latter process first."

"But I have a plan," answered Caldecott quickly. "The only thing is there's not too much time to carry it out. You are due out of Manchester to-morrow—Sunday morning, I believe. Well, to-day is Saturday, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered the other. "What then?"

"Then there is nothing more but for me to jump straight away into telling you my idea of how we are going to get hold of Miss Hazel Harlow. I have been lying low in Manchester all the week, and I have not been idle. The train is all ready laid, it only wants firing. And you are the man who is going to do that for me."

"Oh, that sounds all right, and what are *you* going to do?"

Caldecott looked at his watch.

"As soon as I have laid the details of the scheme before you," he said, "I shall rush off to the station, jump into a train, and soon be speeding away as fast as the locomotive can drag me."

Trevannion looked mystified.

"That sounds a very nice programme, so far as you are concerned," he said with a forced laugh; "but I don't quite see where I come in. Am I to play the part of professional kidnapper all on my own hook while you take a journey to Paris? If so, I think I'll cry off—five hundred pounds or no five hundred pounds."

"Not so fast, not so fast," said the other impatiently. "We won't waste any more time. I'll tell you in as few words as possible the plan that I had sketched out before I met you, but that had seemed doomed to failure owing to the fact of having no ally. So please give me your very best attention."

And without more ado he plunged into the recital of the plot that had for its aim the downfall of the unsuspicious Hazel.

CHAPTER II.

It was Sunday morning, and a cold, dismal morning enough, as is consistent with late autumn and smoky Manchester.

The train that was to carry the *Good Samaritan* Company to Nottingham to inaugurate another week of the provincial tour was due to leave the great manufacturing city at about eleven o'clock. It was half-past eight, and Hazel and Jenny were sitting at breakfast somewhat drearily waiting for the time when they would have to set out for the station.

"What a blessing it is to have Mr. Monteith back with us once again," said Jenny. "Mr. Trevannion made a good enough substitute so far as the acting went, and yet he is nothing like Eric Monteith in private life."

"No, indeed," answered Hazel warmly. "I have come to look upon Mr. Monteith as my guardian angel. I like Mr. Trevannion well enough, but I should have liked him better if he hadn't tried to make love to me."

"I still live in hopes of seeing you Mrs. Monteith," said Jenny smilingly. "I can't think why you don't become engaged to him, Hazel. It isn't fair on the rest of us. Why, I'm not the only girl in the company who would give a good deal to be able to become Mrs. Eric."

Hazel did not answer for a few minutes.

"I don't know what is wrong with me," she said slowly, at last. "I'm awfully fond of Mr. Monteith, and sometimes I think that I really am in love with him, and just as I say to myself that I really will listen to his suit, I begin to have doubts again. I wonder if there is something wrong with my compostiiton. Or whether it is that I am so anxious to become a great actress that I haven't time to think about anything else?"

"I'll tell you what I think," answered Jenny slily; "I think you're a bold, bad girl. You like to have as many strings to your bow as you can, and all the time you are madly in love with Master Eric."

At that moment there came a knock at the door, and their landlady entered, with the announcement that a Mr. Trevannion was outside, and would like a word with the two young ladies on a matter of importance. The next moment Trevannion came into the room, looking strangely heated and flustered, as though he had been brought thither in great haste.

"I am so sorry to interrupt you, ladies," he began quickly, "but I have been rushing round for Venables collecting the company. Venables has made a mistake about the train. It is earlier than he thought, and leaves in a few minutes. I've got a cab outside, and if you can come with me, we shall be just in time to catch it. And I, for one, shan't be sorry to get out of smoky Manchester. Monteith and Venables are rushing off collecting the other people."

For a moment a slight pang of disappointment went through Hazel's heart. Why had not Eric been deputed to apprise them of the fact of the mistake? But she said nothing of this, neither did any suspicion cross her or Jenny's mind at the somewhat unexpected intelligence. It was just the sort of thing that Venables would have done. He was always making plans, only to alter them at the last moment, and there was nothing in Trevannion's manner to suggest anything irregular. Indeed, he seemed genuinely anxious to help the ladies to make their final preparations and catch the train.

"We shall have to get in where we can," he said; "it's a fast train, and only stops once before reaching Nottingham. If we can't get into the carriage with the others we shall have time to change there. As it is, I am afraid we shall run it rather fine."

There was no time given to Jenny or Hazel to think of anything save the importance of getting away from the lodgings. Neither of them, however, connected Trevannion with anything that might have spelt disaster to either of them. He had never betrayed to Hazel how great the revulsion in his feelings as regards herself was since the day when she had so firmly declined to consider his amatory addresses. In a few minutes the two girls were ready, and now only anxious to be off.

"The sooner we go the sooner we shall be in Nottingham," said Trevannion, "and it's always nice to get to a place early—it gives one more time to look about and find decent diggings."

It was about as disagreeable a morning as could be well imagined. A raw, damp fog hung over the grimy streets. As they rattled along in the vehicle towards the station, Trevannion did not allow his companions much time for thinking over the situation in which they found themselves, but kept up a continuous flow of conversation in order to lull any transient suspicions to rest.

"It's just like Venables," he said, "to make a mistake like that about the train, and it won't be our fault if we miss it. If we do we shall land in Nottingham goodness knows when. Venables said particularly we were to jump in wherever we could, no matter if we saw him on the platform or not. I got your tickets so you needn't bother about that. I daresay when we do turn up at Nottingham it will be to find that half the company has been left behind. I left Venables and Monteith ramping round like a couple of crazy tigers."

In this strain he went on until the station was reached, and, jumping out of the cab, he hurried into the crowded station with the two girls at his heels, now thoroughly infected by his feverish haste.

Trevannion had played his cards well. He knew how nervous and excitable women would be when worked up to such a pitch of hurry, and if only he could keep Hazel and Jenny on the move he felt assured that there could be little obstacle in the way of the success of the scheme concocted by Caldecott.

The train was drawn up on the platform. In the gloom it was impossible to see its whole length.

"Come on!" yelled Trevannion, and just as the guard blew his whistle he tore open the door of a first-class carriage and bundled the two girls almost unceremoniously inside the compartment.

"I think I saw Venables," he said mendaciously, "waving like a man possessed. By Jove, that was a narrow shave," he chuckled to himself. "I wouldn't mind betting that half the company is left behind."

The train moved out of the station, and the two girls began to recover their breath slowly. Then Trevannion produced an elegant little box from his pocket.

"I have some bon-bons here," he said airily, "that I hope will compensate for my having hurried you over your breakfast." And he opened the lid to display a tempting array of sweetmeats such as are dear to every feminine heart. In the centre of the box were two bon-bons of exceptionally alluring appearance—delicate little pink and white confections that looked as though they would melt away to nothing within the mouth. As was natural, both Jenny's and Hazel's eyes turned to the two tempting sweets. They each took one with a laugh and popped them into their mouths. Trevannion helped himself to a less seductive-looking chocolate.

But the sweets did not taste so nice as they looked. There was a sickly sort of hot sweetness about them that struck the two girls simultaneously as being particularly unpleasant. Involuntarily both made wry faces.

"Weren't the sweets nice?" asked Trevannion solicitously, "you must try another. Those elegant looking morsels are often deceptive. They are only got up for show, I believe."

Hazel tried to answer, but an indescribable languor had crept over her, a feeling by no means unpleasant, and yet one that rendered her incapable of speech or action. She looked listlessly across at Jenny, who, strangely enough, seemed equally listless and averse to action. Another moment and Hazel's eyelids drooped; the next moment she leant back as though suddenly lost in a slumber of the deepest kind. It was the same with Jenny. She, too, seemed to be in the arms of Morpheus.

Trevannion sat like a statue for a few seconds, his eyes turning from one to the other of the two girls. Great beads of sweat formed upon his forehead. He was deadly pale. Then he cautiously rose to his feet and took hold of Hazel's hand; he lifted it; it was as heavy as lead; neither did the girl show any sign of movement.

"Thank goodness," he muttered, "the opiate has worked. He's a smart man, is Caldecott. I wonder where he got those sweets from and what the drug inside them was. He assured me that it would do them no permanent harm. By Jove, how soundly they sleep."

Half-an-hour passed away—half-an-hour fraught with a hundred anxious forebodings for Lucius Trevannion.

Supposing that the dose had been miscalculated,

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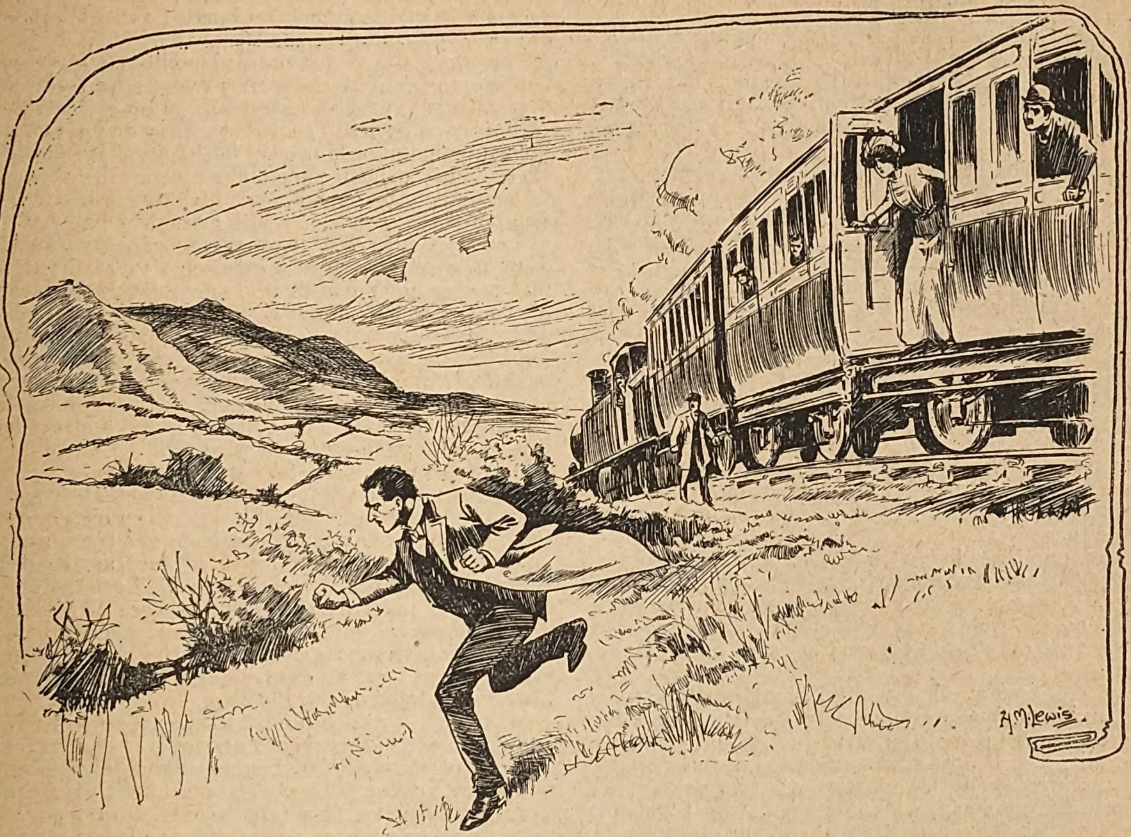


"Pursue him!" she screamed. "Pursue him! He's a murderer."

and that the two girls died. He would be a murderer then. He shook with fear as though he had a palsy. The train drawing up in a station brought him to himself again. He arranged the two helpless figures in opposite corners, as though each were asleep, and thrust his head out of the window. The station was Marple. There were not many people on the platform, and it was with a decided feeling of relief that Trevannion saw Caldecott's figure walking down the platform eagerly looking out for his confederate, as had been arranged between them. At sight of Trevannion, Caldecott hurried forward and leapt inside the compartment. In a few moments the train moved away out of the station.

Caldecott's eyes were fixed gloatingly on the two unconscious figures, the victims of his villainy.

"Then it's all gone off well," he said, speaking in a half whisper as though in fear lest the two unconscious figures could hear what he was saying, though there was really but little cause for apprehension of such a contingency. It was his guilty conscience that prompted this needless caution.

"Yes," answered the other, and proceeded to detail in full how easily his work had been accomplished.

Caldecott looked at his watch.

"When we get to Hathersage," he said, "I shall get out, as arranged, with Miss Harlow. I suppose you have the tickets as arranged."

"Yes," answered Trevannion, and felt in his pocket for the ticket, but it was not there. He felt through every pocket in turn without success.

"Confound it!" he said, "I've lost the blessed thing; and, what's worse, I've lost my own too. You know I was going to get out at Eccleshall and leave Miss Lovelace here with a ticket for Sheffield in her pocket. She's sure to be found by someone, and she won't in the least know where you and Miss Harlow are, and when she is found it will surely be too late for her to do anything."

"Yes, that's all right," answered the other roughly. "You can do what you like, but it's a nuisance your having lost those tickets. I wonder what on earth you can have done with them?"

"Well, there's no good crying over spilt milk," answered Trevannion; "and you must own I've risked a good deal for you?"

"Not entirely for me," was the somewhat sneering rejoinder. "You forget that you had a score against the fair Hazel, to say nothing of the fact that there's five hundred pounds waiting for you."

"Well, anyhow, we both of us have to see the business out," he said; "so I don't see what object can be gained by our trying to cut one another's throats."

CHAPTER III.

It was half-past ten. Eric Monteith, absolutely oblivious, of course, to what had happened to Hazel, set forth from his lodgings with the intention of escorting Hazel and Jenny to the station. He arrived at their rooms, and was electrified to hear that they had already gone.

"Gone!" he echoed, in amazement. "Where have they gone to?"

"A Mr. Trevannion—he called for them," the landlady answered. "It must have been some time after eight o'clock, and took them away to the station in a cab. They seemed in a mortal hurry."

For a few moments Eric could hardly believe the evidence of his ears own.

"Are you quite sure," he said to the woman, "that they have gone?"

"Quite," came the answer. "And there is rather a funny thing in connection with their going. I found these railway tickets lying at the foot of the stairs some time after they had left. I suppose they must have dropped them." And she handed the three diminutive pieces of pasteboard to the dumfounded Monteith.

They were three first-class tickets, but the astonishing part about them was that they were all for separate places. One was for Hathersage, another was for Eccleshall, and the third was for Sheffield. Here was a discovery that only made the matter more complex than ever.

But one fact stood out with startling distinctness. Trevannion had called for the two actresses and had induced them to drive away to the station with him pell-mell. The landlady was unable to say more. She had not overheard the conversation that had passed between Trevannion and his two dupes. She could only reiterate that they had all three driven off together, and that her bill was settled—sure index of the fact that her lodgers had taken their final departure.

Eric was like a man possessed. He dashed off to the station, where he found Venables and the rest of the company awaiting him, and at once told the manager what he knew.

Venables was no less mystified than he was.

"What on earth is the meaning of it?" he said; "and what on earth are we to do?"

"I know what I am going to do," said Eric. "I'm going to follow up the only clue we've got. I'm going to charter a special and I'm going to visit Hathersage, Eccleshall, and Sheffield in turn. I take it that those three tickets must have some connection with the business, though why, in the name of goodness, there should be three different destinations is more than I can fathom. It looks uncommonly like foul play."

"But what on earth should Trevannion want to decoy the girls away for," put in Venables; "and supposing that he dropped the tickets where the landlady found them merely as a blind. What will you do then?"

Eric shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know," he said, "but I am going to follow up the clue I have got. My advice is that you go on to Nottingham with the rest of the crowd and leave me here. Don't say a word of what has happened; explain the absence of Trevannion and the girls any way you can. I'm going to institute inquiries at the station here, and then I'm going to get that special train, no matter what it costs me."

And without more ado he hurried away on his self imposed task.

Inquiries at the station revealed but little. Manchester Central is a big station, and there were crowds of people always there that made the identification of individuals extremely difficult. The tickets, Eric discovered, had been bought at a railway office in the city. He chartered his special train with some difficulty, and then prepared to follow out the next part of his programme. Never had he felt the power of wealth more than he did at that moment. If he had been merely a poor, needy travelling actor it would have been impossible to have followed up the clues, that had been so miraculously delivered to him, with any speed. He would have had to toil laboriously by a slow train to Hathersage, to have instituted inquiries there, and then, if necessary, to have proceeded on towards Sheffield. Whereas, within an hour or so of his discovery he was seated in the saloon carriage of a train composed only of two coaches and the locomotive. In an hour, if all went well, he would be at Hathersage, and on the first stage of his quest.

The journey to the little town was perfectly uneventful. To Eric it seemed interminable, and when once or twice the train had to slow up in obedience to adverse signals, he could hardly contain his annoyance at the delay. But at last Hatherage was reached. He leapt out of the train and asked for the station-master. With the deference due to a gentleman who could afford to travel by a special, he was conducted to the station-master's private room, and at once plunged into the business that had brought him to the place.

"Can you tell me," he said, "whether a gentleman and two ladies have, by any chance, arrived here this morning? One of the ladies was an exceptionally tall and beautiful woman with red-gold hair. The other lady was a slight, dark person. The man who should have been with them would be about my own height and clean-shaven."

The station-master listened attentively.

"About the only passengers to Hathersage this morning, sir," he answered slowly, "were a gentleman and a lady—his wife—who had been taken with a sudden fainting fit in the train, and whom he had conveyed to the house of a doctor in the place. The lady was heavily veiled, but she was tall—I could see that, though she was carried out, and her hair was just the colour you describe."

An exclamation fell from Eric's lips.

"And the man," he said; "what was he like?"

"A tall, dark, handsome, gentleman, with a black moustache," came the answer.

"And he drove her away at once?"

"Yes, sir; he sent for a vehicle from the inn and drove her away through the village."

Eric's thoughts were racing along at lightning speed.

"Do you think I can find that flyman?" he asked quickly.

"Oh, yes, sir," came the somewhat mystified answer. "He's sure to be at the inn now."

"Then look here," went on Monteith rapidly, "I want you to do me a very great favour. I want you not to mention to a soul what I have asked you. In fact, keep your mouth shut entirely. I want this special train to be kept here, and I am going off to find this gentleman and his wife. Believe me, it is a matter of the utmost importance that secrecy should be kept. If I am successful in a certain business that has brought me here to-day, I shall not be ungrateful to you for your part in it."

The station-master readily gave his word, and Eric

Read "Dead to the World."

hurried away hot upon the scent. He had never expected so soon to be put upon the trail and with such little difficulty, yet there was a terrible feeling in his heart as he hurried away towards the village inn, for he knew by the station-master's meagre description who was the only man it could be who had carried off his helpless "wife." It must be Horace Caldecott, and his poor helpless "wife" must be Hazel herself.

So this was the explanation of Trevannion's action. What could have happened to Jenny? A wild wave of fury surged up in Eric's heart.

"I won't spare him this time," he muttered; "and if I can lay hands upon him it will be for good and all."

Inquiry at the inn was soon productive of the driver who had been coachman to the mysterious gentleman and his ailing wife that morning. Half-a crown had the effect of loosening his tongue. His story was brief and very much to the point. He had driven the pair to a house two miles or so beyond the village, occupied by a certain doctor named Ganderton. The lady had still been unconsicous, and they had had to carry her inside the house. That was all the man knew, but it was enough, and Eric did not wait for more. His next move was to rush off to the local police-station, there to enlist the sympathy and co-operation of the village constabulary. He had a brief but pithy conversation with the superintendent. Here, again, the power of gold was able to achieve what less poignant methods would have taken much longer to obtain. So ably did Monteith put forward the pressing claim that made aid necessary, that ere long he was in the satisfactory position of leaving the police-station in company with a pair of stalwart constables in plain clothes. He was going to leave nothing to chance now.

CHAPTER IV.

Although it was a source of annoyance to Lucius Trevannion that he had lost the three tickets in some mysterious way, yet he soon forgot the fact in the stress of the exciting episodes that culminated with the disappearance of Caldecott and Hazel at Hathersage. Had Trevannion paid for the tickets himself he would doubtless have felt their loss more poignantly; but Caldecott had supplied him with money, and hence he had no apprehension on that score. The plan that had been arranged between the two rascals was that Trevannion was to alight at Eccleshall, and to make the best of his way to London and to Caldecott's private house, leaving Jenny in the hands of Providence. By the time she would have recovered her senses and have extricated herself from the position in which she would find herself, Caldecott felt convinced that both he and Hazel would be out of reach; and, besides, the girl would never suspect that Hazel had been got out of the train at Hathersage. She would probably think she had come to Sheffield and been spirited away by Trevannion, as she could not know that Caldecott had had any part in the black affair.

So reasoned the astute Caldecott, and up to a certain point his reasonings were justifiable enough, but as the old saying has it, "The best laid plans of men and mice gang oft agley," and already an event had happened. The providential discovery of the railway tickets by Eric had been the direct means of putting him on the track of the abductor.

Just as the train was steaming out of Hathersage an elderly gentleman jumped into the carriage in which were Trevannion and the still unconscious Jenny. The girl lay in the corner as Trevannion had so artfully placed her, with the appearance of one in a deep sleep, an unnatural pallor overspreading her countenance. Annoyed as he was at this intrusion, Trevannion knew that his only course was to conceal any trace of chagrin that he might feel. It was not far to Eccleshall, and when he reached that station he could leap out of the train and get away before attention had been directed to the unconscious girl.

The gentleman looked somewhat curiously at the recumbent figure.

"The young lady looks tired," he said to the actor, pleasantly enough.

Trevannion threw a careless glance in Jenny's direction.

"Yes," he answered shortly; "she's been sleeping like that for a long time."

"Oh, then she's not travelling with you?" asked the other, in some surprise.

"Certainly not," came the prompt answer. And Trevannion, having made up his mind to his course of action, plunged deeper into the mire of falsehood. "I don't know her from Adam."

"I wonder if we ought to wake her up?" went on the officious stranger; "for all we know she may have overshot her station."

A growing alarm seized hold of Trevannion, a feeling that was intensified by the fact that the train had suddenly slowed up in response to an adverse signal. The only course for him to pursue was to temporise, for if the stranger should attempt to arouse the unconscious girl the results might prove exceedingly awkward, not to say precarious, for the success of the dark business.

"I wouldn't wake her," answered the actor quickly, trying to speak carelessly. "I expect she is bound for Sheffield, and will wake up like clockwork when she reaches her destination. Women are rather like that."

But the other did not seem at all satisfied.

"She doesn't look to me as if she were sleeping naturally," he pursued, in a puzzled voice.

At that moment the whistle of the engine gave vent to a piercing scream, and with sundry bumps and jolts the train started on its way again—a fact that caused Trevannion to breathe a heartfelt sigh of relief. But his satisfaction was short-lived. The jolting motion caused the inert body of the unconscious Jenny to lurch forward, and the next moment she would have fallen on the floor of the carriage had not the stranger sprung forward and caught her in his arms.

Now, had she been sleeping naturally, it stood to reason that she would have been awakened by the sudden shock, but as she still hung limp and resistless in his arms, the gentleman's suspicions were at once aroused as to her grave condition.

"She's not asleep," he said hoarsely, "she's unconscious!" And he laid her down carefully upon the cushions. Now the drug that had been administered to Jenny has different effects upon various constitutions. There are some upon whom it acts much more drastically than others, while some again are enabled to shake it off, after a comparatively short time. Now it so happened that the sudden shock on Jenny's deadened senses caused by the jolt that had displaced her had exactly the right effect in helping her to more quickly throw off the effects of the insidious drug. Added to this the elderly gentleman, with the best intentions in the world, had laid the girl somewhat roughly upon the seat, being unable to support the dead weight in his arms.

Lucius Trevannion sprang forward with a hoarse cry, and to his horrow saw the girl's eyelids slowly flutter back and reveal her eyes, still stupid from the effects of the narcotic. The stranger looked at him in amazement, and reading the terror in his face, raised the girl again to a sitting position, sitting beside her at a loss to know how to proceed further.

A shuddering cry came from Jenny's lips.

"Where am I?" she said weakly. "Are you there, Hazel?" Then her eyes sought Trevannion's guilt-stained countenance, and like a flash consciousness of what had happened came back to her.

"Ah, I remember," she said, her faculties suddenly leaping up to renewed alertness. "We got into the train with you, Mr. Trevannion, at Manchester. Hazel was with me then. Where is she now? What have you done with her? What has happened?" The questions came with frenzied quickness.

The train was moving along pretty swiftly now, and Trevannion realised from the pace they were going that some time must elapse before they reached a station. A mad terror seized hold of him. The stranger's eyes were fixed on his face with resentful curiosity. With a quick motion he turned towards the door of the carriage and tugged at the handle. But the other was too quick for him. Reading his intentions, he flung himself upon the actor, who fell to the ground, striking his head against the wood of the door as he did so, with the effect that, for the time being, consciousness was struck out of him.

Seeing that he was *hors de combat* for the present, the stranger turned to Jenny, who, faint and ill though she felt, was struggling hard to recall all that had happened since she had entered the train at Manchester.

"Quick!" cried the stranger. "Tell me all you can about this business."

"I am a member of a theatrical company," began Jenny, now almost on the verge of hysteria, "and we were due to-day to travel from Manchester to Nottingham. This morning this man, who is also a member of the company to which I belong, came to the rooms shared by a fellow-actress and myself, she being the beautiful Miss Hazel Harlow, of whom you have perhaps heard, and told us that our manager had mistaken the train, and that it was to start earlier than we had anticipated. He told us that his instructions were to drive us to the station and get us aboard the necessary train, irrespective of the other members of the company. Well, there seemed no reason to doubt his word. Before we had had time to realise what had happened, or to consider whether there was any irregularity in his conduct, we were in the train with him. He then produced a box of sweets and gave us each one. Those sweets were, I believe, drugged. Anyhow, I remember nothing more from the moment of eating one; and where my companion is I can't imagine. Oh, Hazel! Hazel!" she wailed, now breaking down completely and bursting into a flood of hysterical tears. "Where are you? Where are you?"

At that moment Trevannion began to show signs of returning consciousness. The blow on his head had been less violent than the stranger had imagined. Leaping to his feet, the actor flung himself upon the other man with the cry of a wild beast.

"I'll teach you to come interfering in affairs that don't concern you," he howled, and flung the other heavily down upon the floor of the compartment. The fracas had the effect of reawakening in Jenny the alertness of her deadened senses. Like a flash she sprung to the communication cord, and tugged at it with all her strength.

Struggle as he would, the old gentleman found himself no match for his younger assailant, reduced almost to a maniac by his mingled fear and rage. A terrible struggle ensued, but finally Trevannion got his knees in his opponent's chest, and, gripping him by the throat, set to work to try and throttle him into subjection.

The helpless man felt his senses leaving him. He gave a despairing gurgle, and Trevannion, springing to his feet, dashed at the door of the compartment just as the train began to slacken in response to Jenny's appeal.

Heads were thrust excitedly out of carriage windows. Already the guard had hurried out of his compartment and was walking along the train eagerly inquiring who had pulled the communication cord. Suddenly the door of the compartment, in which were the actors in the affray, was flung violently open and Trevannion, leaping out, fled away down the embankment that fringed the line like a hare. Then Jenny's pale face appeared at the open door.

"Pursue him!" she screamed. "Pursue him! He's a murderer!" for she really thought that Trevannion had succeeded in killing her benefactor. In a moment the guard had given chase, followed by two or three passengers, who joined the pursuit with all their sporting instincts aroused. The embankment was fringed with a low ledge at its base; over this Trevannion leapt, oblivious of the fact that along the top of the thorns ran a slender thread of barbed wire to keep people from straying on to the line. His foot caught in this and he fell heavily, and with such force as to knock the sense out of him for a few moments for the second time. This accident proved his undoing. A way was forced through the hedge and he was speedily captured and carried back to the guard's van.

And now that he saw the game was up, he relapsed into sullen silence that passed for indifference as regarded his fate, though in reality his whole being was consumed with fear.

A medical man, a passenger in the train, speedily ascertained that the elderly gentleman's injuries were not serious. His nerves had suffered more than his body.

In a few more moments the train was steaming into Eccleshall. The stranger's course was then plain sailing. He summoned a policeman and placed Trevannion in his charge for assault, at the same time offering to do all that he could to see Jenny out of her difficulties. He was, it appeared, a wealthy Sheffield merchant, and his word had weight. Trevannion was placed in custody and telegrams were sent all down the line to inquire if anything had been heard of Hazel Harlow, but, strangely enough, without success. A telegram was dispatched to Venables at Nottingham, and it was determined, on receipt of his answer corroborating the story that Jenny told, to send the actress thither, a pass being provided for her at the instigation of those in authority at Sheffield.

CHAPTER V.

MONDAY morning saw Venables, Jenny, and the other members of the company at the theatre at Nottingham, all in a high state of excitement, awaiting the arrival of Eric Monteith and Hazel Harlow—for Venables had received a telegram from Monteith to the effect that he

Read "Dead to the World."

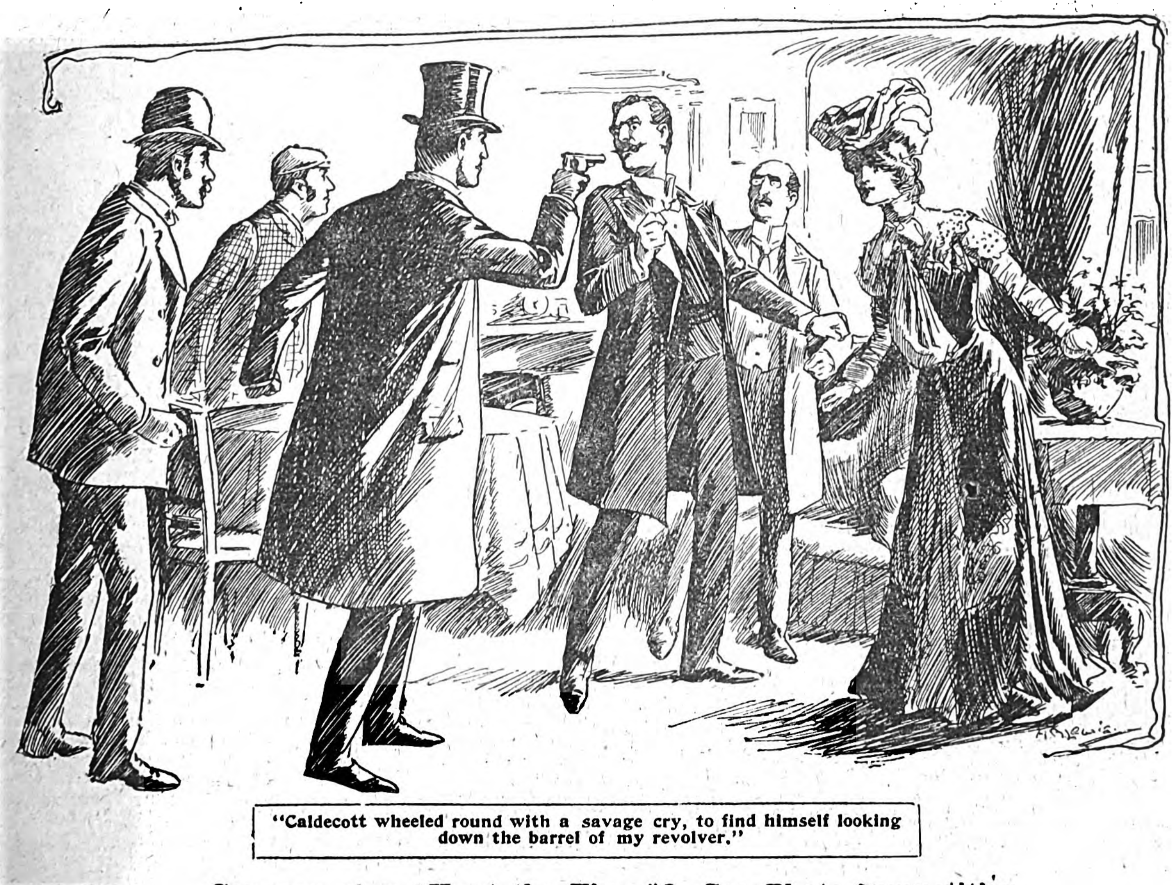
would arrive at Nottingham as early as might be on Monday morning in company with Hazel. At ten o'clock a cab drew up outside the theatre, and from it emerged Eric and his charge safe and sound, though the latter showed on her face, as can be well imagined, traces of the terrible ordeal through which she had passed.

Eric's story was as follows: After telling them how he had arrived at Hathersage, and how he had been so providentially put on the track of the abductor, he went on:—

"We proceeded at once, I and the two constables, to the house to which I had good reason to believe Hazel had been carried. We found it to be a small, neat villa, set back in a garden opening on to the road by means of white entrance gates. We proceeded straight to the house where all seemed quiet. A manservant answered the bell, and I whipped out my revolver and told him that if he uttered a sound I would blow his brains out. Needless to say, he was paralysed with fear, and offered no resistance when one of the policemen slipped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists and trussed him up in a little room opening out of the hall. The village constable did his work most expeditiously and quietly, and apparently attracted no attention. Our next action was to reconnoitre and find out if we could whether there was anyone else in the house. The rooms on the ground-floor seemed deserted so we crept noiselessly up the stairs to be attracted by the sound of voices in a room at the back of the house. There we paused, and you can imagine my feelings when I heard the voice of the villain Caldecott speaking as follows:

"'I have the special marriage license here, and I am not going to let any chances slip this time. You will agree to marry me at once, or——' I didn't wait for more. We flung open the door and found ourselves in the presence of three people. One was Caldecott, the other a stranger, who, it turned out, was a rascally little doctor who lived in the house, the third was Hazel. Caldecott wheeled round with a savage cry, to find himself looking down the barrel of my revolver. The policemen sprang on the doctor and soon secured him. It was not such an easy job to get Caldecott trussed up. He struggled like a madman, and it was as much as the three of us could do to secure him. But we managed it at last, and he is at present lying in the cells at Hathersage waiting till we can have him brought up in court and publicly arraigned, and I think we've got enough against him now to insure a pretty long term of imprisonment, though if he were to have his deserts he ought to be strung up without further ado."

The feeling of relief that at last the scoundrel who had been the means of bringing so much misery upon Hazel and so many others was really in durance vile can be well-imagined. Terrible though Hazel's last experience had been, she still, in common with Eric and Jenny,



"Caldecott wheeled round with a savage cry, to find himself looking down the barrel of my revolver."

Can you play "Hunt the Fiver"? See Photo Competition.

felt that the episode had been almost worth enduring with such an end in view. As Eric had said, enough proof was forthcoming to convict Caldecott a dozen times over. Now that he was really a prisoner he could be confronted with his crimes, and refutation would be impossible. More than that, Trevannion had turned King's evidence. With the faint hope of saving his own skin the craven wretch had confessed at Sheffield to complicity in the plot to abduct Hazel.

And yet, incredible though it may seem, Caldecott's time was not yet. Later on that same day Eric received a telegram from Hathersage from the police-superintendent there. This is what it said:

"Prisoner escaped this morning, no trace of his whereabouts."

Here was a blow indeed. An investigation of the dread message only made the news more black. It appeared that Caldecott had been conveyed away to the cells and safely locked up. He had been put in charge of a policeman, who had been enjoined on no account to have any further intercourse with him than was absolutely necessary. The true facts of the case, however, only came out later on, and were as follows:

The constable had been found lying apparently overpowered on the floor of the cell; the door was open, and the bird was flown. The constable's story was that he had been overpowered by a sudden attack from the prisoner. Being Sunday, the police-superintendent was away, and a subordinate was the only man in charge. This story seemed improbable on the face of it, and after strict investigation it turned out that the man had been bribed by a huge sum of money to submit to allowing it to appear that he had been assaulted, whereas in reality he had aided and abetted his prisoner to escape.

Needless to say, the man was dismissed from the police force with ignominy, though in view of what had happened this was but a poor substitute for the fact that Caldecott was again at liberty.

All that could be done Eric, aided by the police, did. Huge rewards were offered for the discovery of the escaped prisoner, and placards were circulated bearing his description. Spies were put upon his London house, and everything that could be done was, as has been said, set on foot. Yet the days passed by and nothing was heard of the ubiquitous scoundrel. The only poor consolation there was lay in the fact that from that time forward Horace Caldecott went about with a price upon his head. He could not dare to show himself among honest men, but must go about carefully like the hunted criminal that he was.

Trevannion was brought up and condemned to a period of imprisonment for his share in the matter, though, as was pointed out, he was in reality only a scapegoat for the greater villain who had escaped.

As for Caldecott, it really seemed as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up, but in his heart Eric knew that he had not yet heard of the last of the man who had caused him so much misery. He knew that Caldecott would bide his time, that he would never forget and never forgive Monteith for having run him to earth, and for having so nearly been the means of his absolute ruin.

And there was another fact in the case. Caldecott, criminal though he was, was at least sincere in the fact that he was ready to go to any extreme to win Hazel Harlow. He must know now that he had forfeited for ever—even had he not done so before—all hopes of claiming the girl as his wife; yet, if he had gone through so much, had resorted to such desperate expedients to gain her by fair means or by foul, would he pause even now, lost as he was to any hopes of calling Hazel his? And if he could not have her love, would he not lie in his place of concealment like a wounded snake waiting until he might raise himself and strike his poisoned fangs at the heart of her for whom he had bartered his very existence? Would he not also make one desperate effort to put Eric Monteith for ever out of his path? He had nothing to hope for now, and would surely be ready to go to any extreme to gain his one last desire—the desire for revenge.

Eric knew this well enough. He knew that from henceforward he would have to be continually on his guard; that there would be no more open warfare between himself and Caldecott. He knew that from henceforward he would have to go through life like a man who never knows from what quarter his enemy will strike at his existence. It was not fear he felt at the prospect, but a mad rage against the inscrutable workings of Providence. Why had Fate delivered the man into his hands only to snatch him away again just when victory seemed assured?

But he said nothing of this to Hazel. He would at least show her that he thought the danger was past, and one thing at least was certain. It would indeed have to be a desperate game for Caldecott; the sword of Damocles hung over his head ready to descend at the slightest provocation.

The week in Nottingham passed off uneventfully enough, a fact of unspeakable blessing to Hazel and Jenny The *Good Samaritan* Company played to crowded houses every night, and the verdict that had been passed by other towns upon Hazel's abilities as an actress was fully indorsed by Nottingham.

The *Good Samaritan* Company were due at Edinburgh the week after their stay at Nottingham. Here Hazel was suddenly to be confronted with a terrible charge, that of theft—a charge substantiated by terribly conclusive circumstantial evidence. To see how the charge was pressed home upon her, and what the upshot of the affair was, we must refer our readers to the thrilling instalment in next week's *Short Stories.*

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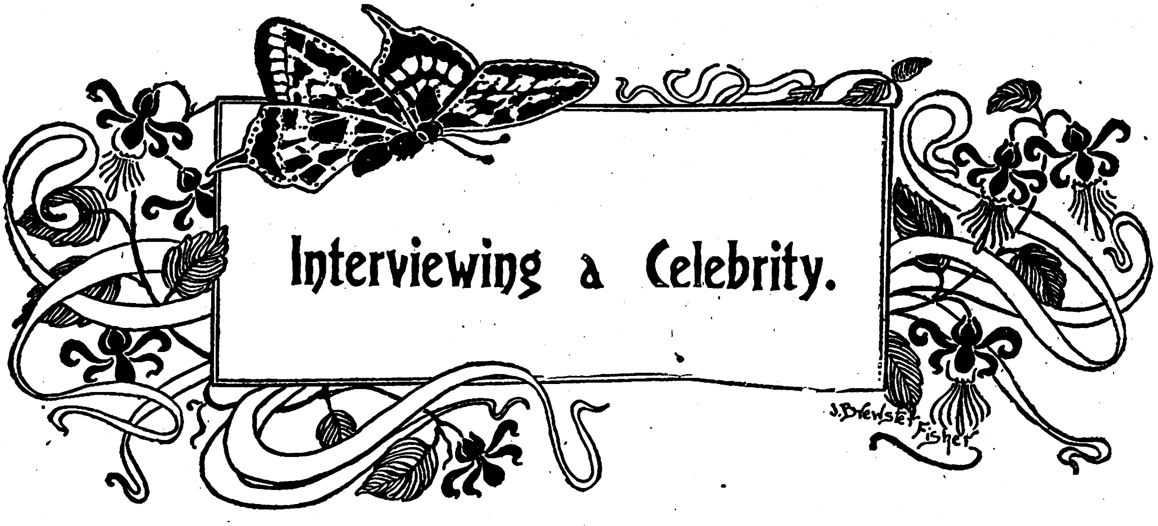

"THAT young and talented actor, Horace Davenport," as the dramatic critics kindly described him, was seated, with more regard to ease than elegance, before a cheerful fire in his comfortable chambers.

His dark, good-looking face wore that sad, hopeless look that a liver derangement or blighted love alone can bring, and his was not a case for medical advice.

A pile of newspapers and reviews lay beside him. He had looked them all through for the purpose of reading one particular item—the critique of a novel by a new writer. It was with feelings of joy that he found the reviews uniformly favourable.

His interest in the matter is easily explained. One short year ago he was the happy *fiancé* of the charming authoress. A lovers' quarrel, a few hasty words, and the ring was returned, but not the heart which had been given with it.

Both suffered, but both were proud, and neither would take the first step towards reconciliation. They had not met since the engagement was broken off, and now he found himself longing to hear her voice again—to clasp her hand once more.

Suddenly an idea took possession of his brain. For an hour he sat still, staring into the fire, but with a new light in his eyes. Finally he sprang up.

"I'll do it!" he muttered, and then, flourishing the poker, dealt a large, smouldering lump of coal a mighty blow, scattering it into numberless blazing fragments. But the above exclamation in no way referred to this performance.

A week later, Clarice Luxmore, the new writer in whom Horace Davenport was so interested, was seated in the drawing-room of her charming home in Surrey.

An open book lay before her, but she was not reading. She was thinking of her success, and wondering whether "he" knew of it, and, if so, how he received the news. How she longed to share her triumph with him! But he had not even sent her a word of congratulation, and how could she possibly make any advances.

Then she thought, with some trepidation, of the journalist to whom she had promised an interview on behalf of the *Golden Magazine*. What was he like? What would he want to know, and what could she tell him that would be of sufficient interest to publish in an important journal? Now that she momentarily expected his arrival, the ordeal, in anticipation, was alarming.

By-and-bye the sound of wheels was heard outside, and a minute later Mr. Carslake was announced.

She noticed, as she rose to greet him in her own sweet and graceful way, that he was a tall, fair man, with hair slightly grey at the temples, and a well-trimmed moustache.

He began by thanking her effusively, in a clear and rather high-pitched voice, for her kindness in acceding to his request for an interview.

She murmured some polite commonplace, and he noticed that she seemed to have grown paler since he had entered the room—the result of nervousness, no doubt.

"What do you want me to tell you?" she smiled.

"Everything," he replied, producing a formidable-looking note-book. "In the first place, I should like to see the room in which you write."

Miss Luxmore smilingly complied, and led the way to her pretty boudoir. Here they settled in comfortable chairs, and began to take the interview in earnest.

Mr. Carslake had all the qualities of a successful, up-to-date journalist. His inquisitiveness was phenomenal, but displayed with such remarkable tact that it was absolutely impossible to take offence, even at his boldest ventures in the art of polite cross-examination. Indeed, his method of extracting information deserved a better title than that ordinary and—to some ears—vulgar term, questioning.

Step by step he elicited his victim's whole history from the bald and toothless age onward. But after a time he approached a subject which even he, incredible as it may appear, introduced with slight, but decided, symptoms of embarrassment.

Meanwhile, the colour had returned to Miss Luxmore's cheeks, and her eyes sparkled. Evidently, she found the interview a far more agreeable experience than she had expected. In fact she seemed to be enjoying it, and had, hitherto, told him all he wished to know readily and frankly.

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But now Carslake's wonderful tact seemed to fail him, and the next question was put with alarming directness, though rather disjointedly.

"Is the report that you are about to marry your neighbour, Mr. Milward, correct, Miss Luxmore?"

All the dimples left her face as she replied coldly:

"No; it is utterly without foundation."

"Pardon me for having asked the question," he said. "Of course, I shall mention nothing in my article without your permission. Would you like to have the report contradicted?"

"It is scarcely worth the trouble," she replied indifferently. "I think you had better say nothing of my matrimonial intentions."

"Very well. But gossip is busy with your name, I assure you. Another rumour credits you with being engaged to an actor."

"That is equally false."

Her voice was colder than ever, but the colour in her face deepened.

"Will you excuse me for a moment?" she asked, suddenly rising. "I hear papa in the hall. He has come in."

She left the room, leaving the door slightly ajar.

Carslake heard a man's step, and then a subdued murmur of voices.

Presently she returned, followed by a fierce-looking little man, whom she introduced as her father.

"Pleased to meet you," cried Mr. Luxmore heartily. "You must stay and lunch with us."

"Thank you, I shall be delighted," replied Carslake.

"Have you finished putting my little girl through her paces?" asked Mr. Luxmore with a proud, fond look towards his daughter.

"Very nearly," replied Carslake. "Miss Luxmore is an excellent subject. I have interviewed several eminent people, but have never before found my task so agreeable. I have the greatest difficulty imaginable in getting sufficient information for an article from some of them."

"I can quite understand that," returned the gratified parent, smiling. "I'm very glad that I am not of sufficient importance to merit your professional attention."

At that moment a servant appeared with a message that Mr. Willis was in the drawing-room, and would like to see Miss Luxmore.

"Mr. Willis!" exclaimed Mr. Luxmore. "Show him up. The son of an old friend of mine," he explained to Carslake.

"Why, Dick, my boy, what lucky chance brings you down here?" he cried, grasping the hand of a fine, good-looking young fellow as the door opened again.

"My visit is to Clarice," the new-comer replied, disengaging his hand from Mr. Luxmore's grasp, and turning to greet Miss Luxmore. "I am commissioned by the editor of the *Golden Magazine* to interview her at an early opportunity."

"Ah, of course! You're in the scribbling line, too. But your colleague here has forestalled you."

"My colleague!" exclaimed Willis, looking sternly at Carslake. "This gentleman is not connected with our Magazine. I have not the pleasure of knowing him."

"What!" cried father and daughter in one voice.

"I repeat, I have not the pleasure of knowing him, and he is certainly not authorised to interview Miss Luxmore by our people."

Carslake was now looking anything but comfortable. In fact, it was very evident that, if the earth had suddenly opened and swallowed him, he would have regarded it as a personal favour.

"Then will you kindly explain this intrusion?" asked Mr. Luxmore, glaring at Carslake, and visibly bristling.

"I—er—I am extremely sorry to confess that I am not an accredited representative of the journal mentioned," Carslake acknowledged, painfully aware that Miss Luxmore was regarding him with unfavourable astonishment.

"Well!" demanded Mr. Luxmore, with strained calmness in his tones.

"I—I thought that if I could obtain an interview and write it up, the editor might accept it," he concluded lamely.

"But you used their official note-paper in making your application!"

"I got it through a friend at the office."

"Oh! you did, did you?" cried Mr. Luxmore, exploding with wrath. "And are you aware that your rascally conduct renders you liable to prosecution for entering this house under false pretences, you precious scoundrel?"

"I am not that, sir," returned Carslake with some spirit. "I admit that my action may appear dishonourable, but I am no scoundrel."

"*May* appear dishonourable!" echoed Mr. Luxmore. "By George!" he exclaimed violently, "I believe you are one of that gang of burglars that broke into my friend Saxby's house over at Crawford, the other night. No doubt you are reconnoitring to see whether it's worth while waiting on us on some future occasion. But you are trapped now, my friend. I'll send for a policeman."

"Oh, papa, you are making a charge against Mr. Carslake that he can easily refute, I am sure. Pray give him an opportunity of proving his respectability before resorting to such extreme measures," interrupted Miss Luxmore, whose sympathy seemed aroused by Carslake's evident consternation.

"My dear, kindly leave me to deal with this matter. You don't understand these people," said Mr. Luxmore testily. "Do respectable people act as he has?"

"If you will allow me to speak to you in private, Mr. Luxmore, I think I can satisfy your doubts on that score," said Carslake, still dejectedly.

To this Mr. Luxmore at first demurred, but, persuaded by his daughter, he at length grudgingly consented to the suspicious stranger's request.

He was leading the way to the library, Willis bringing up the rear, when Carslake suddenly paused.

"Will you take me to your dressing-room, Mr. Luxmore," he asked, "I can explain matters better there."

"My dressing-room!" gasped the old gentleman in amazement.

"Yes," replied Carslake quietly, "and I should like our interview to be a strictly private one. This gentleman," indicating Willis, "had better return to Miss Luxmore."

Willis glared at the speaker, whose cool impudence seemed literally to take his breath away.

"Hand him over to the police, and have done with him," he cried. "He's up to some trick."

"Pooh! I'm not afraid of him," said Mr. Luxmore, who evidently regarded this advice as a slur on his courage. "Come in here."

He opened a door as he spoke, and entered the room, followed by Carslake.

"You can go back to Clarice, Dick."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," cried Willis hotly. "If you are foolish enough to humour the impudent beggar by shutting me out, I shall, at least, remain within call; and I shall not hesitate to open the door at the first suspicious sound, I promise you."

He looked darkly at Carslake as he spoke.

"Have your own way, then," returned Mr. Luxmore, shutting the door on his young friend with unnecessary violence.

"And now what is the meaning of all this mystery?" he demanded, flinging himself into a chair and looking sternly at the culprit.

That worthy vouchsafed only a sigh in reply. He then silently divested himself of his coat, and busied himself for a few minutes at the washstand and dressing-table.

When he turned to face Mr. Luxmore once more, a transformation had taken place. Carslake the journalist had disappeared, and Horace Davenport the actor stood revealed.

The effect on Luxmore was remarkable, and, to Davenport, disconcerting. Flinging himself back in his chair, the old gentleman roared with laughter.

"Well, well!" he gasped, when he had regained sufficient breath to speak. "This is a surprise, Davenport. What on earth induced you to come here in that guise."

Davenport looked abashed.

"Mr. Luxmore," he said, "I will explain. You know in what relationship I formerly stood to your daughter. I have never ceased to regret that our engagement was broken, and I still love Clarice with all my heart. Not daring to call on her openly after what has passed between us, and yet longing to see her and speak to her once more, I took advantage of circumstances and professional arts. I have acted very foolishly. I sincerely apologise, and beg that you will now allow me to depart without disclosing my identity to anyone else."

"You and Clarice are a pair of stuck up young fools," cried Mr. Luxmore. "My silly little girl is breaking her heart for you, and you are doing the same for her, yet you are both too proud to acknowledge it—to each other at least. Dick!" he shouted. "Come here, lad. Clarice was right, by Jove!"

The door opened and Willis burst in.

"Mr. Davenport, I am delighted to meet you," he cried, wringing the actor's hand warmly. "You must forgive our little joke."

"Foiled with his own weapons! Beaten at his own game!" laughed Mr. Luxmore.

"I don't understand," said Davenport, in amazement. "Do you mean to say you penetrated my disguise?"

"Miss Luxmore did," smiled Willis, "past master as you are in the art of making-up."

"Dick came in with me," explained Mr. Luxmore. "Then Clarice rushed down to the hall, and told us you were upstairs masquerading as a journalist. She knows you are not connected with any Magazine—neither is Dick, by-the-way, but that is of no consequence. She quickly taught us the parts we were to play in the little comedy that followed, and—'pon my word—I consider our acting has been as good as some you'll see in your own theatre—though I say it myself."

Davenport was looking alarmed.

"You completely hoodwinked me at all events," he said.

"Now come along and congratulate the authoress and heroine of the piece," said Mr. Luxmore, taking Davenport's arm.

"Really, I——"

"Nonsense! I'll not hear a word. She's expecting you. Bring her down to lunch. Dick and I will go on. Don't keep us waiting too long."

Left to himself, Davenport boldly turned the handle of the door and entered. The next moment Clarice was in his arms.

"My clever darling!" he cried. "How did you find me out? I thought my disguise was complete."

"'Love is blind' is not true in every sense, dear," she replied softly. "Besides, you have forgotten to remove from your watch-guard that little golden heart I gave you long ago."

"Precious little trinket," he said, touching it reverently. "Fitting type of the heart of her who gave it. And so," he continued lightly, "not content with writing a successful novel, you must needs try your hand at play-writing. I must persuade you to write one for me."

She gave his arm a loving squeeze, as she replied:

"I will, with pleasure. But you must not undertake the part of the cruel deceiver in that, you know. That's not your line."

L. B. BROCK.

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A new series of articles under this heading has just started in PEARSON'S WEEKLY. They are written under very romantic circumstances. The authoress, Miss Madge Morris, is a young lady who has resolved to make enough money by her pen to enable her to marry the man she loves.

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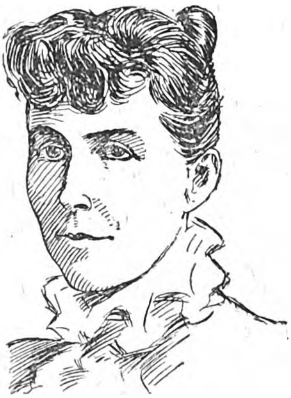

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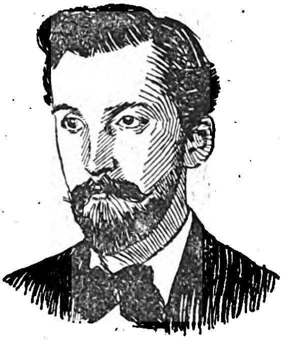

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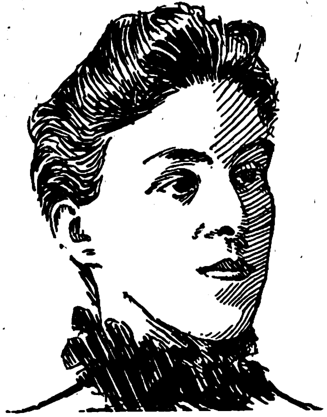

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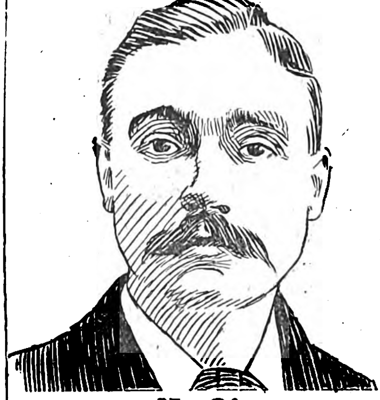

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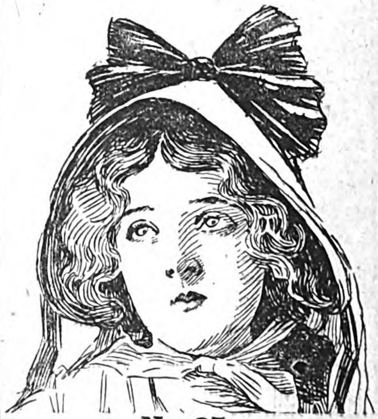

No. 35.

A VERY NATURAL MISTAKE.

MISS DEBORAH MARKHAM stood at her kitchen sink one morning washing a bottle. It was one that had held an acid preparation for removing fruit stains. Almost any other woman would have thrown it on the ash pile as soon as it was emptied, but to Miss Deborah the natural thing was to clean it and store it away on a shelf in her cupboard with an army of other bottles.

No article ever seemed to Miss Markham to have outlived its usefulness; there was always a possibility that "it might come in handy some time," and it was treasured for the expected need.

People might by turns feel amused and exasperated by Miss Deborah's exaggerated love of economy, but their comments on her always ended with, "After all, she's dreadfully good-hearted, there's nobody in the whole town more ready to lend a hand than Deborah Markham, and if she takes any comfort in being so saving that's her own affair. She can afford to be overparticular." For she had the finest house and the largest income in East Elmore.

"It would be a pity not to keep this bottle," she commented, holding it against the light, "it's such a convenient size and the glass is so clear. I wonder what sort of glue that label was stuck on with; after all the hot water it's been in it hasn't started a mite. I've a good mind not to scrape it off, but keep the bottle just as it is. Like as not I shall want a bottle sometime for holding poison, and this one will be all labelled and ready."

Not long afterwards Miss Deborah decided that she must have the advice of the village doctor. All summer she had been tormented by nervous headaches and sleepless nights. She had doctored herself and had tried one kind of diet after another without relief, and her one servant, an old woman who had been kitchen-maid in the house since the days when Miss Deborah had been little Debby Markham, had experimented upon her mistress with all the potent mixtures she knew how to compound, but she, too, had failed to work a cure.

Accordingly, Doctor Bascom was summoned. The result of this professional visit was a slip of paper that Miss Deborah twisted between her fingers as she watched the doctor climb into his high trap before her gate. She noticed that Mrs. Prescott also was watching from her window, where she sat sewing, and the shutters in one window of Mrs. Treadway's vaultlike parlour were rolled open, a sure indication that the lady herself was sitting behind them.

"The neighbours will be running in to see what is the matter over here, so I shall have to send Hannah to the chemist's for the medicine," thought Miss Deborah, realising that for a few hours she was to be the most interesting person in the village. Her prediction was a true one. Within half-an-hour both Mrs. Treadway and Mrs. Prescott were established in comfortable chairs in her sitting-room making anxious inquiries about her health and going over the last bits of neighbourhood gossip. Other ladies followed them, for the doctor's trap stopping before the house had advertised to everyone the fact that either Miss Deborah or Hannah was ill, and the last callers did not leave until Hannah's clatter over the tea-table informed them that the old woman considered it time they were well out of the way and her mistress at supper.

It was after sunset when she found herself at liberty to prepare the medicine for use. Dr. Bascom had informed her that it was a preparation of bromide which would come in the form of a white powder and would require solution. "To be dissolved in eight ounces of water," she read on the slip of instructions.

"Then the first thing I want is an eight-ounce bottle," she thought, "and that ought to be very easy to find in the cellar cupboard."

The twilight was almost darkness in the cellar, but she did not take a light, and her hands groped about among the bottles in search of one that the sense of touch should tell her was of the required size. In the very front row she came upon one that she judged would answer the purpose. The kitchen was very dimly lighted by its north windows, but Miss Deborah did not stop to light a lamp before sifting the powder through a little funnel into the bottle and filling it with cold water. Not until she was ready to take the first dose of the new remedy did she discover that there was a small white label pasted across one side of the bottle—a skull above two crossbones and the word "Poison" ornamented the label.

It was a startling occurrence, but her sense of humour came to the rescue. "I've no doubt it fits well enough," she remarked grimly. "Most drugs are poison. I shall have to show Dr. Bascom the name I have given to what he calls 'a harmless remedy.'"

She found the "poison" so efficacious that a week later, when Hannah came down in the morning with white face and dull eyes, complaining of a sick headache, her first thought was of the medicine that had helped her own headache.

"Go and lie down on the sitting-room lounge," she commanded. "I'll give you a spoonful of bromide, and you needn't give a thought to the breakfast, for I'll see to that myself."

Hannah gladly allowed herself to be tucked up on the big lounge that was, in fact, a couch, and she swallowed the medicine obediently, then lay waiting impatiently for the pain to abate, but the headache was not to be routed so easily. When Miss Deborah peeped in through the kitchen door after she had finished her breakfast, expecting to see the old woman asleep, she saw instead Hannah's wide-open eyes gazing at her from a confused pile of pillows and shawls.

"One dose doesn't appear to be enough; you must take another," was her decision; "and if you don't feel much better in an hour I shall give you a third spoonful." When Miss Deborah returned to the kitchen, she found a barefooted boy standing on the doorstep. The severe expression on his freckled face showed that he considered his errand one of importance, and the weight of responsibility upon him gave great gravity to his voice as he said, "Good morning, Miss Markham."

"Why, Joseph, what's the matter?" she exclaimed. "Is your mother ill? Has anything happened to my dress?" For the boy's mother was the village dressmaker, and she had a new black silk for Miss Deborah under way in her workroom.

"No'm, mother isn't ill, but my sister Julia is, and mother's going to Sharon to see her. She's going to start before dinner, and she says please to come down

Can you play "Hunt the Fiver"? See Photo Competition.

right away and have your dress fitted, so she can take it with her to work on, 'cause she may be gone three or four days."

This was a message to be obeyed at once. Miss Deborah hastened to change her wrapper for a more suitable dress for the street and then looked into the sitting-room to see how Hannah was feeling.

"Mrs. Pratt has sent for me," she said. "She's going out of town this morning and wants to fit my dress before she goes. I shan't be away long, and you must lie still till I come back. If anybody comes to the house, let them rap till they give it up. You are not to stir. Your headache isn't much better yet, is it? But it's too soon to give you any more medicine. I'll leave the bottle and spoon here on the stand at the head of the lounge, and you can see the clock without moving. When it's nine o'clock, take another spoonful unless you get rid of the pain before then."

By this time Hannah's opinion of her mistress' much lauded medicine was not a flattering one.

"Nothing in the world but salt and water!" she grumbled, rolling her head restlessly on the pillow in search of a cool spot. "I fancy I'm not the sort of person to work faith cures on."

But at nine o'clock she decided to give the drug one more trial. She sat up on the edge of the lounge and reached for the bottle. The motion made her head whirl, and she sat with closed eyes for a minute to steady herself before trying to pour out the liquid. When she ventured to open her eyes she noticed at once the white label on the bottle.

"That tells how much to take, I suppose," she muttered. "I don't believe Miss Deborah gave me half enough for a dose." And she brought the bit of paper close to her eyes to read for herself the directions. The next instant she was standing in the middle of the room, the bottle on the floor and her headache entirely forgotten.

"Poison!" she gasped. "No wonder I felt worse and worse all the time!"

She ran to the window which looked into Mrs. Prescott's yard and called wildly: "Help! Help!" And when a startled face appeared at an opposite window added: "Send for the doctor! I'm poisoned!"

Mrs. Pratt lived at the far end of the village, ten minutes' walk from the Markham house. Miss Deborah lost no time on the way, and the business was transacted without delay. Both women were anxious to get it done that they might be free for other matters. Mrs. Pratt had a long ride before her, and Miss Deborah did not like to leave Hannah alone longer than was necessary.

After she left the dressmaker she stepped briskly along the street on her way home. There was no one in sight except a man scurrying along far in front of her. He disappeared through some gateway not far from her own, but the shrubs leaning over dooryard fences and the flicker of lights and shadows on the narrow footpath obscured the view and deceived the vision so that she could not be sure which house had been his destination.

"I wonder if that was Ezra Greene. Maybe Mrs. Greene is having one of her bad spells and has sent for Mrs. Prescott. If I wasn't in such a hurry, I'd stop and see," she thought as she passed the Greene house. There was no sign of excitement about the place, however, and she had no time for further speculations on Ezra Greene's reasons for haste, for she saw the doctor's trap turn into the main street from one of the crossroads leading out into the farming districts. Doctor Bascom was on his way home, but in answer to a call from behind him he stopped his horse and turned about on the seat of his trap to listen to the shouted summons. Then he backed his horse round and drove up to the side of the road, where a man came out to take charge of the horse, while he himself vanished as Ezra Greene had done.

"There's trouble at the Prescotts'," thought Miss Deborah, and she began to run, but she stopped short when she came in sight of the Prescott house and her own, for her neighbour's premises were deserted, while in her own garden several men were gathered about the door talking earnestly, and it was in front of her own door that the doctor's horse was tied.

Her pause of astonishment was a brief one. Then she dashed into the garden, through the group of men and into the kitchen. A woman was stirring something over the fire, and a hum of voices came from the sitting-room. Miss Deborah did not stop to question the occupant of the kitchen, who was so interested in the contents of her stewpan that she did not notice Miss Markham's entrance.

Mrs. Prescott was standing over the lounge, with an empty bowl in her hands.

"There, if it was an acid you've been taking there's a chance that the soapsuds will save you," she announced cheerfully, "and the sweet oil ought to help you whatever the stuff was. Don't you feel any better yet, Hannah?"

A feeble groan was the only reply. Dr. Bascom was at the window examining the contents of a bottle. Suddenly the look of perplexity on his face changed to a broad smile. Looking up, he saw Miss Deborah in the kitchen door.

"This tastes like the bromide I prescribed for you a few days ago, Deborah. How did you happen to ticket it this way? You've frightened Hannah out of a year's growth, and furnished the whole neighbourhood with a most welcome excitement."

"Oh, Miss Deborah, it was all a mistake, wasn't it?" cried Hannah, catching sight of her mistress above the ring of the frightened and bewildered faces surrounding her. "You didn't try to poison me on purpose, did you?"

Miss Deborah looked about her with sparkling eyes. The doctor's words had explained the situation to her.

"Mistake!" she exclaimed scornfully. "Have you all lost your wits? Do you think I shall have to poison you when I want to get rid of you, Hannah? I've a good mind to set you packing this instant, but nothing short of a lunatic asylum would take you in, I'm afraid. If your morning's work isn't further along than mine, ladies, perhaps you had better go where you can attend to it!" And she turned and walked out into the back regions of the house, shutting several doors sharply behind her.

Dr. Bascom watched her retreat with liveliest enjoyment; the stern-faced old man could enjoy a good joke heartily. Then he turned to the astonished group in the sitting-room.

"I think, Hannah, that if you have swallowed everything these impromptu physicians have been ordering you may consider yourself thoroughly poisoned, and now, neighbours, shall we leave her to make her peace with Deborah?"

E. A. M.

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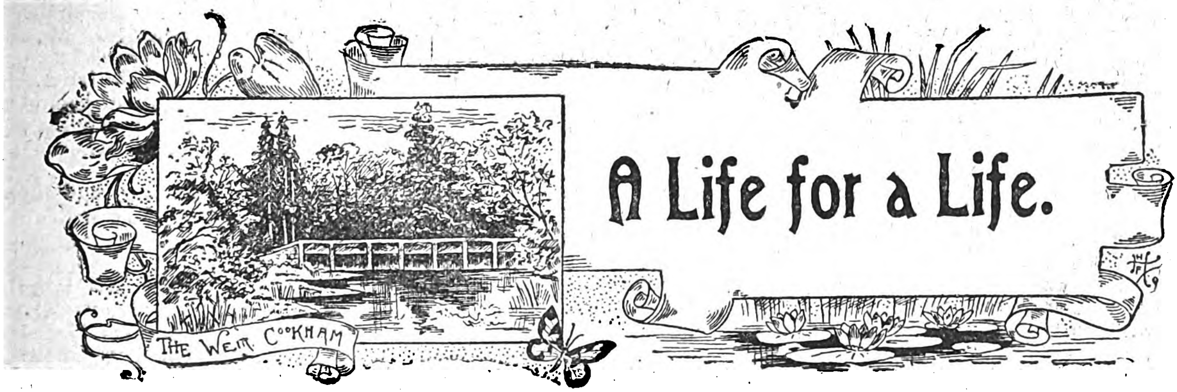

A Life for a Life.

"So you are determined, then, to marry this man?"

"Yes; I am determined to marry this man."

"For the last time, Kathie! Will you not think it over—reconsider your decision? Once done, it can never be undone—remember that!"

"Who are you, Philip Rayne, that you should dictate my course to me? Is it because *my* father owes *yours* money? Is it because he—you—all of you Raynes! seek to humble me—in my own eyes, and in the eyes of all who care for me?"

"No, Kathie! it is not that; it is because I love you so, that I would warn you—hold you back, snatch you, if I may, from a danger which you cannot realise!"

"Thanks! It is of course good of you; but I prefer—much prefer—to manage my own affairs. It will be quite time enough for you to offer your advice, sir, when I seek it. As that is a very remote eventuality, we will, if you please, consider the subject, as between us, indefinitely closed."

Kate, better known as Kathie Myddleton, and Philip Rayne were old friends. Kathie's father was one of the unhappy class, who never, by any chance, succeed in anything. Their touch is blight; their lives resultless. Predestined, it would seem, to social failure, they appear to have a strangely keen relish for assisting in the fulfilling of prophecy.

Captain Myddleton, a widower, with but one child, considered himself, in view of that fact, free to pursue, with reckless light-hearted buoyancy, "the primrose-way" so long as his inheritance lasted, and then for a few steps further in the company of the money-lender and his following.

Unfortunately, his daughter Kathie, a girl of exceptionally high spirit and, it must be confessed, of a wayward temperament, had to suffer in the process. Motherless from her birth almost, and, by consequence, thrown early upon the tender mercies of servants and questionable friends, her waywardness at twenty-three inclined perilously towards dangerous, because irresponsible independence; while her original high-spirits were becoming, day after day, like, and yet more like, to that hard, unsympathetic type of nature, whose god is itself.

Philip Rayne, on the other hand, was a handsome, stalwart young fellow who, without being in any sense a "prig," was all that the heart of the most exacting of good and true women could possibly desire.

The son of a rich man, wealth, while he thoroughly enjoyed all that it could give, had not in the least spoilt him. A gentleman (in the true meaning of the word) to the finger-tips, he was manly, and yet tender as a woman—especially to women. From a boy he had worshipped the very ground upon which Kathie stood. That love is always blind, I cannot, and do not, believe; but in this case there was a dimness of vision on the part of love which made the man to be more than a little kind to the woman's faults and failings.

Philip's father had at one time lent Captain Myddleton money; why, it is hard to say, for the ex-guardsman had little or no security to offer beyond his "I.O.U." which, saving the revenue stamp, was scarce worth the paper upon which it was written.

Strange to say, Joshua Rayne, old as the debt now was, had never pressed for payment, or shown the slightest sign of making things unpleasant for his dilatory debtor. This, naturally, suited Captain Myddleton's book to a nicety, for he himself might be fairly trusted not to allude to the subject in any way.

Philip knew of the transaction, and regretted it, insomuch as he looked upon it in the light of a barrier between himself and Kathie.

Still, even he could not quite fathom his father's action, or rather want of action in the matter.

He had always known old Joshua as being so close-fisted and hard in everything relating to money that it puzzled him as to what motive his father could reasonably have for this refraining from reclaiming his own.

Things were in this state when Leon Duvernay was, one summer afternoon, introduced to Kathie at a tennis-party on the Myddletons' own lawn at Richmond.

Nobody knew very much about him—this elegant, soft-speaking Frenchman; not even the voluble lady who was, in a way, responsible for him; but as he was faultlessly dressed, of charming, if somewhat super-charming manners; and paid the daintiest of compliments in the most picturesque of broken English, people—and among them Kathie—were disposed to accept Leon Duvernay, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, Count of the Holy Roman Empire, and Heaven knows what beside, at practically his own estimate, and as a decided acquisition to Richmond society.

He was a tall, dark man, with eyes which some might call "shifty," but which the majority of the women termed "divine."

It is not an unwise rule to mistrust the man whose eyes are thus breathed "divine" by the sex, whose

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experience should by this time have taught them to know better.

Duvernay was no exception. From the very first the Frenchman displayed an unmistakable admiration for the Captain's beautiful daughter. Like one of his own poodles, he followed her everywhere. For a long time Kathie resented this, to her, unwelcome attention, and any ordinary Englishman would have at once noticed, and profited by the girl's evident dislike and prejudice.

For awhile Philip Rayne looked exultantly on. Then came trouble.

One day it was observed by Kathie's intimates that Duvernay assumed towards her an altogether new and suggestive air of proprietorship; and it was not long before it was generally known that the pair were engaged.

Soon rumours of an early marriage were heard, and it was in connection with one such that Philip uttered his remonstrance.

"Don't think me ungenerous," he said to her, a few days after the conversation between them which opens this story. "I know you have forbidden me to say anything to you on the subject, but I cannot—Kathie! I cannot hold my peace! You may, perhaps, never speak to me again; yet, though it would go nigh to break my heart, I must repeat my warning, even at the risk of complete silence 'twixt you and me for ever. This man—this Leon Duvernay—Kathie, has not the power, believe me, to effect a perfect marriage with you. French law does not allow it, and he knows that. To make it legal in France, Duvernay's parents should give consent; and, as you know, not one of his friends has made a sign. So long as you remain in England your marriage will hold good—here; but once on French soil, and the fellow has you at his mercy."

Kathie's hard and stubborn nature (only skin-deep, after all), however, nearly surrendered before the earnest pleadings of Philip. They moved her powerfully; but, although she instinctively felt that he was right, she would not acknowledge it, or turn from her purpose.

"You may think it right," she said, with a poor attempt at scornful sarcasm, "to traduce another in his absence, and to the woman whom he is to marry, but I hold it to be mean, despicable, and unmanly!"

"Well," he said gently and sorrowfully, "you cannot help my always loving you. Since you will have it so, I will say no more. Good-night!—Kathie."

"Good-night, Phil!"

She reached out both her hands as if to tell him that she believed him, and despised herself, but it was an impulse only, and she repented before it became an irrevocable act.

"Good-night!"

The *frou-frou* of her dress as she passed hurriedly out through the open window into the starlit garden, was to him as a sound of ill-omen, which rung in his ears all through the days, until he heard it once again.

Then, a week later, the marriage—all *de rigueur*—not a hitch anywhere. Bride lovely, but anxious-looking, and pale, bridegroom spic and span, smiling eternally, but yet manifestly subtly conscious of the whole thing's unreality.

Philip was there; he would be true to his resolve to watch and wait.

Ever since the arrival of the Frenchman the young man had been haunted by an indefinable memory, which, rack his brain as he might, would not crystallise.

He felt morally certain that somewhere—where he could not for the life of him remember—he had seen Leon Duvernay in other surroundings, and in very different guise. It worried him to be unable to recall the truth.

The day was warm, and Philip, from his post behind a pillar in one of the side aisles of the church, saw that, every now and again Duvernay wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

Once, when he did so, and when a beam of sunlight shot right across his face, he pushed the hair well up from his brow.

Then light came to Philip Rayne.

"That scar on the temple! It is Carnier Leon! the man I saw two years ago on trial in Paris for the murder of his wife, and he was acquitted on a point of law!"

He would have rushed up to the altar and stayed the marriage, but as he made a move the last words were spoken, and the strains of the "Lohengrin" pealed out as the gay crowd followed the principals into the vestry.

* * * * *

It was a hard winter in Paris; so hard, that the snow through which driftways had been cut in every thoroughfare, was frozen in heaps to adamantine point.

Everything was dear (food, that is), and distress and misery stalked hand-in-hand through the poorer parts of the city, leaving behind a terrible trail of desolation and death.

The Rue des Etoiles is a small dark street in the Montmartre quarter. The houses in it are of the dreary Clerkenwell, or Pentonville, type, only flush with the pavement. The street bristles with low-class *cabarets*, and with shops whose wares are neither appetising nor in great quantity.

One house there was which, dirtier, and more squalid than the rest, leant forward out of the perpendicular to such an extent that it seemed a mere push from the rear of it would project it into the street.

The windows were filthy, and here and there stuffed with straw or rags. In the front room on the third floor a woman sat. There was no fire, and she looked, not alone pinched and pale with hunger, but cold-starved.

For just a week she had been tenant of this room, and now she is at the end of her resources. On the apology for a table a letter lies open. This she picks up after awhile, with a gesture of disgust, and reads:

It is in French, and translated, runs—

"My ever-loved and loving wife—Finding on my return from Marseilles that you had separated yourself from my establishment, I think it well to let you know that the arrangement suits me perfectly. As I do not intend contributing to your present domestic expenses, I should advise that you return to your English friends, who, doubtless, will be charmed to receive you. For me—well—I shall marry by-and-by; while you, in England, will have the honour of being still the wife of your most devoted—LEON DUVERNAY."

"Fiend! Fiend! Oh, Phil! Phil! if I had but listened to you!"

Yes, it is Kathie! After less than a year of such misery as she would have once thought it impossible for her to have endured.

Reason out her position she could not; she was only feeling out, in broken-hearted fashion, for some comforting voice and hand.

Then she thought she would go out.

Feverishly putting on her hat, and wrapping herself round with a big, warm cloak (almost her sole possession of any value), she descended the rickety stairs and passed out into the frost-bound street.

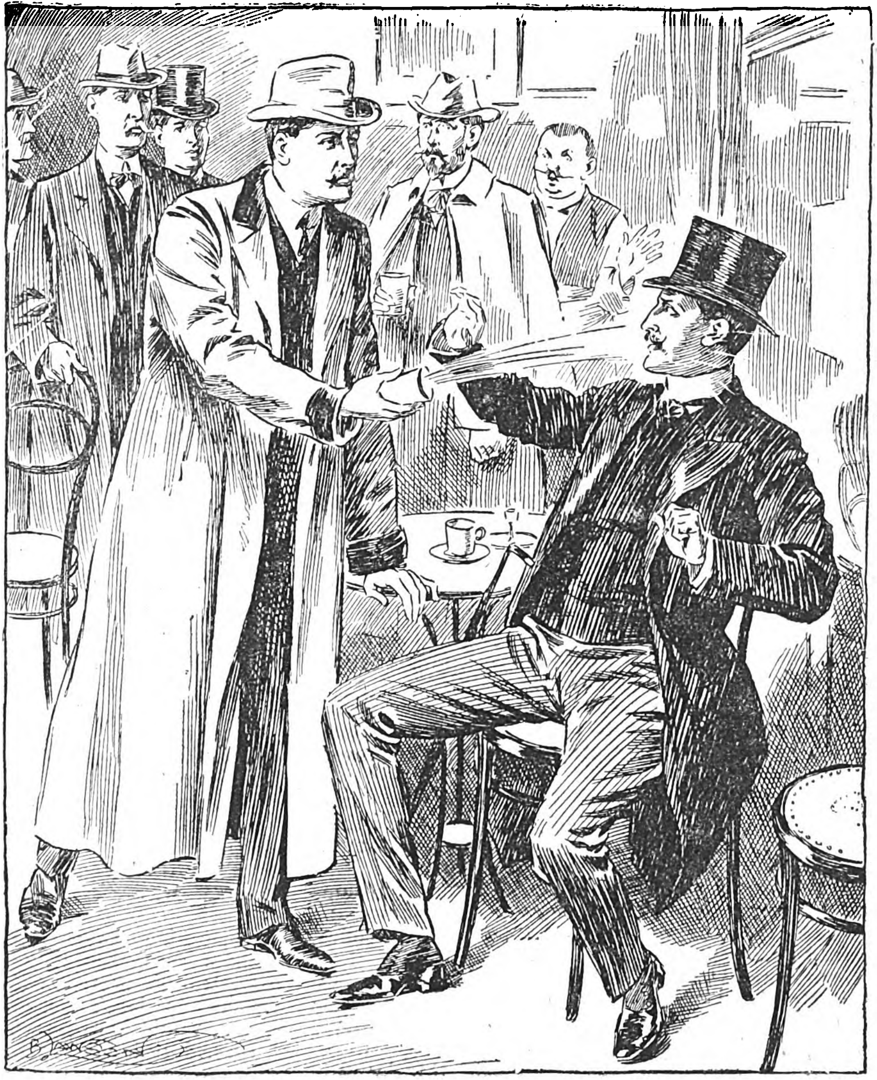
The story of her life since her marriage is both sad and short.

Duvernay had been deceived (not by Kathie) as to his English wife's means. He thought her to be rich, and when he discovered that her father was an impecunious, if not a bankrupt ex-soldier, he fairly exploded with rage.

From that moment he did his best, or worst, to make her life a burden. He taunted her with the fact of the illegality of her marriage—from a French point of view—and when she retaliated with all the spirit that was left in her—he struck her.

Ashamed to communicate the true state of things to her father, or even Philip; unable to move because kept without funds by Duvernay, she only waited the opportunity to leave him.

At last it came. Duvernay had a summons from Marseilles on pressing business. The rest we know. He was cunning enough to leave no money within reach, and her ornaments he had removed and disposed of long before. She, therefore, went out into the world of Paris—penniless (save for a dozen francs or so), and without a friend to consult with or help her.



He dashed the contents of his glass full in the Frenchman's face.

On through the white and bitter streets she went now; this letter of Duvernay's burnt into her brain.

By-and-by, after hours of wandering, she found that her steps had led her to the Seine, by the bridge of Lena.

Chilled to the bone, and ready to drop almost with fatigue and want of food, she halted by the bridge parapet, and leant against it for a moment's support.

A faint echo of footsteps on the hard ground told her of the approach of someone from the other side of the river, across the bridge.

Then a hand was laid upon her arm.

"You seem ill, madame? Can I help you in any way?"

Speak she could not, though she knew that it was Phil!—dear old Phil! honest-hearted, faithful Phil!

And he? Her face was so hidden by the enveloping cloak she was wearing, that he could not for the moment see her face. But for her weakness he would simply have pitied, and passed on.

A little cry, a half-reel, and his arm was round her to prevent her from falling. The movement disarranged the cloak, and he looked down into Kathie's face in bewildered wonderment.

It did not take many minutes to summon a passing policeman, who, for once, sympathetic (thanks, perhaps, to a good tip), procured a belated *fiacre*, into which the two men carefully assisted Kathie.

Telling the man to drive in the direction of his hotel, Philip Rayne did everything he could think of to rouse

Read "Dead to the World."

Kathie from the lethargic prostration into which she had fallen. The jolting of the vehicle aided him in his efforts; and presently she woke to life and to recollection.

"Phil! don't, don't leave me!" she implored him, taking his hand and shedding hot tears over it.

"No, dear! of course I will not! But tell me, where shall I take you? You must have immediate warmth and food, and——"

Then she told him all; how, save for her wretched shelter in the Rue des Etoiles, she was homeless, starving, penniless! She told him of Duvernay's cruelty; of her determination to leave him for ever; of her few months' life of misery, deceit, and agony of mind.

Philip hesitated no longer. He soothed her tenderly, and as might have a knight of old, his liege lady in distress.

He knew of good friends out Auteuil way. Bidding the cabman drive thither, he hurriedly explained matters—the simple-hearted French folk, giving of their best, and receiving Kathie as a trust from their good M'sieu Philippe.

"I will see you to-morrow," were his last words to her. "Meanwhile, get rest and peace; for you shall have no more sorrow, dear, so long as I shall live to shield you from it."

* * * * *

There is a certain Parisian Cafe, not far from the Palais Royale, much affected by English people of Bohemian tendencies. It is not large, it is not artistic particularly—it is just comfortable.

As a rule, the average citizen gives it a wide berth; the company does not suit him. There is too much "insular insolence," he says, and he stays away to prevent possible mischief.

This being so, the presence in the somewhat dingy place on the morning following the night of Kathie's discovery by Philip Rayne, of a tall, well-dressed Frenchman, was noticeable to habitual frequenters.

He had been there before, at long intervals, but none knew either his name or his business. He sat down at a table near the door, and ordered a cup of black coffee, and a *petit verre*.

There were about a dozen young men present—all, or nearly all, of them art-students. To them, five minutes after the Frenchman's entrance, was added Philip Rayne, who appeared to know everybody.

"Phil, my boy," said one, "you look transformed! What's happened to you?"

"To me? Nothing, Ernie, that I know of, except—well, that's my business."

"Oh, all right, Mr. Hush-'em-up. Keep your secret! There! never mind, Rayne—the secret is yours; the day is ours! Fill up and drink to——"

"Justice!" said Philip gravely, lifting his glass to drink.

He was within touch almost of the stranger, who watched him curiously.

As he put his glass to his lips in pledge of the toast, Philip's eyes met full those of the tall Frenchman.

What followed is talked about at "Epinays" to this day.

Springing forward, the young man looked at the other for a brief second steadily, silently, then hoarsely uttering the one word "scoundrel!" he dashed the contents of his glass fair in the Frenchman's face.

"Carnier Leon!" he cried, whipping out each word with a cracking snap, like to that made by a hunting crop in a strong man's hand. "I want no parley with you! I just want justice! You understand me!"

"You! *Peste!* why you are the puppy-boy! and you insult me?"

"Yes; if you will have it so."

"Oh! I want not to speak with you, but—I will fight you!"

"Messieurs! messieurs!" interrupted the anxious-eyed, fat little proprietor. "Do not, I pray you, make the quarrel 'ere!"

Philip reached out his hand and gently put the worthy *restaurateur* on one side.

Then, tearing out of his pocket a card, he scribbled upon it.

"I am going to kill you! Send to me your friend for a meeting to-morrow."

Duvernay, or Carnier Leon, smiled ever so sweetly.

"I will oblige you, *mon cher!*" was all he said, as, re-assuming his hat, he bowed to those around, and went out.

* * * * *

Early in the evening of the same day a gentleman of urbane manners, called at the Hotel Napoleon to see "Monsieur Rayne."

A brief five minutes was sufficient in which to arrange for a meeting the next morning in the wood behind the Bois.

Philip's friend, who was with him at the interview, first did his duty by seeking to persuade the other to change his purpose, and then, when he saw that to be impossible, gave his mind to the matter in hand.

Duvernay's friend was politely amenable, and a quarter of an hour after daybreak on the morrow the thing was to be.

"Will you ride with me as far as Auteuil?" asked Philip of his companion. "I want to call upon a lady there."

"Certainly! come along! You haven't much time to lose if you are to be up at three o'clock!"

* * * * *

When Philip Rayne left the Dufosse's house at Auteuil, without seeing Kathie, who was sleeping, he in no wise regretted his determination to kill the man who had wrecked his love's life, and, but for a strange circumstance, would have assuredly carried out his purpose.

He had made his will since the morning, leaving all he was possessed of to the one woman whom he loved.

Bidding "good-night" to his friend at the corner of the Rue de Rivoli, with a promise to meet him at four, he made for his hotel.

Something prompted him to put his hand in his outer side pocket—the document was gone! It was not that it was in itself valuable; it was that it might lead to suspicion, and, maybe, to a thwarting of his revenge. Where could he have dropped it? For dropped it he must have.

A further surprise awaited him at his hotel.

"Lady to see you, sir," said the English porter.

"Lady to see me! Who is it?"

"Don't know, sir. She's—here she is, sir, coming out of the manageress' room."

"Phil! Come upstairs—to your sitting-room. I must see you—must!"

"What is it?" said Philip, unable to speak almost from sheer amazement. "Tell me, dear, what has induced you to follow me here. You were asleep only an hour or so ago."

Read "Dead to the World."

"No. I was on my way here with *this*, which you evidently sent me in mistake for a letter this morning."

It was his will.

She pleaded with him; for her sake not to do anything which should jeopardise his life. She did not know, till he told her, of Duvernay's imminent meeting with himself.

"You must not! You shall not fight him! With sword, too! why, Phil, he is the best swordsman in all France!"

"Kathie! I am not by nature a blood-thirsty man, but Leon Duvernay—Carnier Leon, as I know him to be—is too base to live, and it is I who must kill him!"

For a moment she did not speak—a wild scheme was forming itself in her brain.

She was, herself, an old pupil of Macpherson's—could use foil and rapier as well or even better than any woman in England. Yes, she would try it.

There is nothing a woman—a true woman—will not do to shield her love, or to avenge reproach.

He told her everything; the meeting at four with his friend, and—what might be.

He thought her sudden calmness strange and incomprehensible, but attributed it to an overwrought mind.

"Phil! I will go now. Tell them to get me a cab."

"Wait here a moment, then."

The door closed, and she was alone; it was but the work of a minute to look round. A pair of swords on a side-table met her eye. Seizing one of them she swiftly concealed it about her dress. On the floor were the contents of a portmanteau tumbled out indiscriminately. A pair of cycling knickerbockers lay right on top of the motley heap. These she snatched up, secreting them inside her large cloak. Scarce had she done so when Philip returned.

"The porter has got you a cab at last," he said. "Now you must get away at once."

He went down the stairs with her and saw her drive away in the direction of Auteuil.

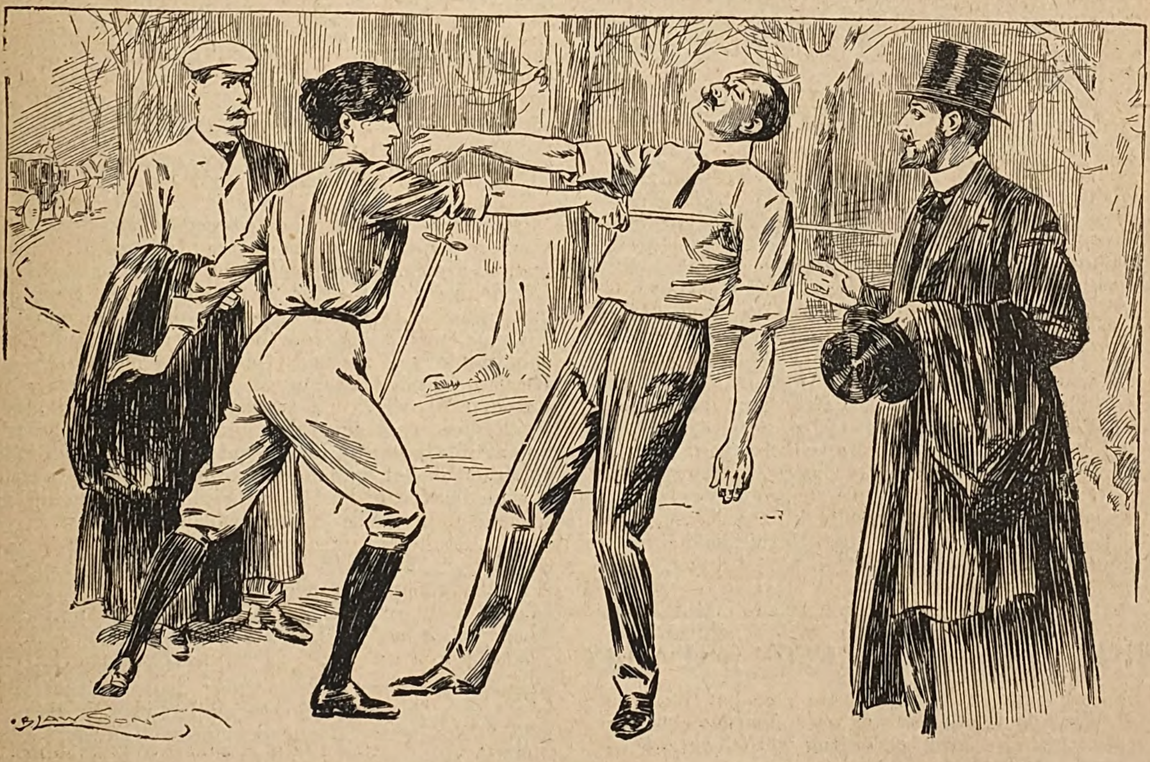
"Just four hours! four hours! I can do it, and I *will*—for Phil's sake, and for my own!"

He did not see that ten minutes later the cab returned, Kathie descended, had a hurried, but brief colloquy with the porter, and drove away again at top speed.

There is a spot not far from the wooded end of the Bois de Boulogne, which is much loved by the gentlemen who seek to satisfy their wounded honours with sword or pistol.

Here, a little after daybreak, two Frenchmen strolled arm-in-arm about, evidently waiting for an addition to their company.

It came. Two persons approached from the city, who bowed, and awaited preliminaries.



Kathie's weapon pierced his left shoulder to the hilt.

"But this—this is not M'sieur Rayne," said Duvernay, indicating one of the newcomers.

"Mr. Rayne has been taken seriously ill," said the one addressed, and Mr. Rayne's friend, pointing to his companion, "is here to take his place, if you agree?"

"Quite impossible! Out of all order!" said the Frenchman.

"But you will! You will! Captain Masters, see that he does not play the coward! But, perhaps, *this* will spur him on to fight with *me!*"

She (for she threw off her cloak and showed her identity) struck him smartly across the face with the flat of the blade in her hand.

Captain Masters did not like matters or approve them; but he knew the story and, could it be done safely by the outraged wife, would applaud the punishment of Duvernay.

Rapidly divesting himself of his coat, and snatching the weapon from his second's hand, the bully initiated the most extraordinary duel ever fought in France or elsewhere.

It was not long.

Duvernay's rage had weakened his arm.

At the sixth pass he seemed to go blindly out to meet Kathie's weapon, which pierced his left shoulder to the hilt.

If her opponent was in a sad case, Kathie was not in much better. For she fainted.

Captain Masters, sorry now for his share in the business, and dreading, too, what Philip would say, raised her and, whistling three times, placed her in the carriage that answered his call.

He looked out of the window as they drove off, and saw Duvernay stretched upon the ground, his head in his second's lap.

* * * * *

When matters were cleared up, just before Kathie, escorted by Philip, embarked at Dieppe, it came out, on confession, that the girl had bribed the hotel porter to lock Philip's door as soon as she was gone. This accounted for his non-appearance on the ground. A hurried visit to Autieul; a return just in time to meet Captain Masters at four, and the reader knows the rest.

* * * * *

"It was very wrong and very foolish of you, dear," said Philip on the deck of the steamer; "and perhaps, as a punishment, I ought not to tell you that the moment before sailing I received a wire, which stated that Duvernay will live, but, for reasons best known to the French Government, at its sole charge and expense for the rest of his natural existence."

"Thank God!" was all that Kathie said; but to Philip it told all he wanted to know.

RALPH ENDERBY.

WHAT SORT OF A PERSON ARE YOU?

What do people think of you? You don't know, of course. But your handwriting will tell you what your character is like. Send a specimen to—

RANEE, 21 Pearson's Buildings,
Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Inclose six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope with each specimen of handwriting.

SHE: "Why does a woman take a man's name when she gets married?" HE: "Why does she take everything else he has?"

SAID an Irishman the other day to a friend, "Arrah, where will you find a modern building that has lasted so long as the ould was!"

PHRENOLOGIST: "Boy, you have a remarkable memory." Boy: "Please, sir, write it on a slip of paper so's I shan't forget it."

NELL: "I believe that people should always marry their opposites." Belle: "I thought you seemed very much interested in the young man who lives across the street from you."

GENTLEMAN (to house agent): "The great disadvantage is that the house is so damp." House Agent: "Disadvantage, sir? Advantage, I call it. In case of fire it wouldn't be so likely to burn."

DOCTOR: "There's nothing serious the matter with Michael, Mrs. Muldoon. I think a little soap and water will do him as much good as anything." Mrs Muldoon: "Yis, doctor; an' will Oi give it t'him befoor or afther his males?"

HE had called on a swell physician, and reported that he was "knocked out generally." As he took the prescription he said: "Well, doctor, what do I owe you?" "A guinea." "I'm sorry I can't pay you to-day. You won't mind waiting awhile, will you?" "No, that's all right." "And, doctor, how much will this prescription cost?" "About five shillings." "You couldn't lend me five shillings to get it with, could you? I'm dead broke." "Let me look at that prescription again," said the physician. He took it, examined it, and erased a line. "I had prescribed something for your nerve," he said, "but I see you don't need it."

HE begged a kiss. She frowned meditatively. "A kiss," she cried, "is an expression of sentiment. Placed upon the hand, it signifies respect; upon the forehead, friendship; upon the lips, both—and more. Since you have asked it, you may express yourself in one kiss. Proceed." He hesitated. Through respect and friendship love may be reached. If he were too bold, she—— He still hesitated. He gazed down into the grass and pondered swiftly. He tried to read her mood. He would place that one kiss upon her—— He heard a trill as of many birds and looked up. She was whistling softly. Her hat was pulled down to her eyes, covering her forehead, and her hands were thrust deep into the pockets of her jacket. The problem was solved.

HE carefully prepared the small garden plot, while his wife deeply interested in his labours, stood watching him. After he had put in the seeds and smoothed over the bed, his wife took his arm to accompany him to the house, and on the way she asked: "When will the seeds come up, John?" He was one of those men who take pleasure in saying a smart thing when the opportunity offers, so laying his hand caressingly on her shoulder, he said: "I don't expect them to come up at all, Maria." "You don't!" she exclaimed; "then why have you gone to all that trouble?" With the smile that springs from superior knowledge, he answered: "The seeds won't come up, but the flowers will by-and bye." But he was wrong, for his neighbour's hens got into his garden that day, and the seeds did come up.

DEAD TO THE WORLD

By

Henry T. Johnson.

Author of *"Cruce Vincit," "The Pride of the Ring," etc., etc.*

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST CHAPTERS.

Richard Seldon, a convict, escapes. In a train he meets Cyril Roylance just back from Australia, whom he murders and impersonates. He assumes the rôle of squire, and pays attention to Doris Dale. One day he encounters two old criminal acquaintances and agrees to meet them.

One night two of Seldon's criminal acquaintances break into Squire Dale's house, where he is staying, and with his assistance murder the butler who had recognised him as an impostor. To deceive the Dales Seldon so arranges his room that it has the appearance of being the scene of a violent struggle. With his revolver he puts some shots through his clothes, one of them grazing his arm. He hints to Doris that the butler's murderer and his own assailant is none other than her lover, Jack Branscombe. An inquest is held on the butler's body.

CHAPTER XII. *(continued).*

"This is a rum start," he muttered, scratching his short-cropped head. "Oh, I'll ask the question, certainly, at all events I'll get the lawyer to, whether there's anything in it or not. It seems funny; shall I mention it to Mr. Roylance? No, I don't think I will, at all events not yet, I'll wait till the inquest's over. Nice chap, Roylance; somehow something about him, the look of his eyes, or is it the tone of his voice, seems so familiar to me, but, of course, it's only a fancy. I've never been to Australia, and he's only been back here, so to speak, five minutes since he was a little nipper."

"I think they're ready for us upstairs," said the Squire, returning. "Now, inspector, shall you and I have just one more glass of port?"

"You're very good, sir, and it ain't a bad wine. It ain't up to that in your cellar, sir. Ah! a City alderman's port I call that. It's very little I take, but a nice crusted tawny port with a nice bouquet of beeswing I must confess, that's my weakness."

"And a very good one too," said the Squire. "We all have our weaknesses; there's nothing like a good selection even in weaknesses. Here's a jolly good health, and when you go back to town I'll have a dozen of that port wine put up for you, if you'll accept it."

The Inspector's eyes twinkled and the Inspector's lips instinctively smacked as, following the Squire up-stairs, he soliloquised:

"No mistake about it, you can't beat 'em, English country gentlemen; they are the people. this chap's as good as they can make 'em. And somehow something about him does seem to bring back old times."

* * * * *

Harcourt Dale, looking in at the sitting-room occupied by his daughter, said, patting her shoulder reassuringly:

"It's a dreadful business, Doris, but this part of it will be over directly, and I don't think they'll call you."

"Oh, father," she said, "of course, it's very dreadful, even for us, but I'm thinking of the poor, dear fellow we've lost." Looking out of the window, she gazed with some curiosity at a group of decent-looking men with serious faces emerging from a store-house and trooping across the stable-yard.

A shudder went through her as her father whispered: "The jury, dear, they're going back to the court after—the view."

"Doris, my child," he went on anxiously, "you must have a glass of wine or something." Then to the maid: "Get your mistress some brandy, liqueur brandy, tell them the best."

And then, glad of an opportunity to divert the poor child's mind from the topic, he said suddenly:

"By the bye, Doris, I have something of yours that was picked up by Bell on the stairs the night of—this affair." It seemed one couldn't get away from that topic.

She looked up with languid interest.

"Yes, it's off your châtelaine; you must be more careful, dear, you know your mother kept it for many, many years, and I'm sure you wouldn't like to lose it."

And he handed towards her the gold locket—her love gift to Jack Branscombe.

"Where was it found—when?" she asked after a long, to her a frightful pause.

"On the staircase; Bell picked it up just as we were ascending from the pantry to the guest-room after we'd found—poor Barker."

Is your photo on page 590?

Then she heard him aright! It had been found there after the murder! What could it mean?

"Evidently it got caught in something and the link snapped, that châtelaine frippery of yours is so slight and insecure; and yet, by Jove! the ring of it's all right, and there's a link to it, a link one would think had been part of a substantial chain, quite different in size and pattern to your châtelaine chain. What's the matter, Doris? Oh, my dear, all this business has been too much for you. Here, come along, Bell, make haste with that brandy. Doris, you must drink this, I insist."

There was a tap at the door.

"You are called, sir," said an attendant, and Harcourt Dale followed the man to the big club-room wherein the coroner sat holding his court. Duly sworn, Dale deposed to having been awakened by the screams and shouts of his servants, the noise of revolver firing, and the falling of furniture in the guest-chamber, generally called the Royal Room, then the discovery of poor Barker's body. The jury, in answer to the coroner, intimated that they desired to put no questions to Mr. Dale. The solicitor representing the relatives of the deceased stated that they had no questions to ask Mr. Harcourt Dale, and his clients, in confirmation of that statement, made Mr. Harcourt Dale their respective and respectful bows and courtesies. The coroner intimated it would be unnecessary for him to trouble Mr. Harcourt Dale with any further questions, everybody knew what a faithful servant the deceased had been and what a kind master he had served, and he felt sure he was expressing the feelings of the jury in saying that he sympathised, not only with the relatives of the deceased, but with the family and household at Dalehurst Grange in this sad affliction, whereupon the gentlemen of the jury murmured unanimously "Hear, hear," and the public at the back of the room indulged in an appreciative tattoo with their feet and sticks upon the floor. Then the coroner said: "Call——"

But the solicitor, watching the proceedings on behalf of the police authorities, rose and intimated that, with permission, he would like to put one or two questions to Mr. Harcourt Dale, and Mr. Harcourt Dale, just on the point of leaving the witness-stand, halted and bowed courteously.

"After finding the body of the deceased in the pantry, where next did you go, Mr. Dale?"

"I returned to the Royal Room to see how Mr. Roylance was progressing."

"And how did you go there?"

"Well, I went upstairs."

"Alone?"

"No, attended by Mary Bell, my daughter's maid."

"Do you remember observing anything on your way upstairs?"

"No," after a pause.

"Try and remember?"

"I can't think of anything of importance."

"Was anything found?"

"Oh, yes; Bell picked up a gold locket that belonged to my daughter, but I don't recollect anything relating to the case occurring."

"What became of that locket?"

"I took possession of it."

"What did you do with it?"

"I returned it to my daughter."

"When?"

"As a matter of fact, about five minutes ago. I forgot all about it till, happening to be wearing the same waistcoat, I discovered it in my pocket just now."

"Thank you! That will do."

The next witness called was Mary Bell, a smart, neatly-dressed young person with the brand of respectability all over her. Her evidence was a mere repetition of Mr. Harcourt Dale's, and when the solicitor instructed by the police rose to question her there was a little flutter of curiosity.

"You remember picking up a gold locket on the stairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"You recognised it as having belonged to your mistress?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Your master took it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you, that will do."

And the wonder widened and deepened. What had the gold locket to do with the case?

Doris Dale, seated in the private sitting-room of the Seven Bells, asked herself again and again what was the meaning of it. The finding of her locket, the locket—her love gift to Jack—on the stairs, and on that night of all nights. Could her father be mistaken? Then she recalled to mind Cyril Roylance's wild, strange words, his assertion that he identified one of his assailants, that he would not reveal that identity—for her sake! Her father entered, looking somewhat annoyed.

"Doris, dear, you are called after all. It's very annoying, but it can't be helped. There's a lawyer down from town watching the matter for the police, and he's evidently got some bee in his bonnet. I'm sure it's a mare's nest, but anyway you've got to give evidence."

There was a buzz, a sensation, when Doris Dale entered the crowded room, took her place at the witness-stand, and, taking off her dainty glove, held up the prettiest white hand in the world while the oath was administered; but it was noticed that her face was deadly pale, and there were those, who, comparing notes afterwards, spoke of the scared look in her beautiful, doe-grey eyes. She was courteously requested to be seated, and only the merest formal questions were put to her by the coroner, the solicitor for the relatives stating that he had none to ask whatever. Then interest intensified as the London lawyer rose.

"Miss Dale, your father has just told us that he has quite recently, in fact, within the last half-hour, handed you a locket he and your maid found on the stairs immediately after the discovery of the murder."

Doris bowed assent.

"Will you produce that locket?"

Doris held out the trinket. The lawyer, turning to Mary Bell and Harcourt Dale, inquired:

"That is the locket you found on the stairs, and, if necessary you will swear to its identity?" and they nodded affirmatively.

"Now, Miss Dale, how long was that locket in your possession?"

"For many years; my mother gave it to me when I was quite a little girl. Oh, quite twelve years ago!"

"When did you lose it?"

"I—I didn't lose it." The little white hand tightened on the wooden arm of the chair.

"Have the goodness to tell the jury under what circumstances you parted with it?"

"I gave it away."

"When?"

The lawyer's face was set as a fencer's.

"A fortnight ago."

"And you have never seen it since until to-day?"

"Not until within this hour."

"Now, Miss Dale, I ask you, to whom did you give this gold locket?"

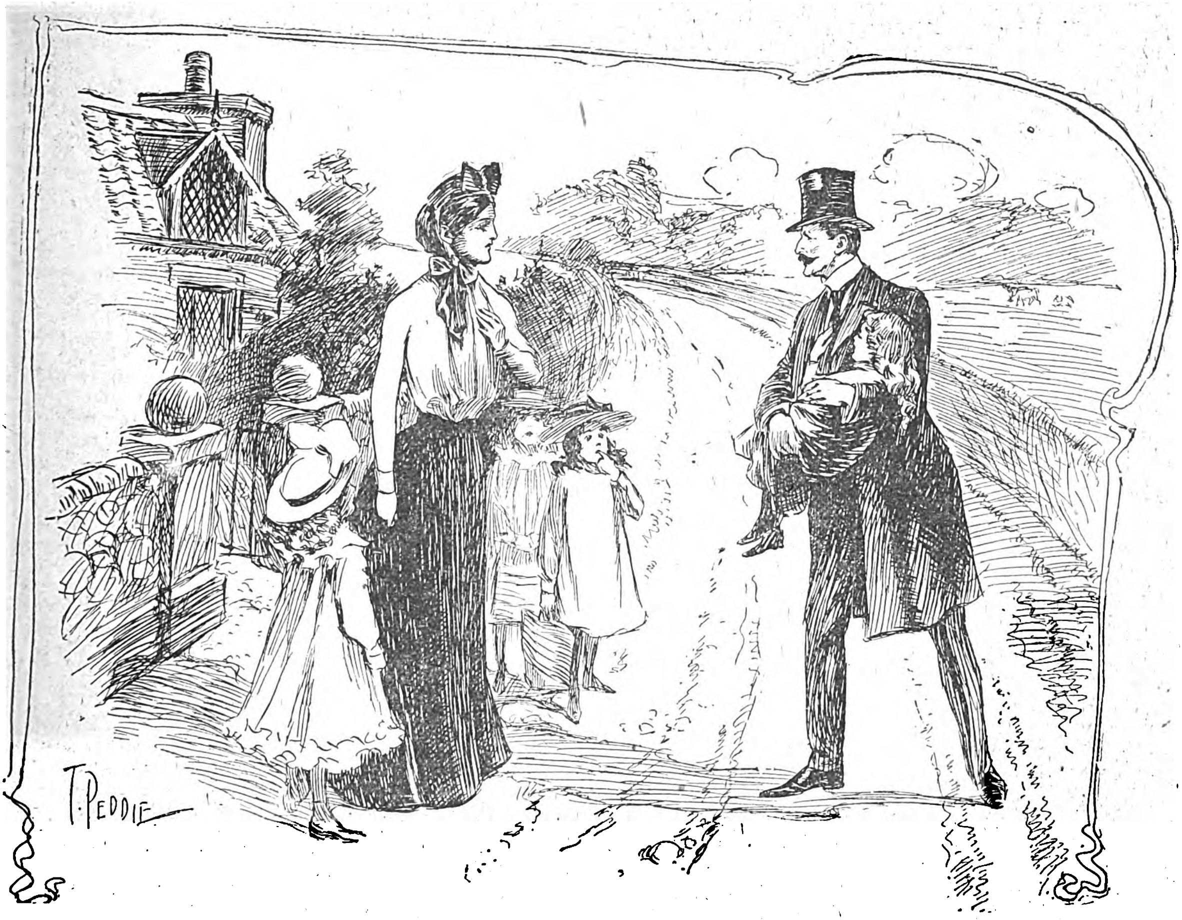
There was a hush; one could hear the scratching pens and pencils.

"I would prefer not to say."

"You must say."

"May I write down the name?"

"No; I want that name spoken aloud in the hearing



"So you are the governess of the village school?" he said. "We just now almost had an accident with one of your little pupils."

of the jury and of this open court, and, with all due respect to you, it is my duty to insist."

Then there was another hush; this time even the pens were still, and faces were turned towards that oval, white one, framed in brown hair.

"I gave it to Mr. John Branscombe, of the Abbey Farm."

There was an exclamation of amazement, almost of dismay, and the spell was broken; not even the coroner's officer's "Silence!" could stop the rustle of the women's tongues. It was true then, there was something between them, they had always said so. But what on earth could he have been doing there on the night of the murder? It was a strange world, and you never knew people till they were found out, and everybody had been wondering, and nobody could understand, how a youngster like him, farming only a matter of fifteen hundred acres, could live up to the style Handsome Jack had been affecting.

"When did you last see Mr. Branscombe, and where?" This was the next question, and Doris replied she had last seen Jack Branscombe on the road to the flower show, and that they had exchanged bows without speaking. And with this question poor Doris' ordeal ceased, and Cyril Roylance was called to take her place at the witness stand. The interest in the case grew more absorbing every moment. The introduction of Jack Branscombe's name had added a new and startling feature to it, and a new witness, practically the principal witness, was listened to with the most rapt attention.

He gave his evidence with the utmost self-possession. He stated that he had not been awakened by the entry of the robbers, though he knew they had come in through his room from finding the shutter removed and the window broken. He had been in the open air nearly all day and had sat late with his friend, therefore he had slept soundly. What had awakened him had been the sound of a struggle and a heavy fall below, and just as he was springing up to ascertain the cause the ruffians re-entered the room carrying, so far as he could make out in the darkness, a bundle. He seized one of them, and they struggled, when the other felled him to the ground with what seemed a short iron instrument; nevertheless, he continued to hold his man, and the other, after a torrent of imprecations and threats, fired a revolver point-blank at him at close range. No: none of the bullets took effect except that one scorched and grazed his forearm. He attributed the fault of the aim to the fact that he and the assailant's comrade were struggling desperately and the risk of hitting the latter. Yes; the moon remained nearly dark. He couldn't succeed in reaching the switch, but there was a gleam of moonlight just through the open shutter. Would he know the assailant? Oh, yes; he was certain as to one of them. Had he ever see that one before?

The witness looked steadily and directly towards Doris Dale for some moments and answered emphatically, "No!"

"But the other; did you see his face?"

"No; by the time that man reached the open window he, witness, had almost gone off with the pain of his wound and exhaustion." The witness before standing down was warmly complimented by the coroner on the courage and promptitude he had displayed, and received congratulations from the same source on his escape from further injury.

He then stood down, and Edward Fletcher was called. Considerable interest attached to Fletcher's appearance, insomuch as it appeared that he was summoned at the instance of the police authorities, and it was the London lawyer who rose to examine him. Excitement increased as he related how, walking along the Fallowfield road shortly after midnight on his way to the plantation known as Brindle's Coppice, he observed John Branscombe reconnoitring his own house, known as the Abbey Farm.

"How was he attired?"

"Well, as if for walking or travelling, he was wearing an ulster and a billycock." This would be, according to the evidence, about an hour after the murder.

"Then," said the coroner, addressing the lawyer from London, "it appears to me that your line of evidence points to a *prima facie* case against John Branscombe. Have the police taken any steps towards his arrest?"

"They have," replied the lawyer, breaking the intense stillness of the court, "but ineffectually; Mr. Branscombe, as a matter of fact, being absent from his house this morning."

On hearing this those in court looked, nodded, and whispered to each other more significantly than ever. And then the London lawyer added he should call Detective-Inspector Rossiter of the Criminal Investigation Department, and on his evidence he intended to asked for a coroner's warrant for Branscombe's arrest.

Doris sat like one in a dream; indeed, she felt convinced it could be nothing but a dream as she listened to the strange story told by the brisk, alert man with roving eyes, who stood there, his note-book in his hand, answering questions graver, more dreadful than any that had yet been put. In a strange, stupefied daze she heard him tell of wheel tracks traced close to the Abbey Farm, of footprints on the flower bed beneath the window of the room known to be slept in by John Branscombe, and she heard the outburst of exclamations of horror as the officer, reserving like a skilled dramatist his greatest sensation till just before the fall of the curtain, detailed the finding in a laurel bush, just beyond that grass plot, of the big, blunt, iron chisel, which he then and there produced with the blood stains still upon it.

Oh! it must be all a dream, she reasoned, and yet, she couldn't wake, she couldn't wake!

Not even when she heard the jury declare as their verdict that John William Barker had been wilfully murdered by John Branscombe and the coroner granting the warrant for the arrest of the latter.

And yet she felt it couldn't be true; it was too terrible. It must be a dream, a dreadful nightmare, only—she couldn't wake, and she would have given worlds to wake!

CHAPTER XIII.

"And Yet, How Like!"

The man who called himself Cyril Roylance drove back to Fallowfield Hall fairly satisfied with the turn of events. "Yes, Richard, my boy!" he mused. "You look like annexing the Doris Dale stakes now; at all events, the favourite's scratched. It's a bit rough on that young fool, but that can't be helped; most people have bad luck who play cross purposes with Tiger Dick. I wish he'd bolt. I'm not over partial to this rubbing shoulders, even in a new capacity, with juries and magistrates, detectives, police, and that class of people, and, by Jingo! they little know who they're so mighty polite to just now. But no, no; why on earth do I let my mind drift back, it's all right as it is. I'm Cyril Roylance I am—I am—I will be—and Dick Seldon, bad, mad Dick Seldon is dead to the world! If only those two men were dead too!"

And in his mind vague possibilities and designs began to weave themselves. Presently he heard the rattle of dogcart wheels alongside, pulled the check string, and leant out of his brougham door. Inspector Rossiter, whom Fletcher was driving over to Hazelwick, also pulled up.

"By Jove, Rossiter," said the man in the brougham, "you've done your work awfully well."

The detective beamed with conscious merit.

"Well, sir," he answered, "I think I've got this case up in a business-like sort of way; bit of a surprise for 'em, wasn't it, sir, at the finish, came with a bit of a bang, eh?"

"Like a thunderbolt."

"I was very sorry for the young lady, sir."

"Yes, it was a bit of a trial for her."

"Yes, it would be under ordinary circumstances, but a good deal of my game's reading between the lines, you know, and I'm pretty certain there's a regular real love story there, at all events on her side. Pity such a nice girl should like such a scamp."

"Yes," replied the other, with a darkened brow and a cauldron of hatred seething and bubbling up in his heart anew against the man whose life he was doing his worst and deadliest to blight, because of that very love story that was so patent to all. "But he'll suffer for his presumption in the end."

"Oh, I don't blame him for that," said Rossiter. "Miss Dale's the sort of young lady I could forgive any young fellow for falling in love with; it's not being worth such a nice girl caring for him that he's to blame for. But there, there, it's astonishing what good women are very often head over ears in love with bad men. Talk about a problem!"

"Yes," replied the other, complacently twirling his moustache, "it is rather odd, when you come to think of it, the good luck a bad lot sometimes has with the girls."

"Rather. Why! there was a man I used to know, dead and gone now, Tiger Dick they used to call him, something, excuse me, your style, sir, only clean shaved and he didn't wear any eyeglass, got the eye of an eagle, Dick had. Well, do you know during that man's career there were women, swell women——"

"Ah, yes, but excuse me, Inspector, I must have that interesting history another time over a glass of port and the walnuts at the Hall before you go back to town. I have some people coming to dinner. By the bye, if you arrest Branscombe you'll let me know, won't you? I suppose you'll nab him shortly?"

The detective smiled significantly in eloquent silence.

"I wonder," the other went on, "you didn't, having regard to the cards you played so well this afternoon, arrest him on suspicion and bring him up at the inquest."

Is your photo on page 590?

"Um! yes," Rossiter smiled complacently. "I dare-say it looked like that from the outside, only you see, Mr. Roylance, my best trump cards didn't happen to be in my hand till about five minutes before I played them. Why, sir, when I was having a glass of wine with you at the Seven Bells I'd no more idea of connecting Mr. John Branscombe, of the Abbey Farm, with the murder of John Barker than I should have had of connecting—well, say yourself with it."

"By Jove! really wonderful!" said the other, and the detective drew himself up like a bird preening its feathers when spoken prettily to.

"Not but what," he went on confidentially, his air of reticence relaxing, "if he'd happened to have been in the neighbourhood I'd have had him up even then before the court rose, only he went away three days ago, no doubt, when we know all the story, to get rid of some of the stuff."

"Where?"

"That's what we've got to find out and will find out. He left no address, even at the farm—don't that strengthen the chain, Mr. Roylance?"

"So far as circumstantial evidence goes," replied the other, watching the smoke lazily curling from the cigar between his fingers, "there doesn't seem to be a link wanting."

"No, sir," replied Rossiter briskly, "all that is wanting is for two of the links to be closed," and as he spoke he produced from his jacket pocket a pair of glittering handcuffs.

And as the man in the brougham looked at those, the cigar between his fingers for a moment shook.

"Ah," laughed the Inspector, "there is something creepy about the bracelets, ain't there, sir—to them as ain't used to 'em."

"Have you any clue?" asked the other man with a somewhat forced smile.

"Well, of course, I mustn't say too much, even to a gentleman like you, sir; but I fancy I shall as soon as he is in touch with one or more of his pals."

"I wonder who on earth they are?"

"I'd give something to know that, sir, but I fancy I shall somehow before long. Between you and me, I should think one of 'em is a bit dissatisfied about the way they divided the swag or something; or perhaps they've had a row over a girl. You know it's all rot about honour amongst thieves, that don't pass muster in Scotland Yard, we know 'em too well."

"So you think there's a split in the camp, eh? What makes you think that?"

"Well, in confidence, Mr. Roylance, one or two of those questions that I had put, and one or two searches I had made were inspired, and inspired by somebody who knows more about the murder of John Barker than you or I do."

The other man blew the long, low whistle of astonishment.

"Well, anyway, Inspector, I'm glad the case is in such clever hands. Have a cigar?"

"One of yours with pleasure, sir. If I might make bold to say it, your weeds and your wines are, like yourself, first quality. Good day, sir," and as Rossiter spun along puffing and inhaling the exquisite flavour of the perfect Havana, he soliloquised:

"One of the right sort, that man, class all over!"

Meantime, the subject of that probation, leaning back in his brougham puffing thoughtfully at his cigar, soliloquised:

"Gently does it, my friend Richard; you mustn't get too near the edge. So he's spotted the likeness, has he? Well, what of that? Tiger Dick's dead to him, dead to the world; only Scotland Yard says honour among thieves is all a fairy tale; by Jove! if only those two low-down scoundrels were as dead to the world as Tiger Dick."

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The famous Weidhaas treatment attacks
THE ROOT
OF THE DISEASE,

and has effected permanent and complete cures in some thousands of cases of ASTHMA, BRONCHITIS, Shortness of Breath, Blood Spitting, &c., many of which had been given up AS INCURABLE. No matter how long you may have suffered there is no doubt

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FREE OF CHARGE,
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MRS. TOMLINSON

(from a photo.)

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The Testimony of a Patient who was CURED of Asthma of 6 years' standing.

For about six years I suffered from violent attacks of Asthma, which were more severe at night. I had often to sit up in bed; my breathing and cough were so bad I thought I should suffocate, having also had pains in my head, the attacks lasting generally an hour, and coming on two or three times in a night, and always in the morning. I had a rattling and wheezing in my chest most of the time. I read in a paper of your cure, and then applied to you, and after following your directions I slept well at nights, breathing became easier and the night attacks entirely ceased. I shall recommend your Treatment to all who suffer from Asthma, as I think it must cure if the directions are fully carried out.—MARTHA TOMLINSON.
MALPAS. (Full address on application.)

£1,000 (ONE THOUSAND POUNDS).
THE DIRECTOR is prepared to pay to any Charitable Institution if the above is not a genuine extract from the patient's own letter. The original may be seen at the Paul Weidhaas Hygienic Institute by any bona-fide inquirers.

CURABLE

The carriage whizzed along through Fallowfield village, and suddenly its occupant was startled by a violent shock and the plunging of the horse, that for a moment had been pulled on to its haunches. Flinging open the door he at a glance ascertained the cause of the excitement. Out of the gate of the village school the children had come romping, shouting, laughing, and singing, and one tiny mite had darted right in front of the horse's forelegs and then, suddenly perceiving her danger, twisted, slipped, and fallen, and the rest had set up a scream.

Just in time, fortunately, the coachman had pulled the horse on to its haunches and swerved it aside. In less time than it takes to tell, the occupant of the carriage had leapt out and snatched up the child.

"Now, now," he said, "you're not hurt, you know, so don't cry, there's a good little girl, and you know you must look where you're going. Now don't bullyrag them, Warren, it's their nature to."

"You careless little ones! I'm always warning you." At the sound of that voice the man with the child still in his arms turned and stood face to face with a woman dressed quietly in grey, her bands of beautiful silky, bright brown hair neatly folded in massive coils, and half-concealed in a neat grey bonnet. A pair of big long-lashed violet eyes were fixed on him with all their gaze, and the colour had swiftly flown from a pair of comely cheeks. She stood there for a moment, her hand upon her heart, as though seized with a sudden spasm.

And he too stood there regarding her with all his eyes as though for the moment transfigured to stone.

"Oh, sir!" cried two or three of the children volubly, "this is our governess. Governess, this is the new Squire, and he's just picked Minnie Bartlett right from under the horse's feet, and he's given her a whole sixpence."

"So you are the governess of the village school?" he said. "We just now almost had an accident with one of your little pupils, but she's all right now, aren't you, Minnie?"

"Yeth, thir! thank you, thir!"

"And you're going to be a good little girl, and never run under horses' feet any more, aren't you?"

"Yeth, thir; pleathe, thir."

"May I ask your name?" he asked, transferring his little burden to the governess' arms, although the little burden had made herself quite comfortable.

"My name," was the reply, "is Mary Morrison."

"Thank you," he said, "and mine is Cyril Roylance, of Fallowfield Hall. I am pleased to have met you. Good afternoon," and lifting his hat, he re-entered his carriage, and the woman stood there with indrawn breath and contracted brows watching the rapidly receding vehicle and murmuring:

"Oh! how like—how like, in face, in form, in manner, in voice—and yet of course it can't be—no—no—it can't be he, he's dead, dead to the world."

CHAPTER XIV.

Branscombe's Narrow Escape.

"Jack! Jack! Oh, wherever have you been?"

"To London, Doris."

"Where have you been these dreadful three days?"

Again they stood at the lych-gate leading from the high road to the nut coppice, in the shadow of the trees.

"Oh, where have you been?" she moaned piteously.

"To London, Doris, hunting high and low for the friend I spoke of, the old school chum in Orders whom I went especially to ask to steer me through the red tape and routine of getting the special license and to promise to marry us. You see, I couldn't ask Hastie to risk his position at Fallowfield. And, oh yes; one other thing I've been doing, I've booked our passages for New York."

"Oh, Jack! but when did you do this?"

"Yesterday."

"But haven't you heard the news, the awful news; the county's ringing with it."

"The *country's* ringing with it," he said in a dazed tone. "I learnt the news last night just by chance, happening to hear my name on the lips of some strangers reading the extra special 'Evening News' at a neighbouring supper table in a restaurant, too late to return or wire."

"And I couldn't send to you, Jack; no one knew where you were, and they've found a weapon in your garden, a man saw you entering your house two hours after midnight, your sudden and secret departure that same morning, all these points have been taken against you; and oh, Jack! there's a verdict against you."

"I know! I can see," he answered in a wild, agonized tone. "Every step I have taken has helped to accuse me. I am as innocent as a child unborn, as the dead in their grave; but it has all pieced in like a mosaic, picturing my guilt in outline and in detail."

"And, Jack, you know what they found in the shrubbery in the laurel bushes outside your window?"

"Yes, I read it all coming down from town to-day; and I fear I did another foolish thing. I alighted at Mattingham instead of coming on to Hazelwick. I thought," and his voice grew hoarse and he seemed to speak the words with pain and difficulty, "I'd like to see you and talk things over before—before they took me. Oh, my poor darling!" and he groaned.

"But, Jack," she whispered, looking up into his face with a wild, staring look, "what do you think of doing?"

"First and foremost," he said firmly, with, so it seemed, all his manhood and self-reliance coming back to him, "I set you free. There can be no promise and no pledge between us until my name is freed from the stain, even the shadow of the stain of suspicion now defacing it. And next, I go straight to the police, surrender to this false charge, and face it."

"No, no!" she cried. "Whether by chance or evil design, there is a web around you, a web so fatally complete that, walking straight into its meshes, you would be foredoomed. I know you are innocent, love's own true instinct tells me; but in the eyes of the world, my poor, dear Jack, you are guilty. The world, so prompt and prone to judge, has found you guilty in the world's own wilful way before trial; the busybodies are putting together piece by piece that mosaic you spoke of, forming in the concrete that pattern of suspicion in the abstract. Oh, Jack! I won't let you go, I won't let you be branded with the stigma of arrest. You must wait, Jack, wait to give us time to think; and, while you are waiting, I will work and will unweave those threads, those circumstantial threads out of which they are trying to make the strands of the rope to hang you by!"

Could this be Doris, tender, gentle, girlish Doris, this woman vibrate with strong purpose, with dilating nostrils, flashing eyes, and breast heaving to the deep breaths on which her words surged out?

Even while she was speaking they started at the sound of horses' hoofs. Round the bend of the lane they saw the dark shadow of a horseman, another man walking at his bridle.

"The patrol!" whispered Doris, "quick, Jack, you must hide!"

There was no time to argue or reason, even to think. Clasping her arms round him, she half-led, half-dragged him, inside the gate and into the ambush of shrubs lining the narrow path it led to.

(*To be continued.*)

Read "Dead to the World."

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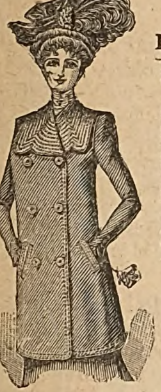

This stylish Jacket can also be ordered 33in. long, at **11/6**; 36in. long, at **12/6**; and 40in. long, at **13/6**. The perfection of style and value.

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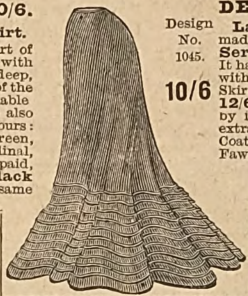

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Ladies' Coat and Skirt Costume, made in Allen Foster & Co.'s **Specialite Serge** or **Venetian Cloth,** all colours. It has three-quarter Coat and Velvet Collar, with a full and well-made flounce Skirt. **Exceptional value** for **12/6,** carriage paid 6d. extra. Skirt by itself will be **6/6,** carriage 5d. extra. This Costume in good Melton Coating will be **19/6.** Colours: Navy, Fawn, Grey, or Black. Satisfaction Guaranteed.

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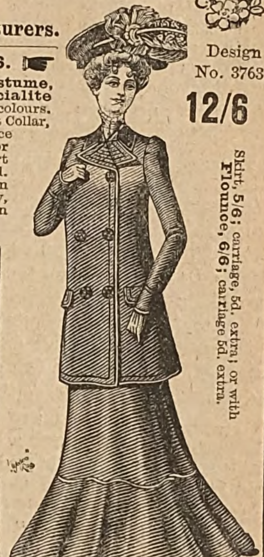

Skirt, 5/6; carriage 5d. extra; or with Flounce, 6/6; carriage 5d. extra.

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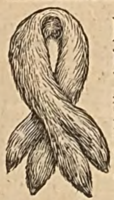

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in Black or Sable, **1/6½** and **2/11**; Opossum, **3/6**; Thibet, **3/11** and **7/6**; Muffion, **6/11**; Japanese Mink, **8/11**; Marmot, **5/6**; carriage 3d. extra. Special line in **Fur Muffs,** Black or Sable, **3/11**; carriage 3d. extra.

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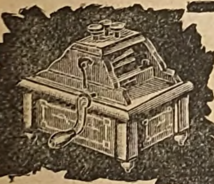

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CURED. This can be done with or without patient's knowledge. Send me a stamp and I will tell you how. (Send no money.) Address, in confidence, Mrs. C. H. (Room 8), 195 Oxford Street, London, W.

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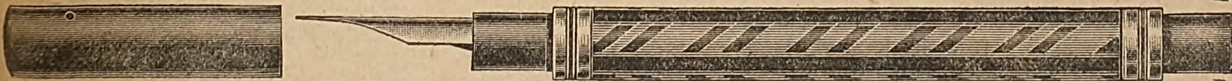
This Pen, post free 2/6, consists of a beautifully-chased vulcanite barrel, finished with an "Imperial" gold band at top and bottom, with accurately-fitting cap, one of our everlasting wear real electro gold nibs, and adjustable feed.



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Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a *P.W.* penknife to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, November 11th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Mr. Ernest Franks, of 31 Plaistow Road, West Ham, Essex, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

TARDY ARRIVAL AT A DINNER PARTY: "I am afraid I am too late, dear Mrs. Smith." Mrs. Smith (effusively): "Oh, dear, no, you could never come too late."

OLD LADY (suffering from hiccough): "Young man, I want—hic—to get some liquor—hic——" Chemist: "We don't sell intoxicating liquors here; besides, madam, I think you have had enough alrea——" Old Lady (frigidly): "Some liquorice—hic——"

"REMEMBER, children," said the teacher, "that even the hairs of your head are all numbered." "What's the number of this?" asked a smart boy, at the same time pulling a hair from his head. "Number one, Johnny," said the teacher, "and these" (pulling out a few more) "are numbers two, three, four, five, and six. Anything else you want to know?" "Not now, mum," said the smart boy, rubbing his head.

WE were watching an exciting finish for the Cesarewitch, between Balsarrock and Black Sand, the former winning by half-a-length. There was a wild cheer, and simultaneously I felt my hat lifted off my head from behind, and, looking up, saw my headgear spinning many yards high in the air. I turned round to resent the liberty, when a buxom Yorkshire lass behind me exclaimed: "Aa beg tha pardon, lad, fur usin' thi hat sa freely, but Aa couldn't git marne fro' mi heaad 'caus o' t' pins."

HE had come from the country to his first ball, and was more than a little—surprised, shall we say?—at the immateriality of the ladies' dresses. "What do you think of me?" asked his charming little cousin, "is not my dress lovely?" "It's very—er—simple," responded the young man with caution. "Simple! I've a good mind to shake you for that, you unkind thing. Do you know what this dress cost? Why, thirty golden sovereigns wouldn't cover it." He looked at her steadily with his frank, blue eyes, and stroked his chin. "Well, perhaps not," he agreed, "but I should say thirty-one would if they were spread out well."

* THEY were a happy young couple from Highworth, and were on their way to Cumberland. They had to change trains at Preston, and an obliging porter, whilst struggling with their luggage, made mental note of the fact that the young lady's hair was dotted with rice. Presently he approached the glad young man, and, pulling a folded paper from a pocket, said: "There's a present for you, sir, with the company's compliments." "Indeed!" said the traveller. "What is it?" "A railway map, sir." "Oh, thank you. And what are these marks in blue pencil?" "There's the beauty of it, sir," said the smiling porter. "Those marks show just where the tunnels are, and their length."

IN a country school near Glasgow, an amusing incident happened the other day. The teacher, as in duty bound, was inveighing against smoking, and lecturing his class on the evils attending it. Suddenly he saw a grin overspreading the faces of his scholars, and on inquiring the cause an innocent young cherub yelled out: "Please, sir, your pipe's sticking out of your pocket." The smoking lecture was curtailed.

"MARRYING a man," observed the Philosophical Girl, "is strangely like buying a piece of china-ware. It may have a break or a flaw in it that you cannot see when you buy it, but time reveals it. So time brings to light the hidden flaws in the man's character and shows just what kind of matrimonial bargain one has made." "But there is no need of buying a piece of china with a break in it," said the Disputatious Girl. "One can always test it to see if it rings true." "Yes," sighed the other, "but in the case of marrying, you know, it is always the man who does the ringing."

"DON'T want any," said a London housekeeper from her second-story window to a street vendor, whose waggon was standing a few steps away, and who had just pulled the bell. "Don't want any what?" gruffly asked the arab, who hadn't had even a chance to tell what his wares were. "What have you got?" asked the housekeeper, whose curiosity was getting the better of her annoyance. "Oh, never mind. You don't want any. Git up, Bob!" "Now, I wonder what that exasperating man is selling, anyhow?" she exclaimed, as the waggon disappeared round the corner.

THE conversation in the village inn the other evening turned on angling. "Funny thing about that salmon Brown caught last Tuesday," said Jones the tailor. "In what way?" queried several of those present. "Well," replied Jones, "he went out angling on Monday and lost his spectacles in the river. On Tuesday he went out again, hooked a fine fish, and after a tough struggle succeeded in landing it." "Well, there's nothing funny about that," interposed several voices. "No; I don't think there is," continued Jones, "but the funny thing about the fish is that it was actually wearing Brown's spectacles when the latter landed it, see!" The subject thereupon was promptly changed.

A MAN entered a pawnbroker's shop in a village near Barnsley and laid on the counter a pair of bronze ornaments, at sight of which an exclamation of surprised delight bubbled to the manager's lips. "Here's a stroke of luck!" he reflected, instantly resuming his customary mask of apathy. "How often, I wonder, has my wife vowed that she'd give her ears for a pair of bronzes like that? I'll buy them out and out, no matter what they cost me." So he started a deal with the man, and secured the bronzes, after twenty minutes' haggling, for a five-pound note. Then, flushed with triumph, he carried his purchase home, and was welcomed with outstretched arms by his little wife. "Oh, Harry, how good of you to bring them!" she exclaimed, kissing him warmly. "The man in the market-place actually wanted a sovereign for them and wouldn't give me credit; so I conceived the bright idea of sending him to you for the money. I knew you would beat him down to a more reasonable figure, you old darling; you're such a wonderful bargain-maker!" And the poor manager, directly he could get away, went to his room and pommeled the punching-ball for five minutes without stopping.

Is your photo on page 590?

BILE BEANS FOR BILIOUSNESS

CURE INFLUENZA.

BILE BEANS FOR BILIOUSNESS

CURE RHEUMATISM

BILE BEANS FOR BILIOUSNESS

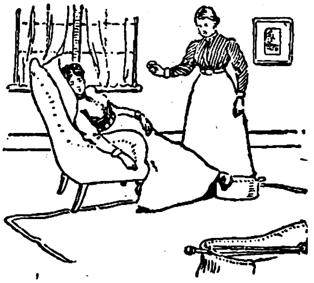
CURE INDIGESTION.

BILE BEANS FOR BILIOUSNESS

A WHOLE FAMILY CURED.

MOTHER, SON, AND DAUGHTER RESTORED TO HEALTH.

The truly wonderful recovery of Mrs. Turner, of Moorgate, Retford, and her son and daughter, has attracted considerable attention, so sensational is it in nature. Said Mrs. Turner to a reporter from the *Retford and Gainsboro' Times*—"For a long time I suffered so from weakness and debility that it was with difficulty I moved about. I had a constant feeling of heaviness at the stomach, and do what I would I could not get rid of it. My breathing was laboured, and caused great pain. Many a time, when outside, I had to stand still in order to get my breath, so bad had I become. One day a neighbour gave me a few Bile Beans to see if they would do me any good. I thought they did, and so I purchased some. From the time I began to take them I have gradually improved, until now I am quite well again." Upon being questioned Mrs. Turner's daughter said she also had suffered from nervous debility. She said: "My strength left me, I became depressed, and lost all interest in everything. So dreadfully low did I get that I could hardly move about, and I felt as if I should like to go to bed and not get up again. My mother, who said it was dreadful to see me so ill, gave me some of the Bile Beans, and I determined to give them a fair trial. The result is most satisfactory. Although only a few weeks have elapsed since I began to take them, my weakness and depression are gone, and my strength has returned. The Beans are certainly a wonderful medicine." Before the reporter left, Mrs. Turner said: "A short time ago my son could not go about his work in consequence of sick headache and dizziness. I gave him some of the Beans, and gradually his ailments ceased to trouble him. The Beans have done him worlds of good, and he is not slow to recommend them to others."



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IMPORTANT WARNING.

Bile Beans are *not* sold *loose*, being put up in sealed boxes only, bearing the name of the inventor "CHARLES FORDE." All others are fraudulent imitations, and you are warned not to accept any but the genuine.

A FREE SAMPLE

The proprietors have so much faith in the efficacy of Bile Beans, that they will forward a sample free, and a book on the liver and digestive ailments, if you send your name and address, and a penny stamp (to cover return postage) along with accompanying coupon. Address the Bile Bean Manufacturing Company, Central Distributing Depot, Greek St., Leeds.

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BILE BEANS.
Short Stories, Nov. 2.

BILE BEANS FOR BILIOUSNESS

CURE COLDS.

BILE BEANS FOR BILIOUSNESS

CURE CONSTIPATION

BILE BEANS FOR BILIOUSNESS

CURE HEADACHE.

BILE BEANS FOR BILIOUSNESS

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

PERHAPS there are some of your friends—and they might have friends, too—who have not yet seen our new Photo Competition on page 590. If so, don't lose any time in drawing their attention to the fact, as it is more than likely that their portraits may appear, and as they have to send in their own claims, think how unfriendly they would consider you if you did not put them in the way of getting a £5 note—especially as it means so little trouble to yourself—merely telling them of the competition either in conversation or by postcard, or sending a copy of *Short Stories* to them.

This week we have to chronicle the names of four winners, and to each of these fortunate individuals a £5 note has been sent. Their names are:

MR. JOHN HOLLAND (No. 16),
57 Richard Street,
Cilfynydd,
Near Pontypridd, Wales.

MR. W. J. WILLIAMS (No. 17),
1A, Obelisk Buildings,
Lewisham, S.E.

MRS. W. COOK (No. 19),
Axholme Cottage,
Cross Street,
Crowle, Lincs.

MR. JAMES THOMAS (No. 20),
6 Baxter Terrace,
Glyncorrw,
Cymmer,
Glamorganshire.

⁂

ADVICE TO READERS ON VARIOUS MATTERS.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

"MINNIE" is only twenty-one, and yet every now and then she discovers that feminine horror, a grey hair. This distresses her very much, as she fears she is ageing too rapidly.

Perhaps it will comfort her to learn that many persons begin to show grey hairs while they are yet in their twenties, and some while in their teens, and that it does not imply premature decay of the constitution. It is purely a local phenomenon, and may coexist with unusual bodily vigour. Many feeble persons, and others who have suffered extremely, both mentally and physically, do not blanch a hair till past middle life; while others, without assignable cause, lose their capillary colouring matter rapidly when about forty years of age. Men and women grow grey about the same period in life. In men the hair and beard rarely change equally. The one is usually darker than the other for several years, but there seems no general rule as to which whitens first.

"QUILLDRIVER" says that the nature of his employment compels him to frequently go without food for a long time, and he is anxious to know if this is hurtful.

Most decidedly it is. One of the most important conditions to a healthy state is, that meals should be taken at regular intervals. Unfortunately, in the present age of hurry, a strict observance of the rule is almost impossible, but a little more attention might be paid to it than is usually the case. Nowadays, both men and women rush about and become so absorbed in their affairs that the period of hunger is allowed to pass and the period of fatigue and depression to set in. Once the second stage is reached, the desire for food is gone, and after many hours' abstinence the man or woman is too exhausted to digest a meal when either of them gets it. To avoid this extreme, it is only necessary to take the most light and rapid repast during the hungry stage. A few biscuits carried in the pocket will be quite sufficient.

APROPOS of the late terrible gale, a correspondent sends me the following particulars of what was probably the greatest storm this country ever experienced. It raged throughout England on November 26th and 27th, 1703. The devastation on land was immense, and in the harbours and on the coasts the loss in shipping and in lives was still greater. The damage sustained in London alone was calculated at £2,000,000 sterling. The number of persons drowned in the floods of the Severn and Thames, and lost on the coast of Holland, and in ships blown from their anchors and never heard of afterwards, is thought to have been 8,000. Twelve men-of-war, with 1,800 men on board, were lost within sight of their own shore. Trees were torn up by the roots, 17,000 in Kent alone. The Eddystone Lighthouse was destroyed, and in it the ingenious contriver of it, Winstanley, and the persons who were with him. Multitudes of cattle perished; in one level 15,000 sheep were drowned.

"VIRTUOSO."—Yes, you are quite right; there are many things in this life better than money. But the trouble is that, even if you can get them without money, it is hard to get much satisfaction out of them on the same terms. Thus, of course, it is very nice indeed to be good and know it; but, unfortunately, the good man gets hungry just as soon as the wicked one, and needs just as many clothes to keep him comfortable and warm. That is the worst of some of these dear old crusted moral sayings; they don't get down deep enough into things.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I AM open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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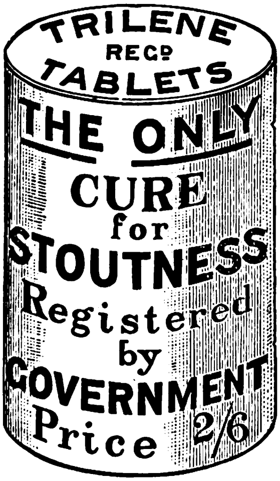

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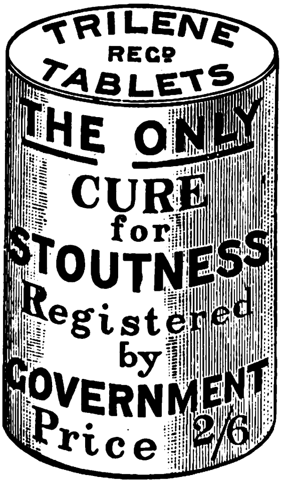

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

Mrs. DARNLEY SMITH, Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, writes: "Trilene Tablets have reduced my weight very much. I am so much lighter in every way, and better in health."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.

"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 21lb. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me.

"Yours sincerely, M. A. HEYWOOD."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mr. WALKER, 236 London Road, Hazelgrove, Stockport, says: "I have used one box and am 14lb. lighter. Send another soon as possible."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. E. ALEXANDER, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They have reduced me quite 2 stone, and I am now quite cured."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Mrs. TAYLOR-ROBINSON, of Tweed Green House, Whalley Range, Manchester, says: "I feel so much lighter and better since taking your Tablets, and am so much thinner that I hardly recognise myself."

Miss A. LONG, of 9 South Parade, Waterford, writes: "Your Tablets have reduced me 14lb."

Miss A. DAWSON, 62 Orchard Street, Weston-super-Mare, says: "Glad to say the Tablets have sufficiently reduced me. I shall always recommend them."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

Mrs. DREW, of 1 Bellevue Gardens, The Nursery, Devizes, writes: "I took Tablets some years ago; they soon reduced me and I have not got stout since Send me a box for my mother."

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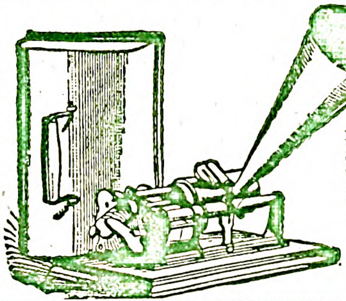

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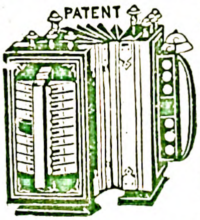

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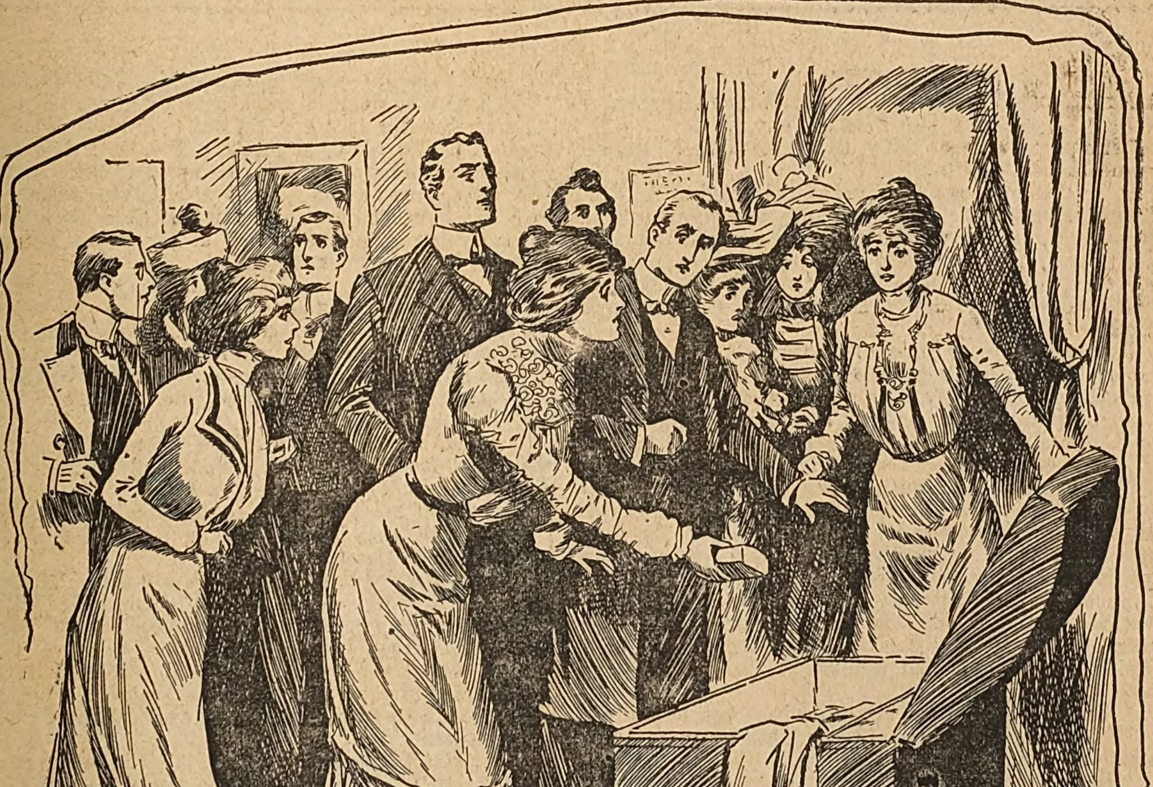
SHORT STORIES

No. 672.] For the Week Ending November 16th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

Adventures of an Actress.



At the bottom of her trunk was discovered a green Morocco case containing one set of the famous diamonds.

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THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

XV.—IN THE FELON'S DOCK.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

A Mysterious Meeting—"They are Worth a Thousand Pounds"—A Fair Cat's-paw.

"It's past the time. Why doesn't he come? Has he begun to break faith?"

It was a man who uttered these words. A well-dressed, handsome fellow, with a silky brown moustache disguising a mouth which, but for the hair that hid it, would have been at once marked by physiognomists as the one weak part in a face otherwise exceptionally well favoured by nature. The man's lips were hard and cruel.

It was in Princes Street, Edinburgh, a thoroughfare famed all the world over for beauty. It was one of those rare mornings in early winter, with a cloudless sky and keen exhilarating atmosphere, a morning to make the blood dance, and even the most pessimistic feel that, after all, life has something worth living for.

The man was standing beneath that graceful Gothic structure, the work of a Scotch peasant boy—the Scott Memorial. His eyes roved impatiently down the busy street and along the handsome line of shops that were lost in the distance in the cool morning mist.

Suddenly a hand was laid on his shoulder. He wheeled round rapidly, to be confronted by another man, a short, sturdy figure with clean-shaven face, upon which was none of that refinement that lay upon his own countenance.

"Ah, David," said the man who had been first at the *rendezvous*, "you are here at last. I had begun to think that you weren't going to turn up."

"Have you ever known David to break his word!" asked the other curtly, "where you are concerned? I am late because—well, because I couldn't help it. But I've got a lot to tell you though it can't be here. Come along up to the snuggery in the Canongate. We can talk there without fear of being overheard."

The two men at once set off, and walking swiftly past the way to the station, held on up Cockburn Street and into the old town. Walking silently down the Canongate they came to a pause at a public-house just before the Tolbooth, which they entered quickly, and with the air of men who knew their locality well.

The man called David led the way upstairs to a small private room, rather more comfortably furnished than might have been expected from the house and its surroundings.

"Now I daresay you are wondering, Phil," he said, "why I have summoned you here to Edinburgh in such a hurry, but the fact is I am on to a thing that is worth a little trouble, as pretty a little haul as ever a gentleman of our persuasion attempted to lift. In the first place, you have no doubt noticed the posters all over Edinburgh announcing that the *Good Samaritan* Company is engaged to appear at the Royal Lyceum Theatre for one week only?"

Phil gave vent to a quick exclamation of surprise.

"What on earth is your game now?" he said; "and why should the advent of the *Good Samaritan* Company have anything to do with you?"

"Not so fast, Mr. Philip Chesterton," broke in David. "You seem to be mighty flurried all of a sudden. Give me time and I'll tell you all."

"I couldn't help being surprised," answered the other, with a half-laugh; "but the fact is there's a little girl in the company that I'm rather sweet on."

"Now you are not going to tell me," cried David, "that you've been bowled over by the charms of the beautiful Miss Hazel Harlow?"

"No," answered Chesterton with a laugh. "I don't fly quite so high. No, it's a little girl called Millie D'Esterre, who, happens, funnily enough, to be rather fonder of me than I am of her."

"Ah, you good-looking ladykillers!" broke in David. "You never give us poor beggars a chance." Then his voice changed, and his sharp little eyes narrowed themselves into slits.

"It couldn't have been better!" he said, with almost diabolical glee. "It's just the very thing that will be of use to us—this fondness of Millie D'Esterre for handsome Phil Chesterton. It'll mean a thousand pounds in our pockets at least."

"Whatever do you mean?" cried Chesterton in great agitation. "Here, we've had enough of this beating about the bush—what's the game?"

"Since you and I went into partnership, Phil," came the answer, "and turned ourselves into a very limited company for the appropriation of other people's valuables we've had one or two pretty good successes. Well, I must tell you that one of the leading ladies in the *Good Samaritan* Company is a Miss Hetty Morton, a girl who, sometime ago, had the good luck to attract the spendthrift young nobleman the Marquis of Basingford. As an appreciation of the fair Hetty's charms and ability the young nobleman, in a fit of generous folly, presented the girl with a necklet of diamonds that had been heirlooms in his family for many a long year. As you can understand, his mother, the Dowager Duchess of Porlock, was nearly off her head with rage to think that the young nobleman could throw such pearls, well, it was just the same as to say, Hetty seemed swine to the old lady. She raved and swore in Duchess-like language, begged and intreated, and even wrote to the girl offering to buy them back at her own figure. But Miss Hetty laughed at her. She'd got the trinkets and she was going to keep them, and kept them she has till this day. Now the reason why I've asked you to join me in Edinburgh so soon after our little *coup* at Buxton, is because I've got my eye on the Porlock diamonds, and having just heard from you that there's a girl in the Company who's sweet on you, well, it strikes me those jewels are as good as got."

Chesterton listened to his confederate with attention.

"That's all very well," he said, "and the trinkets are undoubtedly worth the trying for, but I don't quite see how the fact of Millie D'Esterre being spoons on me is going to help us."

"You're denser than I thought you were," answered the other coolly, lighting a cigarette. "I see I shall have to be more explicit. Could we not, somehow, or could you not get speech with Miss Millie and endeavour to get her to assist us?"

"In other words," broke in Chesterton, "Millie is to lift the jewels?"

"Exactly. But I don't want you to go to her and say: 'Please, Millie, go and steal the Porlock diamonds.' In the first place, does the girl know all about you—about all your antecedents, and where you come from, and that you are—well, at home, Mr. Philip, and abroad a gentleman cracksman—to put it bluntly."

Chesterton laughed.

"I'm not quite such a fool as I look, David. To tell you the honest truth, the girl doesn't know who I am. I was introduced to her in London as a Mr. John Smith, and my introducer said that that was the name by which I elected to be known, as though I were in reality somebody much more exalted. This was said to impress her at a supper-party. Well, I saw her repeatedly after that, but she never found out who I really was."

David brought his hand down upon his thigh with a resounding smack.

"Upon my word," he said exultantly, "wasn't it old Shakespeare who said, 'There's a destiny that shapes our ends,' or something like that? Hang it all, Fate is working for us. You couldn't have done it more neatly if you had tried." Then his voice changed. "Now don't you see how it can be done?" he cried. "Listen, attentively. From this moment you are no more John Smith or Philip Chesterton, you are the elder brother of the Marquis of Basingford, in other words, the Duke of Porlock. You have come to Edinburgh on the track of the family jewels which were stolen—yes, stolen, why not—for you can say that Basingford had no right to appropriate them and give them to Hetty Morton. The family have deputed you to try and get those jewels back by fair means or foul. Will Millie help you? Why, of course she will. She'll find some means of getting hold of the diamonds and then, well, there are plenty of steamers sailing for foreign parts from Leith; in fact, there is a little German—the skipper of a Hamburg boat —who would land us at Rotterdam at a word from me. What do you say, Phil? Is it worth trying?"

The other paused, though there was nothing on his face to indicate the thoughts passing through his mind.

"Yes, it's worth trying," he said suddenly with apparent nonchalance; "and I'll see if I can get word with Millie this afternoon. I'll meet you at the theatre to-night. We can see the play, and I'll tell you what I've done after the play is over. How does that suit you?"

"Excellently, and I'll run down to Leith and see if the *Schwalbe*, which is the name of the steamer belonging to my German pal, is in the docks. If she is I'll get word with the skipper so as to have everything ready in case our little business does come off."

CHAPTER II.

An Unexpected Meeting—Love, the Destroyer—A Base Plot.

"Millie, as I'm a sinner!"

"Jack, by all that's holy!"

The scene was again Princes Street on the afternoon of the same day that had seen the concoction of the plan between the two cracksmen. The *Good Samaritan* Company had arrived in Edinburgh on the Sunday, and were now prepared to open the campaign of the week in modern Athens.

Millie D'Esterre was tripping along Princes Street gazing in the shops spread with so many alluring baits to catch feminine cupidity.

Philip Chesterton, alias John Smith, had known that if there was one place in which he could be quite sure of finding his quarry, it would be Princes Street, and his intuition had proved correct, hence the greetings with which we open the chapter.

"What are you doing in Edinburgh, Jack?" asked Millie tenderly with heightened colour.

"Need you ask?" came the answer. "Did I not know that the *Good Samaritan* Company had come up North? That was my chief reason, in order to have another glimpse of the little girl with whom I have passed so many happy hours in London town. But there is another reason, and that also is connected with you. Frankly, I want your help."

"Want my help? How can I help you?"

"Jack Smith" looked at his watch. It was just three o'clock. "Look here," he said, "let's go for a drive. We can go round to the Queen's Drive, past Holyrood and have a look at Arthur's Seat. Then we will come back and have tea in Princes Street, and by that time I shall have been able to tell you how you can help me."

He hailed a carriage from a rank close at hand and helped his fair companion inside the conveyance. He gave the driver his instructions, and then getting in beside his companion, closed the window and sank back on the cushioned seat beside her.

"That's cosy," he said tenderly, and threw her an ardent look.

Millie's heart was beating wildly. The man with whom she had fallen hopelessly in love had once more crossed her path. She thought of nothing but the intoxicating happiness she had felt at being in his presence.

"First of all," began the man in a low voice, "I have a confession to make to you, Millie. My real name is not John Smith."

"As if I did not know that," answered the girl quickly; "though I think Jack is a sweet name. I do hope you didn't deceive me in that, anyhow, but that one part of your name at least is Jack."

A melodious laugh answered her. "No, I am afraid that even the name of Jack must be taken away," he replied; "though if you like to call me Jack, well, any name sounds sweet from those lips."

"But what is your name?" said the girl impetuously. "I've known you so long as Jack Smith that it is only fair you should now let me into the secret."

"I'll do that with pleasure, but it must be a secret, dear, for reasons that I'll explain afterwards. Promise that you won't tell anyone what I am going to tell you. And tell me also that you haven't forgotten me altogether?"

"You know I haven't!" cried the girl passionately; "I'm not that sort. I haven't forgotten you, and I don't think I ever shall. And I'll promise not to tell anyone though I don't see what harm it can do."

"You will presently," came the significant answer.

He took hold of her hand and caressed it.

"My real name, sweetheart," he said, "is Ralph Lionel Despencer Lavington D'Arcy, and that's not all."

The girl gazed at him in amazement, as well she might.

"Now you're joking again," she said petulantly.

"No I am not," came the earnest answer; "though you may be quite sure I had no hand in the adoption of such a mouthful. They are all family names, dearest, and if you must have the rest of it, well, it ends up with 'Duke of Porlock.' Now perhaps you can understand why I called myself plain Jack Smith that memorable evening when first we met."

Millie went pale.

"The Duke of Porlock!" she almost gasped. "Then I must call you Your Grace and be very distant. I rather wish you had remained plain John Smith."

"Don't look so tragic," came the gay answer, "I'll be Jack Smith to you still, darling. The accident of my being a Duke"—it was well for the girl that she could not see the grim lines of his mouth behind the silky moustache—"has not taken away the fact that I am still a man, a man, with all the passions and longings of any individual, who still has a very tender spot in his heart for little Millie D'Esterre."

"Do you mean that?" cried the girl with a sob, taking his hand in both of hers, "or are you only saying that to please me?"

"No, no! I care for you very much indeed, Millie, and I shall care for you all the more if you will try and help me in a matter that is one of the reasons for my letting myself be known as plain Jack Smith—a matter in which you can help my family as much as you do me. Have you ever heard of the Marquis of Basingford?"

"Why, rather, he was Hetty Morton's pet mash. Everyone knew that; and didn't he give her those splendid diamonds? Why every girl in the Company envies her those."

"Exactly. It is about those very diamonds that I want to speak to you."

The girl looked mystified and not a little curious.

"Perhaps," went on the false Duke, "you never heard the true history of those diamonds; that they were not the Marquis of Basingford's to give, but jewels that should have been held in trust as family heirlooms. I was abroad at the time the gift was made, or you may be sure I should have put a stop to it. And now, what I want to ask you is to help me to get the diamonds back for the honour of the family."

The girl gasped.

"Do you mean you want me to steal them for you, Jack?" she said in an almost awestruck voice.

"Well, that's rather a hard way of putting it, dearest," answered the other with a half-laugh. "It was really a theft to give them away. You see, with an old family like ours that has always prided itself upon its possessions, it was almost a criminal act of Basingford's. So will you help me?" Then his voice changed and became more tender again. "And perhaps you wouldn't be the first actress who has become a Duchess." This in a meaning tone.

The girl blushed rosy red. With eyes that sparkled brightly, infatuated with love and ambition, she gazed into the cracksman's face.

"Do you mean that if I help you to get the jewels," she said, "you will marry me?"

The man nodded.

"Then I'll do it," she went on in a low voice. "I think I would do anything to become your wife even if you were only plain Jack Smith. There, isn't that a bold confession to make?"

The man's heart was beating exultantly. Stifling a faint feeling of compunction that had risen even in his crime-stained heart at the trick he was playing, he went on:

"And I am very fond of you too, dear, as you see. And now, tell me how do you think you are going to get hold of the Porlock diamonds?"

"Well, as you can easily understand," went on the girl, "Hetty has kept a pretty good eye on them, and she has gone further than that. She has had an imitation set made exactly like the others which she wears on the stage. These she keeps together with the genuine set in her trunk. As you can understand, it won't be too easy to get hold of them, but, as luck has it, I am sharing her dressing-room."

The man gave vent to a low whistle.

"So there are two sets, are there?" he said. Then with the quick instincts of the criminal, he continued: "I've got an idea. Couldn't you pop the false jewels into somebody else's box and then go to the fair Hetty and accuse that person of theft? Then you could get hold of the real ones and the family would come into possession of its own again without the least chance of your being found out."

Millie paled. She had not quite bargained for this. To implicate somebody else had not been part of her programme. She hesitated, and the villain beside her, noticing her reluctance, brought all the powers of his manly fascination to play upon the infatuated girl.

"If you really cared for me, darling," he said in a low voice, "I am sure you would do anything for me. Think of the service you are doing to our family—your family, it may be some day—for that diamond necklet ought really to encircle the neck of the future Duchess of Porlock and nobody else."

At his words the last remnant of the girl's better feelings were shattered. From that moment she was Chesterton's heart and soul, and entered into the spirit of the plot with zest.

"There's one girl in the company," she muttered, "whom I can't stand, and whom Hetty hates, and would be only too ready to see in a tight fix. I mean Hazel Harlow, our lead. All the men are wild on her and the manager thinks of nobody but her. It's 'Miss Harlow must do this,' and 'Miss Harlow must have that,' and 'Miss Harlow's wishes to be consulted,' until the rest of the crowd sometimes wish Miss Harlow at the bottom of the seas. Now if I could get suspicion fixed on her she might get the sack from the company, and I, for one, would only be too happy to see her come a cropper."

"Millie, you're a wonder!" said her false lover enthusiastically, "everything is dovetailing beautifully. Now I tell you what. If you can get hold of those jewels and work the game on Miss Harlow, meet me inside the Waverley Station near the booking-office, for Carlisle and England. That will be the safest of all places to meet, because there is always such a crowd there. I'll be at the tryst at noon to-morrow, and, anyhow, if nothing has happened you'll be able to report progress."

CHAPTER III.

"What were you Doing in my Room?"—Accused of Theft.

It was six o'clock. Hazel Harlow was just entering the stage-door of the Lyceum Theatre when an attendant said to Hazel:

"Will you please go to Miss Morton's dressing-room, she wants to see you."

Rather surprised at this unusual request, for hitherto Hetty Morton had always rather shunned than courted her company, Hazel obeyed the summons, only to find the dressing-room empty. She waited there a few moments, and as no one appeared, she hurried out to run right into the arms of Millie D'Esterre, who looked at her, as she thought, in a somewhat curious way. The meaning of this was to be brought home to her later on.

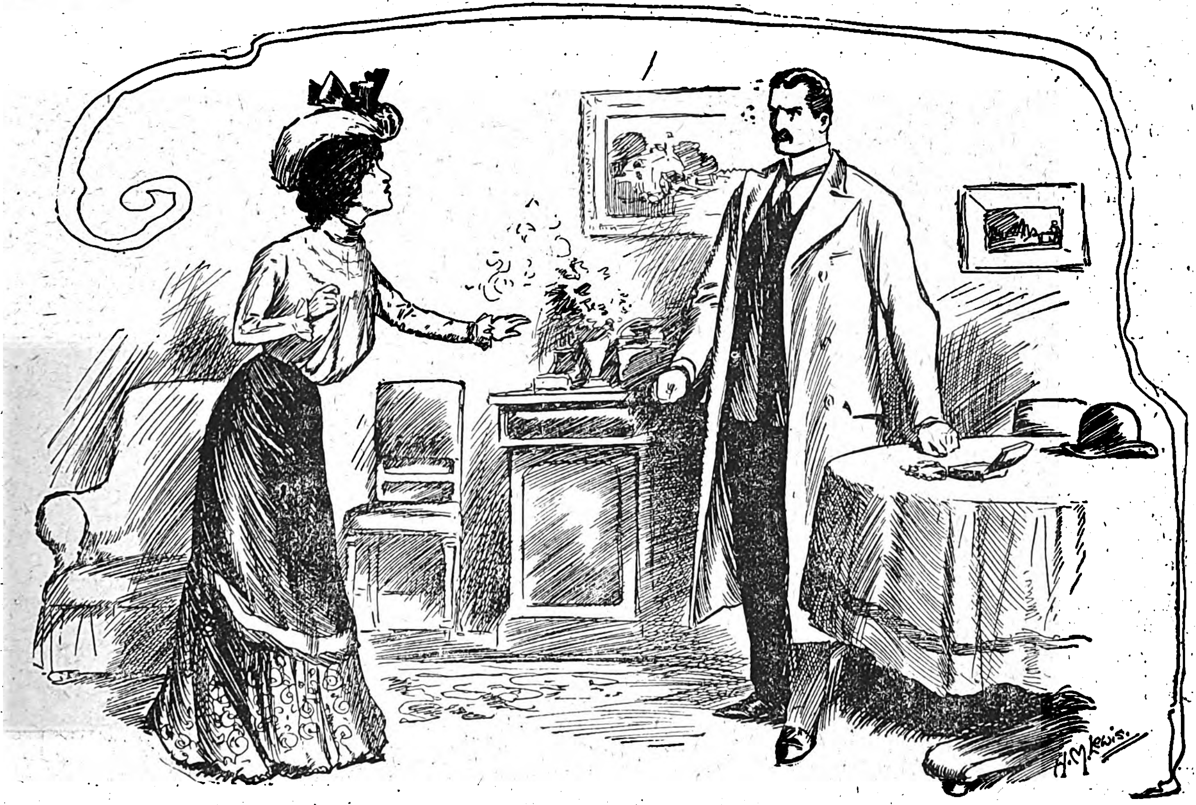
"Have you seen Miss Morton?" asked Hazel lightly.

"No," answered the other curtly, and passed on.

Half-an-hour passed away and everyone more or less had come to the theatre to set about getting ready for the evening performance. Suddenly an electrifying piece of news went round the theatre precincts. "Miss Morton's jewels have disappeared." The actress had gone to her trunk to take out the trinkets, to find that both cases identical, and each containing a necklet—one false the other real—had disappeared.

Hetty Morton was beside herself, and then a more startling development was set on foot. Rumour had it that somebody connected with the theatre had appropriated the diamonds. Orders were given for everyone's dressing-room to be systematically searched. Naturally an immense amount of indignation was raised at such a proceeding.

"It's ridiculous!" said Venables, "to think that people like Miss Harlow and Mr. Monteith and Miss Lovelace and myself should have done such a thing."



"You can't mean that, Jack," she said in a low voice. "You must be joking."

"We'll begin with Miss Harlow," she said; "I'm not going to lose those jewels without every effort being made to recover them."

Secretly indignant though she was Hazel said nothing to the excited actress, but bade her courteously turn out everything in her dressing-room. This the girl did. Judge of Hazel's feelings when, at the bottom of her trunk was discovered a green morocco case containing one set of the famous diamonds.

Words fail to describe the scene that followed. Hazel protested with all her strength that it was not her hand that had placed the jewels there.

"Then what were you doing in my room," asked Hetty, "some time ago? You were seen coming out of there by Miss D'Esterre."

"Why you sent for me yourself," cried Hazel.

"I never did," came the answer.

The person who had given the message to Hazel was sought out and she stoutly denied having given any such message. Here was evidence most damning to Hazel's innocence, though of course her friends absolutely refused to believe that it was she who had taken the jewels.

For reasons best known to herself Hetty made no mention that there had been two sets of jewels, and this omission on her part was to bear unsuspected fruit later on.

The jaundiced actress was for sending for a policeman there and then, and it was only by Venables' and Monteith's most urgent remonstrance that she was prevented from so doing.

"Very well, then," said Hetty, "I shall have Miss Harlow charged in court later on. I shall get out a warrant for her arrest with all haste. Was ever circumstantial evidence stronger?"

Remonstrances, protestations, arguments availed nothing. Jenny Lovelace, Eric and Venables, and, indeed, all those who knew in their hearts that Hazel was absolutely incapable of such a crime, begged the girl to reconsider her action. Even Hazel's protestations availed nothing.

"In consideration to you, Mr. Venables," said Hetty, "I won't wreck to-night's performance, but will wait till to-morrow, but justice shall and must be done. If Miss Harlow can clear herself well and good. If not, I must only protect myself and others."

In making this statement Hetty was urged on by two considerations; the first was personal spite against Hazel; the second was a desire to somehow discover what had become of the duplicate set. The genuine jewels could only be distinguished (except by experts) from the others by an infinitesimal scratch on one of the facets of the centre stone of the necklace—a beautiful blue diamond nearly as large as a pigeon's egg, and worth a fabulous sum in itself, as the profligate young Marquis of Basingford had known, in common with others of his family.

How Hazel acted her part that night she never knew, while the strain on Jenny and Eric was equally great. It was horrible to think that such a sword of Damocles was hanging over Hazel's innocent head. To think that on the morrow or the next day the beautiful girl whom they loved would be arraigned in a public police-court on a charge of theft made their blood boil. As for Eric, his every thought was centred on how he could find evidence to show that Hazel had been the victim of a base plot—for plot it undoubtedly was. In the first place the message that Hazel had received to go to Hetty Morton's room; secondly, the instant demand made by Hetty to have Hazel's box searched first of all. Surely the girl must somehow have known where the jewels were unless—and this suspicion could not be entertained for a moment—Hazel had really been the thief, and had been seen removing the diamonds from their place of concealment.

That was all he had to go upon, and flimsy enough it was in all conscience. It was probable that the jewels had been conveyed to Hazel's trunk some time before the theft had been committed, and by someone who knew the ins and outs of the theatre very thoroughly. It must have been someone who knew Hetty Morton pretty intimately, and where she kept her jewels.

"Will you tell me, Miss Morton," he asked her in an interval between the acts, "where you kept the jewels?"

"At the bottom of my trunk," came the answer, given somewhat churlishly.

"And the key of which you of course kept upon your person?"

The other hesitated. Like most actresses she was most free and easy as regards the safeguarding of her own belongings, and it so happened that she locked the trunk or not exactly as her memory to do so prompted her or the reverse.

"Well, no, I didn't lock it," she said, "but merely because I thought I was dealing with honest people."

Eric uttered an exclamation.

"But don't you see," he went on, "what happened? Someone came into your room and abstracted the jewels and conveyed them to Hazel Harlow's trunk which, like yours, was kept unlocked. There's the whole thing in a nutshell. You can't in your heart believe that Miss Harlow is only a common thief."

"But I do believe it," answered the girl fiercely, "and the whole world shall believe it before we are many days older."

"I wish you were a man, Miss Morton," retorted Eric, stifling his rage with difficulty; "and I'd make you answer for those words."

The other laughed scornfully.

"But I'm not," she said; "if I were, perhaps I, too, would be infatuated by Miss Harlow's beauty. As it is, I am only a weak woman, and if it gives you any satisfaction to knock me down, well, pray do so. I shall then be able to bring a charge of assault against you."

Eric bit his lips and turned aside. He could not trust himself to speak, but he knew that there would be no hope of mercy from Hetty Morton.

CHAPTER IV.

The Meeting—"You've Brought me the Wrong Lot"—A Villain's Callousness.

Besides being the largest station in the United Kingdom, the Waverley Station of Edinburgh is also one of the busiest, and the booking-offices were crowded as was usual with excited throngs of ticket purchasers. Near the main booking-office stood the spurious Duke of Porlock clad in a smart Chesterfield overcoat, and with a soft grey felt hat on his head pulled down low over his brows as though he were desirous of concealment. Punctually at noon he saw the eager figure of the girl he had made his too willing tool, searching anxiously for him. He went towards her, and in a moment she recognised him.

"Well," he said in a low voice, fraught with anxious insistence, "how have you got on?"

"I have them," came the low answer.

"You have them!" He gazed at her almost incredulously, then reading verification in her face, he uttered an exclamation of gratified surprise.

"You darling!" he said. "You are a cleverer little woman than I thought you were, and that's saying a good deal. I'll take you to a hotel I know of not far from here and you can tell me all about it."

He led her to a closed carriage, gave a hurried direction to the driver, and in a few moments they were being driven along the cobbled thoroughfare that led to the humble inn of Canongate, where he had had the memorable interview with the mysterious David as recorded at the beginning of our tale.

But little conversation passed between the two during their short journey. Each was fully occupied with their own thoughts. The man was scheming how he could shake off the infatuated girl, the girl was building hopes on the future, though these same hopes were tempered by a dread concerning the very jewels that she had been at such labour to secure. At the humble hostelry Chesterton led the way without more ado to the room upstairs in which he had interviewed his accomplice. His first action was to take the girl in his arms and embrace her with warmth.

"And now, darling," he said, "where are the Porlock diamonds?"

Unfastening the collar of her dress with a quick motion the girl slipped off the beautiful necklace that she had put beneath her dress for safety.

Chesterton uttered a faint cry as the diamonds scintillated and coruscated before his enraptured gaze. Without a word he took them from her hands and then taking a small phial from his pocket containing an almost colourless acid, for such the liquid was, poured a drop of it on the centre gem. Then a cry escaped his lips.

"Paste!" he exclaimed hoarsely; "wonderfully good paste, but paste without a doubt. Confound it all, Millie, you've brought me the wrong lot."

The girl went white to the lips. Her worst suspicions were realised.

"I was afraid of it," she murmured; "and yet I hoped for the best. I found the jewels at the bottom of the trunk, both in morocco cases, both so absolutely identical that I couldn't tell one from the other. Somehow these looked the finer jewels. I was going to try cutting on glass with them, for I couldn't find any means of identification, when I heard someone coming, and had to take these and trust to luck. And now all I have done is useless. I've got the blame fixed on another girl, and all for nothing. And the real jewels are in Hetty Morton's safe keeping now." Then her voice changed. "But it won't alter our love, will it, Jack? Anyhow, I did my best for you. I did my best."

Chesterton's face had become hard and stern. Black rage filled his heart as he thought of the chance that had been missed, that a useless crime had been committed (though it was not the fact of the criminal side that caused him any compunction) which had resulted in the theft of a paste necklace worth not a thousand pounds or even more, but at the most five. His thoughts worked quickly. Should he cast the girl off for ever there and then, accuse her of having deceived him, of having wilfully stolen the false jewels to save her own skin, or should he still play upon the tender susceptibilities of the heart that he knew to be absolutely his own, and still urge the girl to make yet another effort to gain the coveted diamonds? On maturer reflection he decided upon this course of action.

"Let's have the whole story," he said, trying to speak gently, "and see if there is any way out of the mess."

"I managed to get the jewels stowed away in Hazel Harlow's box," replied Millie almost piteously, "though, as I have said, it was absolutely impossible for me to tell the real from the false. Then just as Hazel Harlow came into the theatre I bribed one of the attendants to tell her that Hetty Morton wanted to see her in her room. Of course Miss Harlow went up there and found no one. She waited there a few minutes and then came out to be confronted by me. Then when Hetty came to her rooms a few minutes later, I told her I had seen Hazel Harlow nosing about the room. Then, when she had missed the jewels, her suspicions went straight to the girl on whom I had meant they should fall. The jewels were found in the trunk, and Hetty is going to prosecute, and I have to be a witness against Miss Harlow."

"But the jewels," broke in Chesterton. "What has Miss Morton done with them?"

He spoke roughly, forgetting in his annoyance at having been baulked of the costly trinket that he should really have been the supposed lover of the girl—his catspaw.

"In the strong-room of a bank," came the tearful answer.

An impatient exclamation broke from the cracksman's lips.

"So that's the end of the whole thing," he said vindictively, careless now of the impression his words might make on Millie. "The game is up, is it? Well, you've got yourself into a mess. The best thing you can do is to get yourself out of it."

The girl staggered back as though she had received a blow in the face.

"You can't mean that, Jack," she said, in a low voice. "You must be joking. It was for you I did it all. Think, I have turned myself into a criminal for your sake, and now you speak to me like that. Jack, dear Jack."

"Oh, enough of that," interposed the man; "I should have been ready enough to have been your dear Jack if you hadn't made such a hopeless mess of things, but now"—a faint touch of compunction came into his debased heart as he looked at the pale, broken woman before him in whose eyes was agony unspeakable—"I must go now," he said hurriedly. "You shall hear from me again. It won't do for us to be seen here together. It's all your fault, Millie; you should have secured both the necklaces and tried to implicate Hazel Harlow in some other way. As for these gewgaws"—he threw the paste necklace contemptuously down upon a table—"you had better keep these as a souvenir of your acumen as a diamond expert."

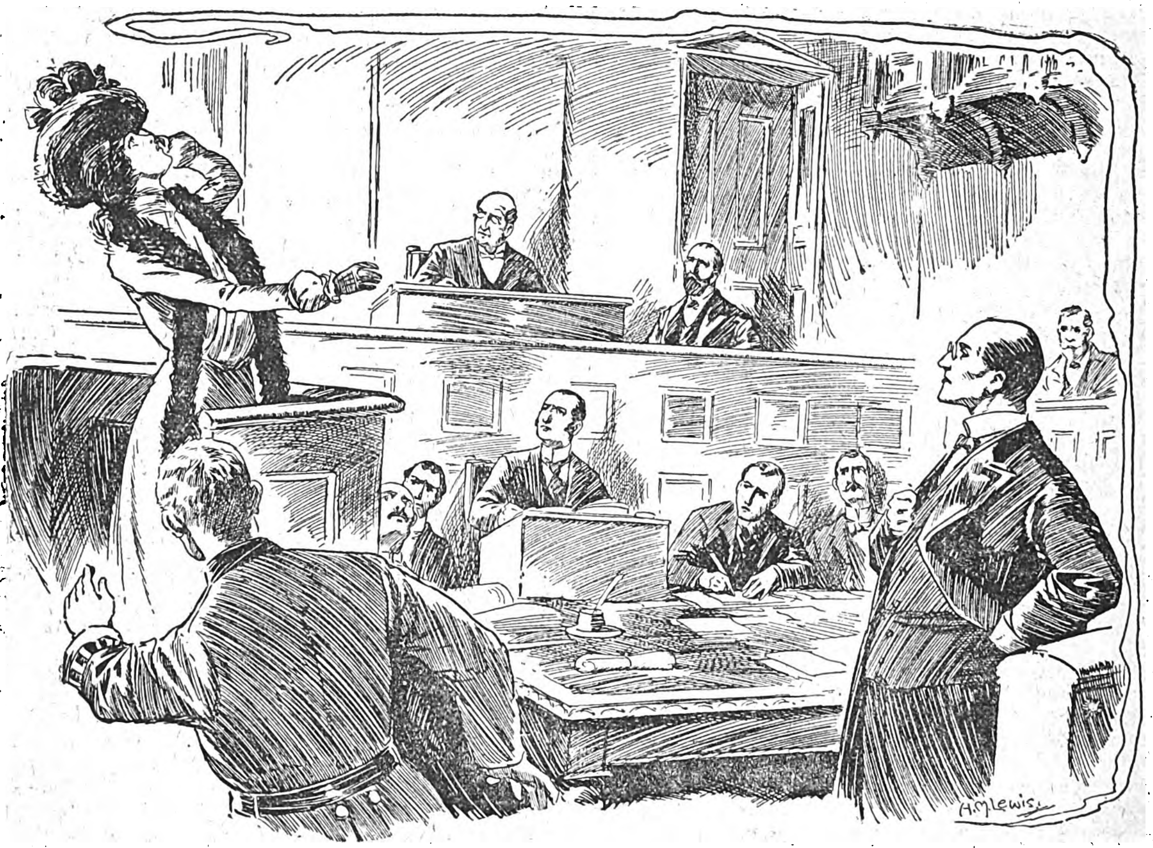
With a sob Millie picked up the paste diamonds. Her eyes were blinded with tears. She turned aside to hide the evidences of her anguish from the villain who had unmasked himself so thoroughly in her eyes. Dimly, yet with woman's quick intuition, she realised that it was the Porlock diamonds and not herself that this man's heart had been really set upon. Already a suspicion had dawned upon her as to his identity with the Duke of Porlock. She brushed aside her tears and wheeled round. A low cry escaped her lips. Her false lover had gone. He had taken advantage of her pre-occupation to steal towards the door and slip away, whither she knew not.

CHAPTER V.

THE SECOND NECKLACE—A STRANGE LAPSE OF MEMORY—ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

THE police-court was crowded. Bad news travels on swift wings, and already all Edinburgh was ringing with the news that Hazel Harlow, the beautiful young actress, was arraigned on charge of theft.

True to her word, Hetty Morton had lost no time in pressing home the charge against the unfortunate Hazel. She had procured a warrant for the arrest of her rival, who was to appear on Thursday morning, bail for Hazel having been secured through the instrumentality of Eric Monteith and Raymond Venables so that she was at least spared the indignity of spending any time in jail.



She tottered forward, and the next moment collapsed in a heap in the witness-box.

For the defence the services of one of the best advocates in the Scotch capital had been secured. He was a young man named Macdonald, who was not without hopes of clearing Hazel from the charge preferred against her, though he was forced to admit that the circumstantial evidence against his client would be a hard nut to crack.

There is no need to set out in full the case for the prosecution as our readers are already aware of the full facts of the charge, how that Hazel had been seen by Miss D'Estérre issuing from the room of her fellow-actress, how that she had gone straight to her own dressing-room, and how that only a short time afterwards the missing diamonds had been found in the prisoner's trunk.

There was still no mention made of the existence of a second set of jewels, and strange as it may appear, Millie D'Esterre was the only person who knew of the existence of the duplicate set, for with the vanity of a vain woman Hetty Morton had concealed the fact from others that she had a second set made. It was exceedingly gratifying to be able to flaunt the famous Porlock diamonds in the faces of the other members of the Company.

The first witness called was Millie D'Esterre. Having given her deposition it became necessary for Macdonald to cross-examine her and to endeavour to discover some flaw in her statement.

"Are you aware," he said, "that a message was sent to Miss Harlow purporting to come from Miss Morton requesting my client to go to her room, and that your discovery of Miss Harlow there is to be explained by the fact that she was waiting for Miss Morton?"

"I know nothing of that," replied Millie in a low voice.

"Then it is your opinion that Miss Harlow, whose reputation is surely well enough known to exclude the possibility of such a deed, went to Miss Morton's room openly for the sole purpose of extracting the diamonds from her fellow actress' trunk?"

"Yes," came the somewhat faint answer.

Macdonald made a gesture of incredulity.

"Why, the thing is absurd," he said. But all further questioning failed to elicit any other answer from the witness. She still maintained that Hazel had been in the dressing-room as a thief.

And then a strange thing happened. Millie D'Esterre was suddenly seen to grow very white. She tottered forward, and the next moment collapsed in a heap in the witness-box. A policeman sprang forward. The girl had fainted. He unloosed the collar of her dress and she was taken out into an adjoining ante-room. This event naturally caused some little commotion in the court and had the effect of retarding the case somewhat. It was of course understood that the Porlock diamonds had been produced in court and sworn to by their owner as being the identical jewels presented to her by the Marquis of Basingford. Judge of the sensation in court then, when, a few moments after the removal of the unconscious Millie, the constable who had carried her out returned, and approaching the counsel for the defence, he requested a few words with him. Mr. Macdonald, craving the magistrate's tolerance for a few moments, retired with the officer, to return in a short time to the court with an expression on his face that an astute observer would have recognised as typical of elation.

"I must crave the indulgence of the court," said the barrister, "but a fresh phase has entered into the case which will, I think, admit of conclusive evidence of Miss Harlow's innocence from the terrible charge that has been preferred against her. Round the neck of the witness who has just fainted a necklace has been discovered that seems to be absolutely identical with the diamonds alleged to have been stolen by my client."

And amid the profoundest sensation he held up aloft the spurious gems that, as we know, Millie D'Esterre had placed round her neck for greater security.

The introduction of this surprise into the case that had already been fraught with so much sensation, created the profoundest amazement. Hetty Morton was called again, and Macdonald at once assailed her with questions.

"Do you know of the existence of a second necklace?" said the advocate.

"I do," in a low voice.

"Is it yours?"

"It is."

"Then will you kindly explain to the court why you made no mention of it before, and how it came to be in possession of the witness upon whom it was found?"

Hetty paused, and then seeing that there was no way out of it, she said in a low voice:

"The jewels you hold in your hand are only paste. I had them made in imitation of the real diamonds, which I did not care to always wear in public. I made no mention of them because—well, because—I forgot about them."

Here was Macdonald's opportunity.

"You *forgot!*" he said in a trenchant voice. "You forgot the existence of a set of jewels that you yourself had had made, and that you were in the habit of wearing so that people might think they were real diamonds?

"Do you really mean to stand up there and tell the court that that is the true explanation of this extraordinary occurrence? It looks to me very much like a conspiracy. Perhaps you have also forgotten, madam, how the paste diamonds came to be round the neck of the last witness?"

"I have no idea how that happened," answered Hetty, trying to speak boldly. "I am as much at a loss to understand how they came to be round Miss D'Esterre's neck as you are."

Macdonald gave vent to a contemptuous sniff far more expressive than any words could have been.

"At any rate," he said, "I think the introduction of this fresh element into the case disposes pretty effectually of the trumped up charge against my client. I beg to move an adjournment of the case until the matter can be thoroughly sifted. I understand that the last witness is incapacitated from making any further statement at present."

Such indeed was the case, for by this time Millie D'Esterre was delirious, having succumbed to an attack of brain fever that was almost to cost her her life. When she did recover she made a clean breast of everything, not disguising the fact that she had been duped by the so-called Duke of Porlock, who, needless to say, had disappeared, together with his confederate. And but for Hazel Harlow, it would have gone hard with Millie D'Esterre.

And Hetty Morton, convinced in the most conclusive way of the mistake she had made, and smarting under the remembrance of the rebuke administered to her in open court by Macdonald, felt no desire to press home the charge of theft, or to recall a business out of which she had emerged with so little credit to herself.

But "Philip Chesterton" and "David" were not to be allowed to disappear from the scene with impunity, for some months later on they were both apprehended red-handed in a burglarious attempt to break into a mansion in the north of Scotland. It was then discovered that Chesterton was, by his own confession, the very man who had been instrumental in implicating Millie D'Esterre in the robbery of the Porlock diamonds. He was imprisoned together with his accomplice, serving a sentence of ten years' penal servitude.

Liverpool was the town next upon the tour list of the *Good Samaritan* Company after a week that, notwithstanding what had happened, had been a great success from a financial point of view. At the great seaport Hazel was to be the central figure in a tragedy that owed its existence to professional jealousy, and which was to be nearly instrumental in cutting short her career for ever. Readers are referred to next week's issue of *Short Stories* for a story no less thrilling than those which have preceded it.

Footballers

Should order at once "Pearson's Weekly," ready Friday, November 15th. In that number a huge Football Competition begins, which will close in four weeks.

THE WEIR COOKHAM

The Lion Tamer's Story.

A TERRIBLE TEN MINUTES.

WHEN you see a lion tamer stepping jauntily into the lions' den, and putting the great, skulking brutes through their paces, you wouldn't think, perhaps, to look at him, that he is exposed to much risk. But take my word for it he is.

From the moment he steps inside those bars, no matter how seasoned he may be to the business, he simply carries his life in his hand until he is safely out of the place again.

You see, most of these savage beasts, lions and tigers especially, are sharper in some ways than human beings even. They seem to know by instinct if a man has anything on his mind when he ventures in amongst them. And then they watch him.

If he allows his attention to wander, if his eye loses its grip on them for one half-second, they notice it, and are on him like a shot.

Worst of all, if a tamer takes to priming himself with drink before he enters the cage, as some of them used to do in the olden days—well, good-bye to him! His Dutch courage may stand by him all right for a time, but so sure as he's got a head on his shoulders, there'll come a day when his nerve will fail him at the critical moment, and then you may expect to see his obituary notice in next morning's papers.

I had a terrible experience in this very connection when I first took to the business, and it taught me a lesson.

Though I have been in the taming line for years now, and there's not many men who can handle their beasts more surely than I can, I never touch a drop of drink until I have got my nightly performance off my mind. I am ready enough to join in a friendly glass with any of you fellows when the show is over; but before—no thanks!

I was very young at the time that this thing happened—had only just joined Westwood's show, in fact, and was apprenticed to a tamer named Robson, who carried as many scars on his body as if he had gone through half-a-dozen campaigns.

We went into a big cage together every night, and I stood by while he made the growling, snarling brutes skip round, feeling safe enough so long as I was under his wing.

Robson—or "Old Rob" as we used to call him—had been a noted man at this kind of thing in his day. He had the power of bending those savage beasts to his will. He could make them do almost anything.

Not only in England, but all over the Continent, he had exhibited before no end of celebrities, and could show as many medals on his breast as many a Crimean veteran.

But, unluckily for him, he had fallen into the bad habit of tilting his little finger far too much.

At first he used to wait until the show was over before he tackled the whiskey bottle; then, finding his nerves a bit slack I suppose he tried to brace them up beforehand in this way.

I confess that I felt uneasy about it, for lions and tigers are not to be trifled with, and it is no joke to face them when your only safeguard is a man who might step into the cage any night in a half-muddled condition. And of all places in the world where one requires to be quite sure of himself it is there.

Many a time I tried to coax the bottle away from Old Rob when he sat brooding over it an hour or so before we were due to appear. I pointed out the terrible risks to which he was exposing the pair of us, though there was little need to do that.

He saw it, knew it better than I could tell him. But though his eyes were wide open to the fact that there was death in that bottle for one or both of us, nothing on earth would induce him to part with it.

"Ah, lad," he would say, "I am not the man I used to be, and want something to stiffen me a bit. I've kept those snarling brutes under for many a long day; but their time will come, their time will come. They'll round on me yet."

One or two of the other chaps tried their hand on him also, but had to give it up as a bad job.

When they saw they couldn't turn him, they just stood aside, and let him go his own way.

But I stuck to him. He was a good sort, Old Rob, in spite of his faults; and—and—well, there was pretty little Nellie, his daughter, and she counted for something in this business.

Poor girl, her heart was nearly broken as she saw him drifting nearer and nearer to the catastrophe which we knew must come sooner or later. Many a time, when I saw that he had taken quite enough, and actually forced the bottle from his grasp, I have caught a grateful look in those honest grey eyes of hers that caused a little flutter within me, and well repaid me for my trouble.

Nellie Robson, you must know, was engaged in another part of the show. She did all the usual tricks

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on horseback—flying through paper hoops and that kind of thing—and a lot more besides.

Ever since she was a tiny child she had watched her father perform amongst the lions and tigers. As she grew up she was always prowling around the cages, studying the great beasts and their ways, until she knew every twist and turn of them by heart. I believe from the very first she had a hankering after a tamer's life. It may have been in her nature, for this sort of thing often runs in families, and I know she had spirit enough for that or anything else.

The cage which Old Rob and I entered every night contained an African lion, a Bengal tiger, a puma, and a panther. Of the whole four the tiger was the fiercest and the panther the most treacherous, but both were kept in awe by the King of Beasts himself.

When our turn came on, and the great cage with its fierce occupants was wheeled into the ring, Nellie Robson stole in from the dressing tent and hovered about quite near the entrance until the pair of us emerged safely from behind those iron bars. I knew right well that she was on thorns the whole time. And so was I for that matter; for though Old Rob's dull eye caught something of its former fire when he found himself face to face with those savage creatures, it was only a flash in the pan. The moment the performance was over his nerves simply went to pieces, and for the rest of the evening he was usually to be found in a pitiable state of collapse.

One night I noticed with inward misgiving that he did not seem at all up to the mark. Not that he had been drinking heavier than was his wont—less if anything—but his eye was not nearly so steady, and had a queer, uncertain look in it.

I did not like that look in it at all. To me it was a danger signal.

I went so far as to draw him aside and speak to him about it, telling him straight that he wasn't in a fit state to appear.

Unluckily, that did more harm than good. He was one of those men that you couldn't argue with; if he thought you were trying to cross him, it only made him the more determined to have his own way.

At the very first word he shook me off roughly, told me to mind my own business and not to meddle with his; and as our "call" came just then, he strode out into the ring with a face as black as a thundercloud. Well, I had roused the spirit in him a bit, if I hadn't done anything else.

All the same, my heart was down in my boots as I followed him across the arena. At every step my feet seemed to be weighted with lead. I felt an odd depression over me that evening, and for the life of me I couldn't shake it off.

As we entered the cage the four beasts scurried away to the further end, where they crouched in a quiver of rage, glaring at us with open mouths and savage growls.

It was always a ticklish moment, this; and Robson, as was his wont, stood perfectly still for a second or two with his eye on the brutes as if he were gauging their temper.

He appeared to be satisfied, for he advanced boldly into the centre of the cage and thrust a wooden pole out through the bars.

I took up my position with my back to his, holding a similar pole through the bars at the opposite side. Then, at the word of command from the tamer, the lion took a flying leap over the first barrier, the other animals following in rotation, and round and round they went in this manner.

We had got about half-way through the performance, and I was beginning to think we would come out of it all right after all, when one of those unforeseen and disconcerting accidents happened, which are always to be feared in a calling of this kind.

The tiger had just come round to Robson's side of the cage; but, instead of clearing the pole, for some unaccountable reason it pulled up almost in the very act of springing.

The panther, which was close behind, jostled up against the bigger brute, and like a flash, before you could realise what was happening, the pair rolled over at my companion's feet, snarling and tearing at each other.

To this day I don't know whether Robson imagined they were about to attack him, or if it was simply a case of blind, unthinking panic.

At any rate the incident seemed to throw him completely off his balance. Without giving a thought to me apparently, he dropped his pole and fled from the cage, the little grated door closing behind him with a crash that seemed to make my heart stand still.

For one single instant I stood there in the midst of those savage, snarling beasts, as powerless to move as if I were in the clutch of some appalling nightmare. And then, oh, heavens! the great tawny lion, which happened to be nearest to me, reared himself up on his hind legs with a roar that seemed to shake the whole place, the horrible red cavern of his mouth gaping before my very eyes. The next second with one tap of his mighty paw, he stretched me full-length upon the floor!

As I went down, a sound like the roaring of the sea smote upon my ears, and I knew that the vast crowd of spectators, seated all round the place in rising tiers, had started to their feet with cries of horror. I heard, too, the shouts of the attendants as they rushed towards the cage; and then came silence—a blank!

The time that I lay unconscious in that awful position seemed to me like a long night, though I learnt afterwards it was well under one minute.

When my senses returned I became aware of a heavy pressure on the lower part of my body and wondered what it was.

Opening my eyes I found that the lion had sunk upon me, and lay there with its two massive paws planted upon my chest, pinning me to the ground in such a manner that I couldn't move even if I wanted to.

Strange to say, when I realised how completely the great beast had me at his mercy, it awakened no concern within me. I experienced no sense of fear whatever. A sort of dreamy indifference took possession of me.

I was even curious as to when the brute would begin to tear me, and wondered what part of my body he would attack first.

I lay on my back, with my head towards the upper end of the cage.

The tiger, the puma, and the panther were at the lower end, but not one of them dared dispute possession of me with the lion.

And now, as I remained pinned there to the floor, it suddenly dawned upon my dazed senses that there was a strange hush in every part of the crowded building. Even without moving my head in the slightest degree, I beheld, as through a mist, a sea of white faces all round the place. But not a sound came from that vast throng; some great tension, some awful suspense seemed to hold them spellbound.

What was the meaning of it? Why were the attendants grouped outside the cage there in that state of intense, breathless watchfulness? Above all, what was there behind me at which the whole four brutes were glaring, and which seemed to enrage them so?

In an instant the answer to these puzzling questions flashed through my brain. Someone had entered the cage while I was unconscious, and was standing right behind me.

Opening my eyes to the fullest extent, I tried to throw my gaze back, and there—Good Heavens!—there, within a few feet of me, I beheld Nellie Robson!

Still in her circus attire, the brave girl stood in a half-crouching attitude, facing those savage beasts without a flinch or a waver, and holding them in check by her perfect knowledge of their ways and the power she had inherited from her father. The next second, without daring to turn her head, she dropped a few words through the bars to the attendants.

"Meat!" she said. "Bring them meat—quick!"

As the great chunks of raw flesh were thrust through the bars, the tiger, the puma, and the panther fell upon them savagely, and their rending and crunching could be plainly heard in the breathless hush.

But the lion was not so easily tempted. Though a huge joint was held within a foot of him, he merely turned his head and sniffed at it.

Then, as he saw it about to be withdrawn, he rose slowly from my body, and craned his neck out after it.

Quick as lightning Nellie's hand slid along the floor and took hold of me by the collar. Now was her chance. Gently—oh! so gently—she drew me towards her; and then—Ah! Heavens!

Seeing me move, the lion turned with an angry growl, and once more his heavy paw came down upon my chest, the savage claws digging deep into the flesh.

Again the joint was thrust forward, and again he was enticed away.

This time, however, the temptation proved too strong for him and he pounced upon the meat.

In a twinkling Nellie whipped me beyond his reach.

At the same instant the attendants shoved a high grating through the bars, ran it across the cage —and I was safe!

Well, if there was dead silence before, there was uproar enough now in all conscience. How that vast crowd swayed and roared!

The air was black with waving hats, and the white flutter of handkerchiefs. And then as I was dragged out of the cage, and Nellie sprang lightly down after me, the people burst into the ring on all sides, pressing eagerly forward to shake the brave girl by the hand, and cheering as if their very lives depended upon making all the row possible!

* * * * *

Poor old Rob never held up his head again after that awful night. He retired from the business altogether. But he always had a home with us—Nellie and myself —after we were married; and I don't know which of us, he or I were prouder of her. J. HORNIBROOK.

HE: "I don't understand why some people require so much sleep. I can get along with four hours." She: "Oh, but you see, the body doesn't require nearly so much rest as the brain."

BENEVOLENT OLD LADY (giving tramp a mince-pie): "My poor man, I suppose your life has been full of trials." Tramp: "It has indeed, mum; but I wouldn't so much mind the trials if I didn't always get convicted."

IT is feared that little Johnny is not so proud of his dad as he might be were his dad a different sort of man. The other day Johnny looked at the unhandsome features of his papa, and then watched that personage move about in his shiftless fashion. Said Johnny after awhile: "Pa, were there any other men about when ma fell in love with you?"

GREAT STATESMAN: "You were in rather a sad condition when you left the banquet the other night." Reporter: "Yes, I drank more than was good for me." Great Statesman: "So I noticed. And it showed in your report of my speech. It was terribly mixed up. Didn't the editor make a row about it?" Reporter: "No; he didn't blame me. He thought you were slightly intoxicated."

SIR JOHN MILLAIS had some very funny stories regarding his sitters. One day a lady, wife of an American parvenu, came to him to have her portrait painted. At the first sitting the lady asked the great artist, curiously, what were his most expensive colours. "Oh," replied Sir John, "vermilion——" "Indeed!" interrupted the lady quickly. "Then paint me all in vermilion, if you please; my husband doesn't mind expense." It is hardly necessary to say that Sir John did not accede to her wishes.

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A Man of Spirit.

"Impudence, young man—confounded impudence—that's what I call it!" And old Mr. Widger accompanied his vocal thunder with a thump of his fist on his blotting-pad and glared at Edward Elliston.

"I'm sorry you call it that, sir," answered the "young man," in the sort of firm, respectful tone that means "Say what you like, but I'm going to get my way."

"Call it that! Why, what else should I call it? You come to me and ask for the hand of my daughter—you, an employe of mine—a clerk with a beggarly salary of three hundred."

"It's not my fault if the salary's beggarly, sir."

Mr. Widger waved the interruption away.

"Three hundred a-year," he finished. "What do you mean by it, sir?" Mr. Widger's thunder grew louder. "This is what comes of my treating you confidentially. I take you to my house, introduce you to my daughter, and you repay my kindness by falling in love with her! You have the temerity to become engaged to her. I took you to my bosom as a dove, only to find that you turn to out be a s—s——"

"Son-in-law!" finished Elliston, mildly.

"How dare you, sir! 'S—erpent,' I was about to say! Now understand me once for all, this engagement has got to come to an end."

"I hope so, sir," said Elliston, with fervent significance. "I trust we shall marry ere——"

"I mean the engagement must stop now—you understand? It must be broken off at once."

"Never, sir!"

Old Mr. Widger looked up quickly. This imperturbable young man was a little too much for him. He went red in the face, then purple, then—when governing calmness came—back to normal hue.

"Well, I must say, Mr. Elliston," he remarked, and now he was much gentler than before; "that you beat all the people I've ever met for cool cheek."

"It's a record-breaking age," ventured Elliston.

"Well, I should think it was," rejoined old Widger, fanning himself with a sheet of note-paper. "But I want you to know that you're not going to beat *me*. You're a smart young man, Mr. Elliston, and if you'd behaved yourself, you'd have got on. But when you come to me with this romantic nonsense, you make a mistake. It's only in stupid novels that clerks marry their employers' daughters. They don't do it in real life."

"Then I'm going to create a precedent."

"You're going to do nothing of the kind. You're going to get the sack! Do you hear? Unless you promise not to see or write to my daughter again, I'm going to discharge you from my employment."

"There is no necessity, sir. Kindly read that."

Elliston handed him an envelope, which Mr. Widger tore open.

"Oh, so you resign!" he said, when he had finished reading. "Then you fully expected that I should object to your engagement with my daughter?"

"Fathers always do, sir—in stupid novels," returned the young fellow drily.

"Hold your tongue!" yelled Mr. Widger. "You're very impertinent. . . . And since you resign, consider yourself out of my service from this moment. And remember that I forbid you ever to see my daughter again."

"I'll certainly remember it, sir; but I will not promise to comply with your request."

"Go out!" cried Mr. Widger, exasperated beyond bounds; "get out! You're a scoundrel, sir—an impudent scoundrel. Go!"

"Yes, I'll go!" returned the other as coolly as ever. "But before I go, I'd like to remind you that it's fortunate for you that you are Mabel's father."

"Why—what if I wasn't?"

"Well, only that I should punch your head! Good-day, Mr. Widger!" and Edward Elliston strode firmly from the office and out into the street.

"Phew!" he ejaculated to himself, as he let the cool air fan his heated brow. "I'm glad that's over! I wouldn't go through it again for ten thousand—or for anything or anybody—except Mabel of course. I'd do anything for her. And she told me to tackle her father boldly—that a mild, ordinary request wouldn't be of the least use. I was surely bold enough, but the thing is, I'm afraid, I've been a bit *too* bold. Lord, how he fumed!"

When Mr. Widger arrived home at Hampstead that night, he at once sent for his daughter.

"Mabel," he said sternly, "I have to-day received some astounding news."

"Indeed, papa!" and there was a look of complete innocence on pretty Mabel's face.

"Yes, that clerk of mine—that Elliston fellow—has had the audacity to tell me that he loves you. What does it mean?"

Mabel blushed, and her blue eyes sought the carpet.

"He spoke the truth, I think," she said simply.

"How dare he? How dare he?" I ask.

"Speak the truth?" Mabel dug the rug with the toe of a tiny slipper.

"No, I don't mean that," Mr. Widger snapped. "You're

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as bad as he is with your impertinent answers. How dare he fall in love with you—and how dare you encourage him?"

"Daddy, dear!" Mabel put her arms round her father's neck. "You don't really mind, do you? Ted—Mr. Elliston—loves me, and I love *him* dearly."

"Well, you'll have to stop it, that's all!" snorted Mr. Widger, and he gave a twist of his fingers as if he were turning off imaginary gas.

"The idea!" he went on—"the idea of your receiving the attentions of a mere clerk! You—an heiress!—it's preposterous! Why, he's not even a clerk now!"

Mabel inquired with her eyes.

"He's gone—I've discharged him. He's joined the ranks of the out-of-works."

Mabel paled a trifle and then flushed.

"Father! how could you do it?" she asked reproachfully.

"Do it? Why, I'd do it a hundred times if necessary. Such impudence!"

"You're very unjust!" and Mabel's eyes flashed indignantly. "It surely is no crime for us to love one another."

"Crime? It's worse! It's madness! But enough of this—I dismiss the subject for ever."

"You're very cruel!"

"I'm very hungry. I want my dinner!"

* * * * *

Edward Elliston was not out of work long. No man with an ounce of common-sense and a whole ton of energy ever is. And Master Edward had both in full weight. He got another berth soon at two-hundred a-year, and four months after that, induced his new employer to increase it to three hundred. So that he was once more on his old pecuniary footing. He was saving money, too.

Meanwhile, of course, he had been seeing Mabel. Brief, clandestine meetings they were for the most part, but the sweeter for that. The course of true love never did run smooth—most lovers would be terribly bored if it did. So Edward was attracted by the difficulties, and simply delighted in these surreptitious meetings.

But his face straightened when, one evening, while they wandered through the woodland paths of Hampstead Heath, Mabel confided to him that she had something serious to tell him.

"What is it, darling?" he asked.

Her eyes timidly sought his for a moment, then dimmed and turned half away, as she replied:

"It's papa!"

"What of him?"

"I don't know how to tell you—but he's so horrid!"

His eyes flashed fire.

"What's he been doing now, my own darling?" He fixed the note of interrogation with a kiss.

She looked as if, under the same conditions, she would have liked the question repeated.

He repeated part of it—omitting the words.

"Papa wants me to marry."

"So do I, my darling; there's nothing horrid in that."

"Oh, but he wants me to marry someone else."

Edward Elliston sprang back a step.

"Marry someone else!" he cried in quite a dramatic manner. "His name—his name, I say!" He looked as if he would have added, "that I may have his blood." But he didn't.

"It's Count Slumpski—a Russian nobleman."

"A Russian!" Edward looked aghast. "Mabel, it must never be!"

Mabel opened her beautiful eyes wide.

"Why, of course, it mustn't! But papa is very much in earnest about it. He mentions the matter every day."

Edward Elliston remained silent for a minute or two. Then suddenly he turned his eyes full upon the girl at his side.

"Mab," he said firmly, "there is only one thing to do. We must elope!"

Mabel blushed to the roots of her hair, then, to hide her confusion, buried her face on Edward's shoulder, with just a little exclamatory "Oh, Ted!"

Ted let her go on burying her confusion. He was always most considerate in such things. It took some time; and by the time her confusion had been effectually buried, the whole matter was arranged.

"I shall be having a fortnight's holiday soon," observed Ted. "We can get married and go on our honeymoon then."

* * * * *

On a day, about a month later, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Elliston alighted from a train at Brighton. They had been married quietly that morning, and had come to the popular south coast resort for their honeymoon.

Edward hailed a cab.

"Grand Promenade Hotel," he directed the driver, and, ten minutes later, they were there.

Scarcely had they been shown into their sitting-room, when a servant entered with a card.

Edward took it up with wonder in his eyes. Wonder grew to amazement, as he read the card—

MR. JOSIAH WIDGER.

with a pencilled inscription in the corner. "Must see you at once in No. 37."

Edward turned a little bit pale.

Mabel darted to his side.

"What is it, dear?" she asked anxiously. "You look ill."

"All right," said Edward, recovering himself, and addressing the waiting servant, "you may go. I'll see the gentleman who sent you in a moment."

Then, as the door closed, he turned to Mabel.

"Mab, my darling," he said, "don't be alarmed, but your father is here."

"Father here! Oh, Ted, Ted! He must have seen me slip away this morning, and been suspicious. Jane, my maid, must have told him. I had to confide in her. And now he's come to take me back."

"No, no, my darling!" Edward consoled, "he can't do that. You're my wife now, and nothing on earth can ever part us. But he's here, and wants to see me. I must go and see him."

There was a grimness about Edward's tone and look that startled Mabel. She clung to her husband's arm, and in a tone of supplication, begged him not to be too hard on her father.

"Remember, Ted, dear, he has always been so fond of me, and must be excused if his feelings get the better of him."

"But, Mab, he's not a tenth part as fond of you as I am, so I must be excused if my feelings get the better of me. However," Edward pursued, as he saw the tears coming into Mabel's eyes, "for your sake I'll be gentle with him." And having kissed her twice, he quitted the room. With compressed lips and clenched hands he arrived at the door of No. 37. He paused for a moment. Then he knocked.

"Come in!"

Edward Elliston stood face to face with Mr. Widger.

"Ha!" ejaculated the latter; "and so, sir, you've come?"

"It appears so!" Edward remarked quietly.

"So it does. And now you're here, aren't you ashamed of yourself, sir?"

Edward looked at his father-in-law square in the eyes, and returned:

"Not the least bit in the world, sir! I've done nothing to be ashamed of."

"Oh, you haven't, haven't you? You don't think then, that it's disgraceful of you to carry off my daughter and marry her?"

"On the contrary, Mr. Widger, of all things I have done in my life, it's the act of which I'm most proud."

"You stole my daughter, sir! You're a thief!"

Edward's fists clenched tighter than ever. He advanced a step. Then he checked himself, and said very sternly:

"Mr. Widger you presume on our relationship. If you were not Mabel's father I should knock you down."

As Edward spoke, the features of Mr. Widger suddenly relaxed, and to Edward's utmost surprise, he broke into a fit of the most uncontrollable laughter.

"Oh—oh—oh—oh!" he roared. "You're too much! You threatened some time ago to punch my head, and now you threaten to knock me down—all because I presume too much on *our* relationship. Oh—oh—oh!"

He paused a moment, mopped his brow with his handkerchief, and then, having controlled himself, he advanced with outstretched hand to the amazed Edward Elliston.

"Edward, my boy, give me your hand! Accept my heartiest congratulations. Fetch Mabel in as well—I want to congratulate her, too!"

Edward looked as though he thought Mr. Widger were mad.

"No, my boy, I'm not crazy," remarked the old man. "I'm really delighted. I opposed your marriage with my daughter because I wanted to make sure you were the right kind of man for her. I didn't want her to marry a fool. I wanted her to have for a husband a man of spirit. And that's just what you are. So shake hands and accept my congratulations."

The astounded Edward shook hands, unable to utter a word.

"And now, Edward," went on Mr. Widger cheerily, "take me to my little girl."

The scene between Mabel and her father was one of hysterical joy.

"But, papa," she asked presently, with a blush, "how did you know I had run away this morning?"

"Know, you little minx; why, of course, I knew! Do you think I haven't been aware of your clandestine meetings with this rascal Edward here for the past few months? When the man had the spirit to throw up a good berth with me and start all over afresh, I guessed I had a man of pluck and determination to deal with. And that's just what Edward is. Why, Mab, do you know, he threatened to knock your poor old dad down because I presumed too much on our relationship! Oh—oh—oh!" And the old fellow went off into another hearty fit of laughter.

"Well," observed Edward; "now that you're down here sir, you'll stay of course to dinner?"

"No, no," replied the old merchant. "I'll drink your healths in a glass of champagne; but as for staying to dinner, certainly not. Shouldn't have liked it myself when I was honeymooning, and shan't inflict a father-in-law's presence on you."

And, despite all protestations, Mr. Widger insisted on catching the six o'clock train back to London.

"Good-bye!" he said, as the young couple were seeing him off. "Good-bye, and God bless you! And, oh, Edward, here's a little wedding present for you. Buy Mab something nice and keep the rest for housekeeping." And he thrust a piece of paper into Edward's hand just as the train moved off.

"Why," remarked Edward, as they made their way out of the station; "it's a cheque—a cheque for £1,000! What a brick your father is, darling!"

"I'm so glad!" replied "darling." "But you deserve it, you know, because you are a man of spirit." And she smiled sweetly.

"I'm a man in high spirits, anyhow!" Edward replied.

And both made their way back to the hotel in the happiest of moods.

G. CARR.

Key to *Pearson's Weekly* First Football Competition.

1. A young goose=Gosling. 2. Require cured hog=Needham. 3. GO, man who shoes horses=G. O. Smith. 4. Wild apple tree=Crabtree. 5. House at gate of park=Lodge. 6. Consume by fire=Burnup (or Byrne). 7. Pay up=Settle. 8. Cluster of bushes=Thickett. 9. Cottager indisposed=Cotterill. 10. Male child of Henry=Harrison. 11. Garden tools for scraping=Raikes. 12. An extensive wood=Forrest. 13. A kind of fish and a village=Chadwick. 14. Military engagements=Battles. 15. A drink=Beveridge. 16. Railway carriage=Carr. 17. Satisfactory victory=Goodwin. 18. Husks of ground corn=Brann. 19. A small twenty-hundredweight=Littleton. 20. A well-known writer=Ballantyne (or Barr). 21. See short-tailed animal=C. Hare. 22. Legs=Shanks. 23. Walk like a duck=Waddell. 24. A man who works in a garden=Gardner. 25. Grumpy=Cross. 26. Mac's not ill=Maxwell. 27. Our greatest general=Roberts. 28. Odoriferous=Smellie. 29. Not wrong=Wright. 30. Inter=Bury. 31. Robust=Birley. 32. Dark brook=Blackburn. 33. Entirely rooster=Alcock. 34. Lively=Gay. 35. Silly, look at the horse-fly=J. C. Clegg (Jay, see clegg). 36. Outer coating of fruit=Rhind. 37. Glowing atoms=Sparks. 38. Benjamin swallowed food=Bennett (Ben ate). 39. An underground chamber=Sellar. 40. Not the former =Latta. 41. Cunning=Wylie. 42. Look at a dusky colour =C. Brown. 43. Ah, Gee! bend your knee=R. G. Neil. 44. The fish consumed food=Bassett. 45. A herbaceous plant=Amos. 46. A fuel=Cole. 47. An assistant=Clarke. 48. To ward off=Parry. 49. Various=Divers. 50. Reed instrument=Fyfe.

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Although the persons whose portraits will appear in this competition are quite unknown to us personally, we have their names and addresses in our possession, and, therefore, a claim can be settled at once, without risk of fraud.

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All claims in connection with the portraits below must reach the address already given above by Tuesday next, November 19th. Full names and addresses of the correct claimants will appear in succeeding numbers.

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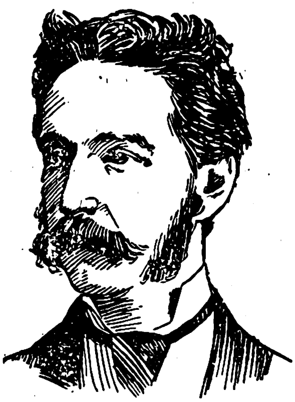

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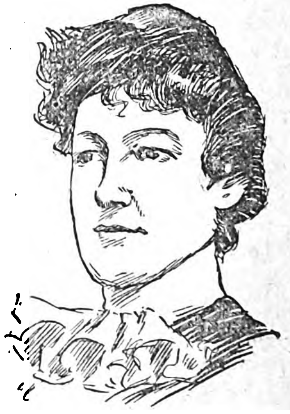

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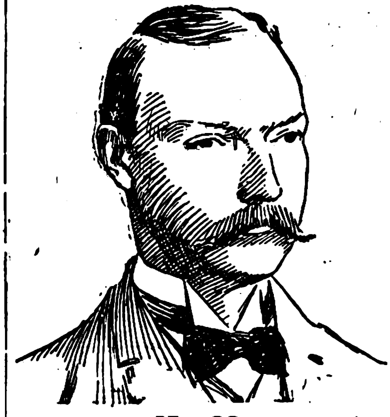

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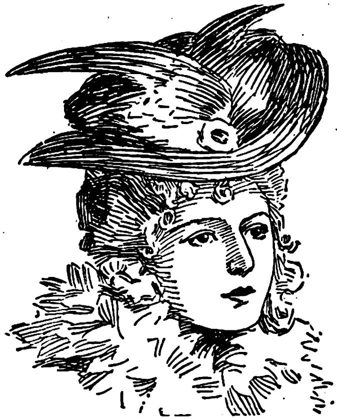

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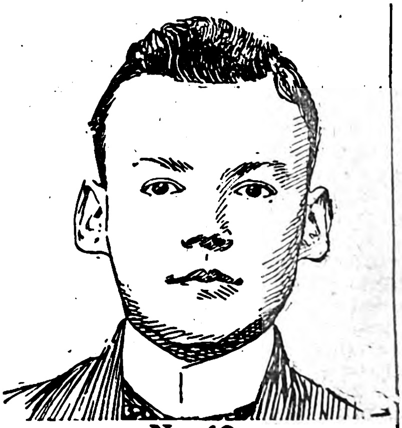

No. 40.

Stanley Green's Deception.

"No luck again, Madge," groaned Stanley Green, as he entered the room in which his wife was anxiously awaiting him. "How is Dora? Has the doctor been?"

There was a moment's pause before Madge replied; she was trying to recover from the pang of disappointment which had shot through her on hearing her husband's first words and also from the emotion caused by his inquiries.

"I am very sorry, Stanley dear, but—but perhaps our ill-fortune will turn soon. No, our little darling is no better, the doctor says, and I—I fear—she is worse. Doctor Leyton says we must give her all the nourishment we can. She is sleeping just now and I hope——"

She was unable to finish the sentence, for there seemed but little room for hoping that the black cloud which overshadowed them would soon lift.

"Oh, Heaven, why are we so sorely tried?" cried Stanley, the words wrung from him by bitterness of heart. "Ever since I was ill three years ago, misfortune has followed us unceasingly. For myself I do not care, but for you and our little one—Oh, it is too hard!"

These words brought strength to Madge as nothing else would have done.

She rose from her seat, crossed the room to where her husband stood with half-uplifted hands and with anguish written on every feature, and placed her arms lovingly round his neck.

"Stanley," she said gravely and tenderly after she had kissed him, "it is the duty of a man to suffer and be strong! Oh, my dear husband, it would be the last drop—the drop that would make my cup of sorrow overflow—if you, my ideal, were to falter and fail under trial!"

"Man is kept strong by such angels as you!" cried Stanley, passionately kissing her and pressing her to his breast.

They had been married five years. People said that Madge, although she could not exactly claim to be pretty or of higher social standing than Stanley Green, might have made a much better match. She had had at least one suitor who possessed money, and they could not understand why she should prefer to be the wife of a man holding a position in an office at a salary of two hundred a year, even if he were possessed of capabilities that would insure his rising.

But they had not seen Stanley Green in the same light as Madge had seen him; and she had joyfully become his wife, and for two years their happiness was as perfect as human happiness could be.

Then the demon influenza had laid his grasp on Stanley and when he had recovered from a severe illness it was to find that his once brilliant mental powers had been terribly impaired. His memory failed him at intervals with startling suddenness, and at others, he did the most stupid things—from a business point of view—although he believed at the moment that they were quite correct. The result was that he lost the situation which had been kept open for him during his illness; he had obtained others, only to lose them after a short period of service. The little stock of money soon disappeared, trinkets and other things were disposed of; Stanley obtained some odd work now and then and Madge did a little in various ways, so they just managed to keep afloat, and now, to crown the edifice of trouble, their little one had fallen ill.

When husband and wife returned to the little sitting-room, they felt more calm and were able to discuss the situation quietly. Their deliberations were interrupted by a tap at the door; it proved to be the landlady's maid of all work, who brought a packet for Mr. Green.

"It must be the jelly," said Stanley, cutting the string. "I had clean forgotten it. I met John Harcourt this morning and he asked how we were. I did not tell him how low down we were, but I said that Dora was very ill and he was good-natured enough to promise to send this. The little darling will enjoy it, won't she, Madge?"

"Yes."

The word came slowly from Madge's lips, while a slight tinge of red mounted to her cheeks.

John Harcourt had been her well-to-do suitor, but he had attracted her very little; she knew of nothing against him but she had not cared for him.

When Stanley appeared on the scene, Harcourt's chance of success completely vanished, and this fact the latter had not forgotten nor forgiven.

On the following morning Harcourt again met Stanley as the latter was wandering from place to place in search of work. Again he made the same kindly inquiries, and in the afternoon another delicacy was sent for the little one, whose condition remained unaltered.

During the next ten days Harcourt met Stanley four times and on as many occasions a delicacy was conveyed to the house in which they lived.

On the eleventh day, Stanley suddenly found an arm linked in his and heard Harcourt's voice.

"You must come and have lunch with me at the club, my dear fellow. I'm sure you can spare the time—your business cannot be immediately pressing, and it is nearly one o'clock. You commercial men do eat sometimes, I suppose? You always seem to be so confoundedly busy that I really doubt it at times."

Stanley's face flushed and he tried to utter some words of excuse, but Harcourt merely said "Tut, tut!" and drew him along with a firm grip,

Stanley ate but little of the good things that were placed before him, for his thoughts went away to the little sitting-room where Madge was probably dining off bread and cheese.

The food seemed to choke him. Oh, if he could only have her with him to share it!

Luncheon over, Harcourt insisted that they should spend a few minutes in the smoking-room and Stanley felt powerless to refuse. He was weak from worry and proper food, and his morning's tramp had nearly exhausted him; he was partly fascinated by the other man and allowed himself to be led to a favourite corner and installed on a cushioned seat.

Harcourt took good care that his guest should partake freely of wine and then he began to talk. His words were uttered in a quiet tone and with an air of concern, his eyes at the same time watching every expression on Stanley's face.

At first the latter did not catch the meaning of what was said; the wine had contributed to make his mind still more confused, and it was not until he caught the name of Kate Barbour that he really began to understand.

Kate Barbour! He had almost forgotten that shallow-pated girl who had been rather sweet on him before he had become betrothed to Madge; what little brains she possessed had always been filled with romantic ideas culled from cheap novelettes, and the fact that she was still Miss Kate Barbour was a proof that, despite her independent income, she was not attractive enough to be selected as a partner by any sensible man.

"But perhaps I am wronging her," thought Stanley with some remorse. "She was a long way from being to my liking, but she had some good in her, I believe. But what is Harcourt talking about?"

Then, aloud to his companion, he continued:

"I beg your pardon, but I fear I have not heard all you have said. What was that about Miss Barbour?"

Harcourt was not in the least put out by his companion's inattention and he began again.

"Miss Barbour and you were on friendly terms at one time, I know, so I need not tell you that she has some foolish notions. Now, she has of late conceived the notion that it would be a splendid thing to be run off with by some suitable member of our sex. Well, her aunt, who is a friend of mine, is afraid that the silly woman will run away with some worthless scamp and wishes to avoid that catastrophe and teach her a lesson, It is quite on the cards that some fellow will try to do it for her money."

"Yes," said Stanley inquiringly, "and what is that to do with me now?"

Harcourt coughed drily and took a sip at his glass before continuing.

"Mrs. Evin and I have decided upon a plan by which we hope to cure the young lady of her foolish notion. In order to carry out that plan we must have the services of a thoroughly trustworthy man. We want you to be that man."

"Please explain further," requested Stanley hesitatingly.

The idea was not altogether pleasing.

"To put it briefly," returned Harcourt, "we have schemed an elopement—that is, a pretended one. We want you to be the man to run away with her."

"The idea is absurd!" exclaimed Stanley. "How on earth am I to run away with her?"

"Didn't I tell you that it was merely a pretence?" asked the other in an injured tone. "The girl will be mad at first, but she will soon get over that and in time she will herself thank you for it. You will have nothing whatever to do but to go with her somewhere—wherever you like—except that I may possibly ask you to write a letter to Miss Barbour just to make the thing look plausible."

Stanley flatly refused, but Harcourt was not daunted. He knew his man, and was convinced that by judicious appeals to Stanley he could so work on the man through his love for his wife and child that he could induce the unhappy husband and father to yield.

It took more persuasion, however, than Harcourt imagined; he offered Stanley twenty pounds for his assistance, then thirty, then fifty.

Fifty pounds!

Stanley's brain degan to whirl; for that sum he had worked three whole months even in his days of fortune —what did it mean to him now! Would he be doing anything very wrong, after all?

He would not dare to tell Madge the truth, for he knew instinctively that she would not agree; he must tell her a falsehood. He had never deceived her before and he hated to do it now, for she believed in him so implicitly; but fifty pounds might save them all, so did not the end justify the means?

Harcourt could see that his victim was yielding and he clinched the matter by a renewed offer.

"We'll make it seventy-five pounds. We are not particular to a few pounds so long as we save this girl from probable harm."

"I'll do it!" exclaimed Stanley. And they shook hands on it.

"I have already begun to carry out this scheme," said Harcourt, "and the girl believes that she has been in correspondence with an ardent, but unknown admirer, who dare not woo her openly just now for certain powerful reasons which he will explain later. The correspondence has been managed through the medium of a small shop keeper, and the admirer's letters have all been type-written. But now that the thing is coming to a head, you must write a note in your own handwriting, making the appointment, just to make it look genuine. Have I not told you that I have arranged all the details?" he demanded somewhat tartly as Stanley was beginning a question.

Stanley gave up further opposition, deciding to concern himself only so far as absolutely required. Seventy-five pounds! The vision haunted him, and nerved him to crush all qualms of conscience at his duplicity.

Two days later, Mr. John Harcourt was ushered into the presence of Miss Kate Barbour and at once began a hurried apology.

"My dear Miss Barbour, it is with the most profound regret—really I am most vexed! I have important business, which is taking me away from town this very afternoon and I shall be unable to accompany you to the North to-night. What a shame! I am afraid that you will have to go by daylight and alone."

"Oh!" ejaculated the young woman in a tone of deep disappointment. "And we had planned it so nicely. I was quite looking forward to a night journey."

"I knew you would be disappointed, so—I hope you won't blame me."

"What?"

"I have taken it upon myself to find a trustworthy friend to go with you, so that you might have your way in spite of all. I have spoken to Mr. Stanley Green, who has business in Marlington and was going to-morrow, but has consented to travel by the midnight train and act as your escort. You know him."

"Oh, that will do nicely. Mr. Green—I thought he was a nice man some time ago, and I suppose he hasn't altered."

"We have been friends for years," Harcourt assured her. "And it will be—like an elopement," he added slily.

"So it will! I'll tell him that just to make him feel uncomfortable, that I will!"

Stanley Green came back in great haste on the morning of the eventful day and astonished Madge by telling her that he had secured a temporary appointment in his old firm; he was to go off at once to the provinces and would be away for three days, after which he would take up a subordinate position in the office, and he handed the delighted Madge five pounds, which he said was an advance of salary kindly made by the head of the firm.

The landlady of the house was surprised beyond description when Madge appeared at her door with a smiling face and held out a sovereign as a first payment of the arrears of rent; the young mother seemed completely transformed.

The cloud was lifting at last; Stanley had got a situation, which, as his memory was now better he would doubtless keep, and Dora was rallying. The silver lining was showing itself; Madge's heart was glad.

The day waned and night fell; it was ten o'clock and Madge was asking herself whether she might venture to retire. Since five o'clock Dora had been worse and she feared a relapse; she had not sent specially for the doctor and, as the child now seemed easy again and Madge was very tired, she decided to snatch a little sleep.

She had hardly arrived at this decision, when a tap came at the door and the servant peeped in to say that a gentleman wished to see Mrs. Green on very urgent business.

It was Harcourt. He had followed the girl upstairs and now entered the room with an apology for intruding.

"Mrs. Green," he said gravely, "in spite of our old acquaintance I would not dare to make this intrusion had I not something of the gravest importance to communicate."

"My husband!" exclaimed Madge, turning pale with fear. "Something has happened to him!" She clutched his arm imploringly. "Oh, do not keep me in suspense!"

"Pray calm yourself, Mrs. Green," admonished her visitor, soothingly. "No bodily harm has come to him; the mischief is moral."

"It would be well to await his return and make the charge in his presence," Madge said with a mixture of haughtiness and anger, as she half-raised her hand to point to the door.

"He will not return. He has found someone more to his liking and with money enough to lift him out of poverty and keep him out of it."

Harcourt prepared himself for an outbreak of anger, but the result was different. Madge was weak with mental strain and physical work, and her remaining strength failed her under these terrible words. She tottered to the nearest chair and sank on it, her face as white as death.

"It's false!" she gasped in a husky whisper.

"I know how this must pain you," continued Harcourt tenderly. "And I would not have undertaken the task of telling you, but that the affection I once expressed is still as strong as ever and—Oh, I can no longer stand by and see your husband deceive you, Madge!"

For once in his life Harcourt made a mistake; the intrusion of these words of love in the midst of her anguish filled Madge with indignation and infused renewed strength into her exhausted frame. With blazing eyes she sprang to her feet and pointed to the door.

"Go!" she cried, her usually sweet voice hoarse with passion. "How dare you insult my husband and myself in this way? He would never stoop to even one of those petty acts which are as nothing to others! he is the soul of honour and I will believe nothing against him. I will believe in him against the whole world. Go!"

"I can give you convincing proof," said Harcourt, once more self-possessed. "I can show you a letter written by him to Miss Kate Barbour, a former sweetheart; and I can take you to the railway-station, where you can see him keep the assignation with your own eyes."

He took from his pocket the letter which he had induced Stanley to write, but which of course never reached the addressee. He held it so that Madge could see it by the the light of the oil lamp; her eyes went to the sheet of paper because she believed that it would prove false and so vindicate her husband. But she started on seeing the handwriting and mechanically took it from him and read it through.

There was no doubt about the handwriting, and the contents were plain enough. Once more strength failed the overwrought body and she sank on her knees and burst into a flood of tears.

* * * * *

It wanted but five minutes to midnight when Stanley Green and Miss Barbour entered the booking-office. Stanley hurried to the window and asked nervously for two first-class tickets, quite unconscious that his wife's eyes were fixed upon him and that her ears were strained to catch his every word. She had agreed to watch for him, still half-believing that Harcourt's information was false.

She would probably have rushed up to him, but Harcourt thought it prudent to detain her by urging her to let the guilty man actually go into the train so that he should be unable to invent any excuse.

Stanley offered his arm to his companion and conducted her to the platform where a train was waiting.

"Thank Heaven!" he muttered, as he sank back among the cushions. "I am glad that Harcourt has arranged it so that she does not expect me to make love to her—I really could not do it, not for seventy-five pounds! But she certainly is quiet for a girl who is being run away with. Poor Madge! How I have deceived her. I have done it so that she and our little girl may benefit."

He was still thinking of his wife and staring dreamily out of the window when the train started. As it glided along the platform his eyes fell upon a figure; he turned white as he caught the accusing eyes and expression of that white face and uttered a groan of "Madge!"

Madge herself fled wildly from the station, and before Harcourt could recover himself and follow her she was lost to view.

That journey seemed like an age to Stanley Green and he scarcely spoke a word all the time, somewhat to Miss Barbour's disgust and alarm, for she thought he looked ill.

It did not surprise Stanley to find a carriage waiting for her at that early hour, because that was part of the plan, but he was just conscious enough to feel rather astonished that Miss Barbour made no fuss about her elopement being thwarted—in fact she seemed to take it as a matter of course.

Stanley saw her into the carriage and then dashed back into the station to ask the time of the first train to London. The irregularity of his conduct did not strike him at all. But his action upset part of Harcourt's plan, for the latter had arranged to have him waylaid and kept confined for a few days.

It was noon on the following day before Stanley Green, weary in body and mind, reached his home.

"Madge, Madge!" he cried as he entered. "Oh, Madge——"

"Stanley Green," said a voice which he scarcely recognised, "our ways are separate from this moment!"

"Madge," he cried in desperation, "listen to me! I deceived you, I am a wretched and despicable man, but——"

"In there," she interrupted in a toneless voice, pointing to the bedroom, "lies all that remains of the child you deserted. She had a relapse and died before—before I could get back. Look at her, and then go your way! Do not come here to me to deceive me again; you cannot deceive me, for I have found you out."

"But, Madge, listen to me!" cried Stanley desperately.

He understood that his wife believed him guilty and he was horrified.

"I know I deceived you, my dear, but it is not what you think. Oh, Madge, do not harbour such thoughts against me. Listen to me, dear, and I will explain all."

Madge was about to interrupt, when he stepped forward and took her in his arms, despite her struggles.

He understood that the terrible ordeal had affected her mind.

"You shall listen to me, Madge," he cried almost fiercely, as he kissed her passionately. "I have done wrong, but I did it for your sake—for your sake, Madge!"

The appeal in his voice and his eyes seemed to sink into Madge's very soul and arouse her from her half-demented condition. She gave a great sob and yielded to his embrace with the words:

"I ought to have known. I have done wrong as well."

Side by side they sat and each told the story of the past few hours, and light began to dawn upon the dark mystery. There had been a plot against them.

When the first burst of grief at the death of his little one had passed away, Stanley's heart was filled with a fierce desire to inflict punishment upon the man who had sought to ruin his domestic life and had partly succeeded.

He would have gone in search of Harcourt had not Madge restrained him.

Towards evening, as they were finishing a frugal tea of which they had forced themselves to partake, they were startled by a rap at the door, followed by the turning of the handle and the entrance of a male figure.

The new-comer was evidently as much surprised at seeing two occupants of the room as those two people were at seeing him, for he uttered an exclamation and would have retreated. But Stanley rushed at him and clutched him by the throat.

"You villain!" shouted Stanley as he shook Harcourt with all his strength.

"Let me go!" gurgled Harcourt.

Madge hurried to the struggling men and begged her husband to desist, for Stanley was throttling his opponent.

Stanley loosened his grasp enough to allow Harcourt to breathe and hesitated for a moment; then he suddenly twisted Harcourt round and kicked him down the stairs and into the street, where the much rumpled, hatless and smarting plotter was glad to take to his heels.

On the following morning they received another unexpected visit, the visitor being none other than Miss Kate Barbour.

"I have come to make an explanation and I should like to speak to your wife alone, Mr. Green."

Stanley bowed in silence, and went out of the house. Then Kate seated herself opposite Madge and began to ask questions and make her own statement.

"What a rascal he is!" she cried, her tones betraying both vengefulness and vexation. "I know I am rather silly and giddy, but fancy a man taking advantage of that in order to work out a plot against someone else! But I'll pay him out for it! It was my aunt who set me thinking and then I found out that Mr. Green had returned to London, so that he could not have had any business in the town. So at last I was so worried that I decided to come back and get to the bottom of it. By a little trickery I got your address from one of Harcourt's servants and here I am."

There was silence for a little while and then Kate continued:

"You are in very bad circumstances," she said gently, "and I intend to atone for my foolishness by helping you. No!"—as Madge opened her lips—"It will do me good to be of some use; I feel that I have led a very useless existence. Come, my dear Mrs. Green, let us be friends."

Madge was sorely in need of sympathy and a friend, and she allowed the other to take her hands and press them. Then Kate Barbour acted the part of a true woman and drew her new friend closer to her while Madge sobbed in mingled sorrow and joy.

Kate was as good as her word, and in less than a week Stanley was in a new situation in a firm in which Miss Barbour had an interest.

She helped the Greens unobtrusively in many ways and brought sunshine into the home once more. She also contrived to make things so uncomfortable for Mr. Harcourt that he deemed it advisable to take up his residence permanently on the Continent.

Miss Kate Barbour, still unmarried, often pays a visit to the Greens, where she is vociferously welcomed by a sturdy youngster who rejoices in the same name as his father and who calls her "auntie."

GEORGE DAY.

Is your photo on page 624?

Last Century.

Christmas is usually a time of damp and dark depression.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

Therefore the Christmas Number ought to have been abolished long ago.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

It was getting on people's nerves.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

There was no element of joy or surprise in it.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

We knew what it would contain before we opened its pages.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

There was the girl getting kissed under the mistletoe.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

There was that game of blind man's buff with the old gentleman tumbling over the chair.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

There was the coaching party—broken down in the snow, of course—and it was still snowing.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

There was the ridiculous ghost and the haunted chamber.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

There was a robin-red-breast occupying a whole page!

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

And if you were lucky you'd get a churchyard scene as well,

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

And a man lying dead with a dagger through his heart, in the forefront of the picture.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

Then there was the story of the burglar who went home crying,

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

And empty handed because the little flaxen-haired girl thought him to be Father Christmas.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

Also the story of the long-separated family united on Christmas morning.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

Together with a short problem novel; the highwayman;

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

A comedy in one act; or a charade which nobody ever read or performed.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

Then there was that fearful "presentation plate."

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

If it was not a little girl with a cat,

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

It was a little boy with a dog,

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

Or it was something after the "death with glory" type.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

A British soldier was facing the usual fearful odds.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

He held a smoking revolver from which the last cartridge had been discharged.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

Or he held a broken sword and stood astride his dead horse.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

(He would have had more room out in the open but you must make allowances for Art.)

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

A dozen or two blacks surrounded him and a few thousand more hurried to their assistance.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

He died singing "God Save the King."

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

This Century.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

The first number of a new century—will not be anything like that.

PEARSON'S CHRISTMAS NO., READY NOV. 20.

Will be mainly fun, just pure fun.

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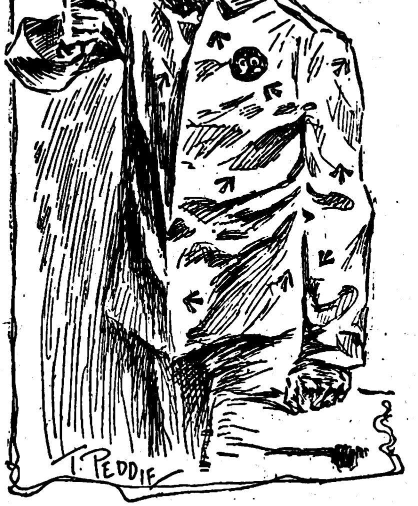


By

Henry T. Johnson.

Author of "Cruce Vincit," "The Pride of the Ring," etc., etc.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST CHAPTERS.

Richard Seldon, a convict, escapes. In a train he meets Cyril Roylance just back from Australia, whom he murders and impersonates. He assumes the rôle of squire, and pays attention to Doris Dale.

While visiting the Dales, the butler is murdered by Seldon and two accomplices, but he so manages that the guilt is fixed on Jack Branscombe, Doris' lover. Branscombe is away from home when the verdict against himself is pronounced, and on his return meets Doris.

CHAPTER XIV. *(continued.)*

Nearer and nearer came the sound of horses' hoofs, and the voices of the mounted man and the companion walking beside him. And Branscombe, listening as it seemed with heart as well as ears, thrilled as he heard his name.

"That was the man, Mr. Rossiter, no doubt," the mounted policeman was saying. "Pity there was only one chap on the down platform at Mattingham, and he a sleepy-headed dunderhead; but, wool gatherer as he was, when he noticed how the man hurried with his cap peak pulled down and his ulster collar turned up, and besides that his ticket was for Hazelwick, the station beyond, it set him wondering, and if he'd only had the sense and pluck to have set out after him then and there, we might by this time have had the bracelets on Barker's murderer. We gave it him pretty straight, I can tell you, about letting him slip, but by the time he'd done wondering there was another train coming up, that had to be cleared, and by that time, of course, the man had got a clear start, so the chief ordered me to ride over and warn you."

"I am much obliged to him," said Rossiter. "I'll have this district scoured and my men posted at every likely spot. By the bye, I'll plant one here," and as he spoke he walked up to the lych-gate, peered inside, and stood within a few yards of the very spot where Doris and Jack crouched, holding their very breaths.

And it seemed to them that the beating of their own hearts would betray their hiding place, as, after a pause of seconds, which seemed to them so many hours, of agonising suspense, he turned away, and the sound of footsteps and horses' hoofs receded, and at last merged, into the silence of the night.

"Jack, Jack," she whispered; "you see how the toils are closing round you."

"Yes, yes," he answered; "and surely it is best for me to face my accusers."

"Not with your hands bound as they are by the threads woven of suspicion, of deluding circumstance, and unhappy mischance. No! you shall not seal the unjust doom that hovers over you."

"What can I do?" he asked in a tone of bitterness, maddened at his very helplessness in the face of falsely accusing circumstance.

"That we must think out," said Doris. "For the present you must—you shall—put yourself in my hands, and I will be your guide."

Before he could argue, or even remonstrate, she had seized his arm, led him by the path through the nut coppice that closed like a leafy screen behind them as they entered, and so to the shrubberies of the Grange and to a postern gate which, by a secret spring, she opened; that very postern gate by which her loyal ancestor had led out his fugitive king in the guise of a serving man, with the pack horses waiting at that very lych-gate. Closing on its rusty hinges, that iron-clamped and studded oaken door, she led him by a dark and winding narrow passage to that secret chamber wherein the second Charles had lain safe in cover while the Roundhead pack were drawing all the county blank. Then, leaving him there while she went in quest of food and comforts for him, she drew a bolt, pushed aside a canvas frame, stepped down into the library, then, with her own fair hands, replaced the picture by Sir Peter Lely of the second Charles, covering the very hiding place of the original of that historic portrait.

And not a moment too soon; for her father, entering the library, said:

"Doris, it is time for you to dress. Remember we are dining with the Ponsonby Smiths this evening, and it's a long drive to Brettelby Court."

“Very well, father,” she replied.

“And, Doris,” he went on, “I want to speak to you seriously. It has come as a great shock to me the news of your persistence in that foolish entanglement with that young scoundrel.”

“Scoundrel, father?”

“You know very well whom I mean.”

“Yes, father, I can guess, but the man you mean has not yet been even tried for—for what you mean; still less has he been found guilty.”

“No!” thundered her father angrily, “and why? Because he has flown from justice! No more of this, I have done with imploring and intreating. I command you to dismiss out of your thoughts, out of your heart, yes, out of your life, this wretch who has already done so much to darken it. You are going to-night among people of your own set and class——”

Even in the midst of her grief, thinking of the Ponsonby Smiths, Doris smiled.

“Friends who are disposed to save you from your own folly and to gloss over the imprudence with which you have linked your name to one that has so swiftly sprung into criminal notoriety. And, in particular, you will meet one there who is ready, able, willing, eager, to give you even now the shelter of his own good name. You know who I mean, you know what I mean! It has not pleased Providence to bless me with a son; disobey me, and remember I cease to have a daughter!”

He watched her sternly as she glided, pale and silent as a spectre, out of the door, and even with anger at what he deemed her disobedience raging in his heart, he could but feel a pang of pity there too, for, with all his pride, and notwithstanding that he was intent upon her carrying into effect the plan of his pride, that plan was formulated, so far as he forced himself to believe, in her interest, as well as in his own—and he loved his daughter!

But he loved the fame of his ancient house even more; if it came to a choice between his daughter and the honour of his house he knew which he would cast aside, and he knew it would not be the honour of his house! And thinking of the man who, to his mind, had brought about the gulf between himself and his child, the man whom he believed had, in cold blood, foully murdered his old and faithful friend and servant, he clenched his hands and teeth.

“The wretch! the villain!” he exclaimed. “Oh, John Branscombe, it is well for you that you are far beyond my reach, for, if it were not so, I myself, with my own hands, would give you into the hangman's.”

He little guessed that there beyond the mellowed canvas from which the debonair, beruffled Charles beamed down, John Branscombe, bowed with anguish, heard.

CHAPTER XV.

“A Quick Change.”

“We've got the right sort, to-night, Maria,” said Mr. Ponsonby Smith, with a smile as broad as his white waistcoat, and Mrs. Ponsonby Smith with dignified asperity replied:

“Did you expect the wrong sort at my table, Joseph?”

“No, my dear, only”—and unable to find a suitable explanation, Mr. Ponsonby Smith ejaculated: “You're a wonderful woman!”

“Yes,” replied the lady, “I should like Rebecca to be here to-night.” For Rebecca was Mrs. Ponsonby Smith's sister, and at a stage in their upward flight when the Ponsonby Smiths had not reached their present altitude had emphatically and acidly expressed her conviction that Joe might buy a place in the country, but with all his money he wouldn't buy a place in county society, and Mrs. Ponsonby Smith reflected with complacency that while Rebecca, whom she had never forgiven for having years ago presumed to look down upon Ponsonby Smith because he kept a butter shop, while she had married a solicitor's managing clerk who was learning his articles, was struggling to make ends meet on about three hundred pounds a year, she was entertaining to dinner, amongst others, two county magistrates, one member of Parliament, a real live lord, and their respective womankind. For the solicitor's managing clerk was still a managing clerk, albeit a solicitor, but Joseph Ponsonby Smith was a millionaire. For Joseph had prospered. In the first place, he had had a fire, and, phœnix like, out of the ashes of the little shop with one window there had arisen a provision store with a plate-glass double frontage. And Joseph had got on to the Vestry, shortly after which he had developed a happy knack of acquiring small properties which happened to have to make way for parochial improvements, and in such cases, of course, even vestrymen have to be properly compensated. By and bye, Joseph took another shop, and another, and yet others, and by and bye, in many quarters many men drove Joseph's horses in Joseph's carts. And on and on he went along the high road to prosperity with accumulating velocity. And the wife of his bosom severely subdued her sister by referring with sniffs to her husband's clerks, and his cashiers, and his managing clerks! And Rebecca went home and wept.

In those days the Ponsonby Smiths were only the Smiths; it was at a later day that they took up the prefix Ponsonby, one of the shops being in Ponsonby-street. At the date of our making their acquaintance they were contemplating, by license, reversing the position of the Smith and the Ponsonby, as doubtless in the fulness of time they will drop Smith.

“Now, Joseph,” said the lady, “mind, you'll offer your arm to Lady Limberg; she's an old cat, but she's a very old family, and these people they've got their ways, and you must ask his lordship to take me down. He's an old fool, but he's a lord, though he don't look it! And, Joseph, just remember this time and don't flop down into your seat until all the ladies have taken theirs; and don't go telling people how much you paid for the wine, and, whatever you do, don't go explaining the points about butter and telling people all about cheeses; you may know more about cheeses than anybody else at the table, but that's just what you don't want them to know that you know. And, remember, if you hear me clinking my champagne glass accidentally with a fork, that's a warning to you not to put your foot in it.”

“All right, my dear; you know it's most marvellous, it is, the way you've picked up society ways. I say, we have got there, haven't we, Maria? Astonishing what you can do with money! You can't do much without it, and there ain't much you can't do with it. But I never thought we should have got on visiting terms with that there stuck up Harcourt Dale. Fancy a haughty, starchy, old buffer like him having such a nice daughter.”

“That was my contriving, Joe. I got that smart young Mr. Roylance to say he'd come to dinner, hinting that the Harcourt Dales would be here; then, knowing how her father was pitching the girl at the young fellow's head, I'd only got to mention that he was coming to get them here.”

“You are a contriver, Maria! But, I say, what an awful thing it is for that girl letting her name get mixed up with that young villain of a Branscombe's, and with a smart young chap like Cyril Roylance fairly gone on her. Ah, I'd give a lot of money to have that chap's style and be just as free and easy as he is in society.”

“Oh, it'll come in time, Joe. He's had more practice than you, and practice makes perfect, that's all. Now I must go down, they're arriving. Don't forget when I clink my glass."

"What's the matter with that woman? Has she got the fidgets, or is it nerves?" Lady Limberg, fixing her pince-nez, asked her neighbour at the dinner table. "She keeps tapping her champagne glass with a fork as if she were a singing teacher trying to get C!"

"I rather fancy," replied her neighbour, "she's using it as a bicycle bell to warn her husband to mind how he comes round the corner. There it goes again; see, he pulled up short just as he was telling your husband what his Chateau Lafitte cost him a dozen."

"What an observant man you are, Mr. Roylance, you'd make an excellent detective. By the bye, wasn't it smart of that man Rossiter?" She dropped her voice to a whisper, for Doris Dale was only some four seats down, and her father was across the table.

"Yes; they've got up the case pretty well considering how little they had to go upon," her neighbour replied. "Where shall you winter?"

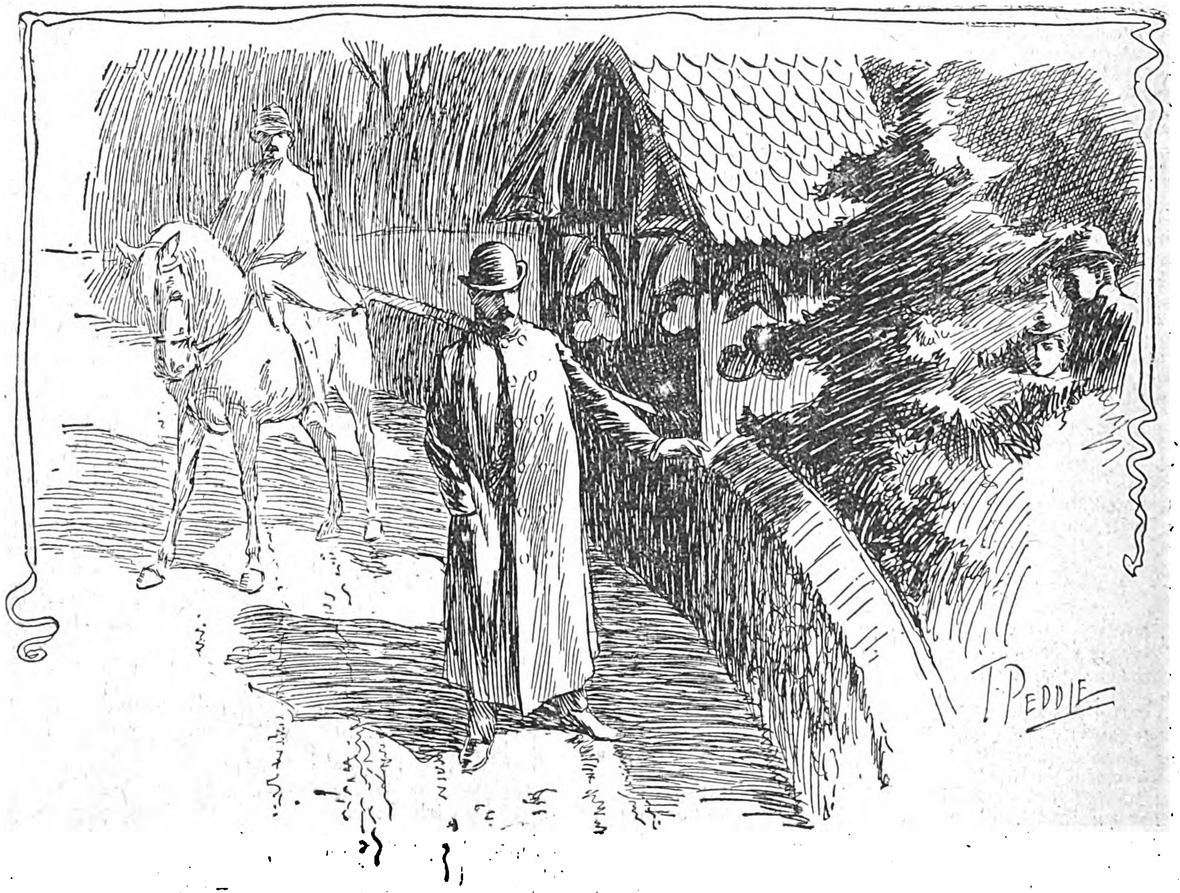
"Biarritz; Limberg wants to be near Monte Carlo."

"Isn't he going to hunt?"

"Not foxes," laughed the old woman with a hard face, "but I was thinking it would be very awkward for a criminal to have that man Rossiter on his track. Oh, of course, I see you don't care to talk about the affair, naturally"—for an impatient shade flitted across her companion's face, and he emptied his champagne glass at a draught.

As the dinner proceeded, wise Mrs. Ponsonby Smith furnished the conversation with an accompaniment in the form of a musical glass obligato, so that her lord and master managed to keep clear of serious danger. It is true he brought a frown to the cadaverous face of Lord Limberg by alluding, in order to demonstrate his familiarity with the family connections of the upper ten, to one or two relatives of his lordship who had happened to figure rather more prominently in the court of bankruptcy, and that presided over by Sir Francis Jeune, than at the Court of St. James'; and he caused something like a panic at the table by casually mentioning that he had that afternoon been perusing Stubbs' Gazette and beginning to recapitulate the names of those belonging to the district he had found there. Cling! cling! went Mrs. Ponsonby Smith's glass furiously, as a tripper's restaurant bell; the recapitulation was throttled at birth, and the situation was saved.

But from one theme, not wild horses could drag Mr. Ponsonby Smith; the superlative intrinsic value of his belongings. His 'ouses, his 'orses, his wines, his pictures,



It seemed that the beating of their own hearts would betray their hiding-place.

he waxed enthusiastic enumerating and describing them, never forgetting to mention, as the unfailing criterion of their merit, what he had paid for them, and frequently, as an instance of sagacity, how much more he had been asked for them. Lord and Lady Limberg and others present exchanged significant glances; the master of Fallowfield Hall listened with rapt attention, which won the heart of his host.

"There's class, Maria, if you like," Mr. Ponsonby Smith remarked at a later stage in the evening. "Why that there old gambler, Lord Limberg, could hardly set an' listen at the dinner table when I was a-talking about the stock of port I'd bricked up in the cellars. But, bless you, that Mr. Roylance, he was all attention, and, after dinner, when you ladies had gone upstairs and Limberg was fidgeting to get to the cards, Mr. Roylance was one of the very first to say 'yes' when I orfered to show 'em the cellars. He was the sort of chap as takes an interest in things, and I like him; and I was jolly glad he did clear old Limberg out when we did sit down at cards."

"So was I, Joseph," replied the lady, "for it's something shocking the tales I've heard about them Limbergs going out to people's houses to dinner and winning every blessed penny the people who asked them was worth. People say they actually make their living at the cards. And how anxious he was to get Mr. Roylance down at that little green table in the ante-room? I heard Mr. Harcourt Dale whisper to him, 'Be careful of Lord Limberg, he's worse than a professional gambler; he's an amateur gambler, and a gentleman by profession.' And Sir George Manders said out loud in the drawing-room: 'Limberg's got a nice fat pigeon; he'll be plucked pretty clean before he's done with him.' And for all Lord Limberg's a nobleman, he looked more like an old hawk as he took young Roylance's arm and led him into the card room; yes, and I saw him look back over his shoulder at that old scarcecrow of a wife of his and he winked, and that wink said as plain as A B C: 'Got him!'"

"Yes, my dear," said Mr. Ponsonby Smith; "but he didn't look much like a hawk when he came out, he looked more like a poor barn-door fowl what had been set about by a fighting cock and then chucked into a pond. They say Roylance had most astonishing luck, it's often the way with novices. But, I say, he was quick enough, wasn't he; nobody else except him saw that accident?"

"What accident, Joseph?"

"Why, didn't you see him when they was playing Bridge suddenly stop and say, 'I beg pardon, my lord, you've dropped an ace'; then Limberg swore he'd done nothing of the kind, and the other says, cool as a cucumber and as sure as a gun: 'Oh, yes! really, I saw it fall, look, my lord, on your right knee, it slipped off the table.' And Lord Limberg looks down, and he says: 'Well, I'm sure, so it has. How very careless!'"

So far as the Ponsonby Smiths were concerned, it was a most enjoyable evening. They enjoyed the display of their own abundance, they enjoyed Doris Dale's singing, and the Squire of Fallowfield surprised and charmed everybody when seated at the piano. He filled the room with melody, sometimes classical, sometimes popular, managing to delight everybody, except, perhaps, Lord and Lady Limberg, who were wondering how on earth they were to scrape along minus the hundred and fifty pounds which had been transferred from their pockets to the pianist's, and how on earth Limberg was going to take up the promissory note he had scribbled at the table for another two hundred. And fancy, when Limberg suggested an I.O.U., the Squire of Fallowfield happening to have a bill stamp in his pocket-book!

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"It's been a most disappointing evening, Caroline," said Lord Limberg as he threw himself back in a corner of the carriage. "It serves us right for acknowledging and visiting that class of people."

"Oh, but the Ponsonby Smiths would have been all right if we could only have got them to have played."

"But we can't, and I shall cease to know the Ponsonby Smiths; at least I shall if I can raise that fourth mortgage in other quarters."

"But don't be precipitate, Limberg. The man who spoilt our evening, as a matter of fact, was the one most nearly our equal in social standing."

"Yes, by gad! Never saw such luck before! And a mere beginner too!"

As for the Squire of Fallowfield himself, leaning back in his brougham as it sped along the tree-arcaded lanes, its lamps cleaving the inky blackness of the tunnels made by interlacing boughs, he folded his arms, half-closed his eyes, and puffing at his eternal cigar, muttered:

"A fair night's work in one way. Yes, the business part of it was all right, but as for pleasure. Ah! she wouldn't say a word to me except but what etiquette and common politeness demanded, and I couldn't win a smile from her. All the while the other women were looking at me with languishing eyes under drooping lashes, she was still and cold as a statue, thinking of him. Yes, I know, with a canker-worm gnawing at her heart for his sake. But where on earth can the fellow be? He couldn't have played into my hands more completely if he'd been trying, trying as hard as that old harridan Lady Limberg was trying to play up to the hand of her rogue of a husband just now. His disappearance has condemned him: not merely before he's tried, but before he's caught. By Jove! he's clever enough in keeping out of the way; he's slipped Rossiter clean enough as a whistle. What a coincidence if he's been working some little plant of his own—on the cross! Or again, suppose something happened to him, suppose he's been to town for a night or two off and he's got into a mix, say in some place like those I learnt to play Bridge and Baccarat in, and paid for learning; or again, something may have happened to him in his own district.

"Now, I wonder if Barney and Josh, working on their own account, have happened to cross him and are keeping it dark from me; they're quite capable of it, they meant carrying out the whole of the Dalehurst contract on their own. I wish—oh! I wish three people I know, two men and a woman, were at the other end of the earth. I'd win Doris, I'd marry and settle down, and there wouldn't be a sleeker and more respectable member of society than Tiger Dick—I mean, Cyril Roylance of Fallowfield Hall.

"Or if only two of them, the two men were away—for she's staunch enough, she wouldn't play my game, but she wouldn't give it away, she's got the pluck to, but she wouldn't; they would, if it paid them, but they daren't. But where on earth can this fellow Branscombe be? Wherever he may be, by Jove! for her sake I'd change places with him and chance it.

"For I love her; by Jove! I love her. I've liked plenty of girls, a thundering sight too many, perhaps, but I never cared for any girl quite in the same way as I care for her. Except, perhaps—once! Long ago. And then I only thought I cared; in this case I'm sure."

The carriage paused a moment at the lodge, the big gates swung open, and then the wheels creaked as they wound along the stately avenue leading to the magnificent, though a trifle sombre, main portal. The doors swung open, the man who ruled there entered, then said, with a nod to the footman who divested him of his sable-lined overcoat:

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"Don't let anybody wait up. I want nothing more to-night. Good night, everybody."

Then he sought his palatial bedroom, lit another cigar, filled himself a liqueur from the tantalus, and sat awhile smoking.

Then he went to the door, softly opened it, and listened, reclosed it, kicked off his dress boots; he gave a glance at the bed, the smooth white coverlet and quilt, he undressed, and tumbled into bed. Two or three minutes later, instead of composing himself to sleep, he tumbled up again, flinging aside quilt and coverlet.

"Yes," he said; "in case anybody entered early in the morning I've been to bed and got up early for one of my gallops or walks before breakfast."

Then he went across to an inner dressing-room, where stood a wardrobe, on casters, some inches away from the wall. He had once expressed a doubt as to that wall being damp and conducive to moth.

He pushed it further from the wall, touched a spring, and slid back the secret door of the false back of that wardrobe. Then from within he took a reefer jacket, a fur cap, a pair of corduroy trousers, a pair of thick blucher boots, a belcher neckerchief, a close cropped wig, while he fitted on a bull's eye acetylene lamp, a revolver, a short leather-laced stick with a loaded knob attached by gutta percha! Pulling the cap well over his eyes, he stealthily made his way back to the bedroom, switched off the light, then stealthily emerged into the silent corridor. At the end of it he gently raised a window opening on to the gardens of the east wing, made his way across these to the fields, and so to a lane, where in the dense shadow of the overhanging trees the identical trap with, between its shafts, the identical fast trotting pony with muffled shoes which had waited close to the Abbey Farm in the early morning following the midnight murder at Dalehurst Grange was standing.

"That you, Barney?"

"Right ho, that you, Dick?" came an answering whisper.

He clambered into the trap, and silently, swiftly, it sped away towards Brettelby Court.

Silently, steadily the midnight hours crept away. Once, twice the turret clock in the stable yard at Fallowfield Hall mentioned the fact that Time was still toiling on his journey whoever else might be resting. Stealthily along the oak wainscotted and floored gallery a man's form crept in the darkness that was quivering on the very point of beginning to lift. He approached a window.

"Yes," he said, "I'd best leave this one open, this is one they might get in by. And what infernal carelessness; it's unlatched, and how smooth it moves." Then the strange figure made its way up a staircase along the corridor to the Squire's bedroom.

"He's going into accounts to-morrow is he?" the prowling man muttered, "Very well, I'll settle accounts to-night. Cyril Roylance, you'll almost wish you'd stayed beyond the seas; you won't quite wish, because you'll be past wishing."

He placed one hand on the door handle, gently, noiselessly turned the latch, and entered.

* * * * * *

Meantime, another form approached that window—from outside!

"What? The deuce! Was I fool enough to leave it open?" A sudden spring, he was kneeling on the sill, another second he had dropped noiselessly into the corridor. Stealthily he made his way along the corridor, into which, through the mullioned windows, the thin grey-blue shaft of light was piercing.

"It's a bit late," he muttered. "I hardly fancied the job would have taken so long." He reached that bedroom door, then gave a start.

ENGLAND'S DANGER.

A HULL SOLDIER'S STATEMENT.

George Henry Biggins, of 5 Grange Villas, Grange Street, Hull, served under Sir Charles Warren in South Africa, and was nine months in Mafeking. Some hard campaigning fell to his lot, and though he bears no scar of the battlefield, misfortunes have come to him in another shape. An *Eastern Morning News* reporter who called upon him the other day was certainly able to observe in him nothing but a fine healthy type of the British soldier, yet Mr. Biggins owes his present healthy condition exclusively to Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness, and he has not always looked as well as he does to-day. "I have known the time," he said, "when I used to be strangely overcome by a chilly sensation. It was not altogether cold, for I felt it all over my body; and it seemed to be the result of being altogether run down. I felt languid and too weary and weak to do anything. My joints ached as if I had rheumatism all over me, and many a time I had difficulty in keeping up with my duties. I began to suffer from biliousness, too, and to experience a nasty sharp pain at my heart. This pain continued to get worse. Whenever I moved quickly it commenced, and I had to go slowly to get ease. So bad did it become at last that I felt convinced I had heart disease. Of course I tried to get relief, and purchased all kinds of medicines in vain until I tried Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness. The result was most satisfactory. I noticed an improvement after the first few doses, and so went on taking them. They soon ended the biliousness, and from first commencing to take them I have never again felt the pain in the chest. Bile Beans have completely cured me, and I am frequently recommending them to persons I find suffering as I did. While at Gosport I gave some to a gunner, and his mother-in-law derived great benefit from them. Only the other night my little daughter was quite out of sorts, and I gave her a few half beans. The next day she was all right again. I can tell you my family, both young and old, have used them with marvellous results." Wherever Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness are used marvellous results follow. For indigestion, anæmia, dizziness, liver and kidney disorders, constipation, debility, headache, nervousness, female ailments, colds, chill, rheumatism, and as a preventitive of influenza they are unequalled. Purely vegetable in composition, their use is followed not merely by temporary improvement, but by permanent cure. Of all chemists, or post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 London Wall, E.C., by sending prices—1s. 1½d. and 2s. 9d. They have been instrumental in restoring scores of our gallant defenders, as they did Private Biggins.

ESTABLISHED 1851.

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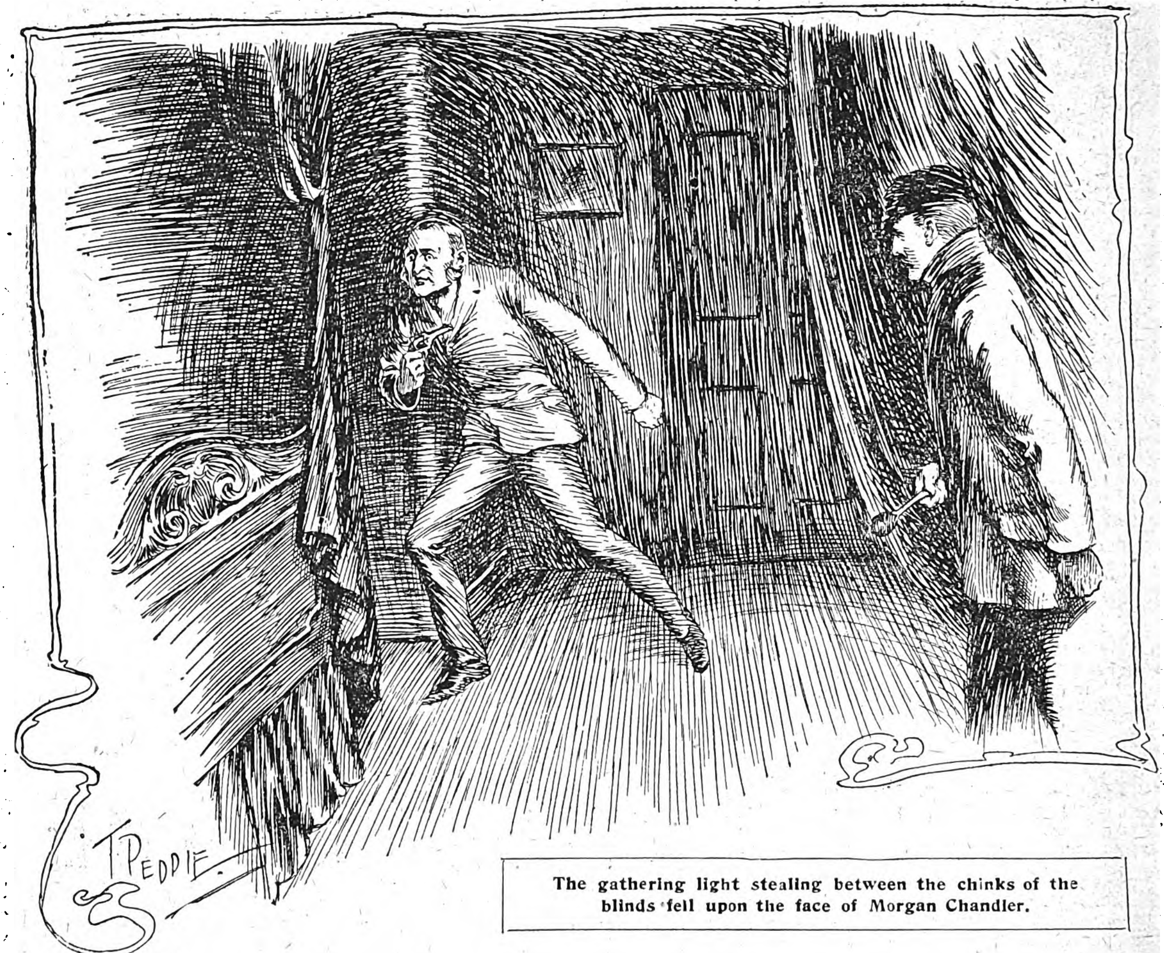
The BIRKBECK ALMANACK, with full particulars, post free.

FRANCIS RAVENSCROFT, *Manager*.



The gathering light stealing between the chinks of the blinds fell upon the face of Morgan Chandler.

"Why! what's this? I'll swear I never left that open too!" He entered the door, heard a shuffle, a stealthy footstep, saw in the dim first streak of dawn the figure of a man step by step advancing across the room towards the bed; the gathering light stealing between the chink of the blinds fell upon the face, the face of—Morgan Chandler.

And it fell and glistened on something else; on the barrel and cylinder of a revolver! Swiftly, but silently, the second form sprang upon the first, a strong arm was hooked across Morgan Chandler's throat, a resistless knee pressed into his spine. He went down with a gasp; crash! came something full upon his skull. He half-uttered a cry that died into a gurgle as a pair of iron hands tightened the collar at his throat; crash came something down again, and Morgan Chandler fell back and lay face upwards there upon the floor.

Swiftly, silently, but deftly and coolly, within that dressing-room the master of Fallowfield Hall divested himself of his disguise, replacing it within the trick back of that ingeniously constructed wardrobe. Then he tumbled into a suit of pyjamas; for a moment he looked down on the heap huddled up there by the dressing table.

"He's right for an hour or two, anyway," he soliloquised. "I may as well, however, take this out of harm's way in case of accident," and gliding back to the inner room he placed the revolver inside the false back of the wardrobe. Then he timed a tiny alarm just an hour ahead, crept into bed, composed himself comfortably between the sheets, and dropped off quietly and comfortably to sleep.

(To be continued.)

FIND OUT SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF

Handwriting is the truest index to your character. Your method of forming a T may betray meanness; the tail of your G may show generosity. Ranee's character delineations are generally pretty accurate. Do not send for one if you dislike plain speaking.

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THE GREAT REMEDY.
UNEQUALLED....

1/1½ AND 2/6.

Conquers Pain!

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Reader, do you wish to know how to make more money, obtain greater happiness, have better health, and achieve greater success in life? It is our business to help others—we are specialists in this line. Will you permit us to help *you?* It costs you nothing until we prove what we can do. We will send you our elegantly illustrated **one hundred page book free.** This remarkable work thoroughly instructs you in the underlying principles of success in every business and calling; it tells you how to cure every known disease and bad habit without the aid of drugs, medicine, or the surgeon's knife.

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It fully reveals the hidden mysteries of **Hypnotism, Personal Magnetism, Magnetic Healing, &c.** It tells you how you can quickly master these sciences in a few days at your own home and use this mighty power on your friends and associates entirely without their knowledge—new and instantaneous methods which enable anyone to hypnotize quick as a flash. We guarantee success or *forfeit One Thousand Dollars in gold.* This wonderful book has proved the turning point in the lives of hundreds of persons, who were ready to give up in despair. Thousands owe their health, happiness, and financial success to its teachings. It is full of wonderful secrets and startling surprises. It will be sent to any address absolutely free. A penny postal card will bring it. Address:

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The Best & Safest Remedy for

HEADACHE.

SAFE
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NURSE HILL, of the London Association of Nurses, writes:

"I have seen Kaputine administered to many patients, and can truly say it is a remedy which should have a place in every household."

All Leading Chemists sell KAPUTINE, 1/-. Samples One Penny.

If your Chemist has not KAPUTINE send his name and address to

KAPUTINE, HUDDERSFIELD,

and we will send you a SHILLING PACKET FREE.

WORTH A CROWN A DOSE.

RHEUMATISM CURED.

TRIAL PACKAGE FREE.

In Its Worst Forms the gnawing, boring, twisting, piercing, grinding pains of Rheumatism are almost unbearable, and often drive the sufferer to seek relief by resorting to opiates that in time enslave him to the dreadful thraldom of opiumism.

Broken and Pain-racked Bodies might have been kept supple and well if properly attended to during the beginnings of the disease.

I Have a Cure for Rheumatism. My remedy, "GLORIA TONIC," has CURED thousands of people from almost every country of this torturing disease, many of them having suffered for over 50 years.

In England it Cured Mrs. M. Stickland, of High Heath, Pelsall, who suffered for 58 years. Mr. L. Pinkney, of 3 Well Lane, Bridlington, was cured after being afflicted for 27 years. Mrs. W. Clarke, 1 Percy Street, Stratford-on-Avon, from being quite helpless for eight years, has been entirely cured through its use. It cured Mrs. J. Brewster, 59 St. Ann's Road, Barking, E. It has cured hundreds of others throughout the British Isles too numerous to mention.

1,000 BONA-FIDE TESTIMONIALS MAY BE SEEN AT MY OFFICE.

I want every sufferer from Rheumatism to give my remedy a trial, without cost. ABSOLUTELY FREE.

If You Have Rheumatism write to me about it, and I will send you, absolutely free and fully prepaid, a trial package of this marvellous remedy for Rheumatism. I will at the same time send you my book on Rheumatism, free of all cost, which will tell you all about your case.

THIS OFFER IS FREE TO ALL. AVAIL YOURSELF OF IT. WRITE NOW.

JOHN A. SMITH (Dept. B1007), 6 & 7 Stonecutter Street,
London, E.C.

THE "GEO R. SIMS" HAIR RENEWER "TATCHO"

COUPON

This Coupon entitles the holder to a Large Size

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Trial Bottle of Mr. Geo. R. Sims' Hair Renewer for

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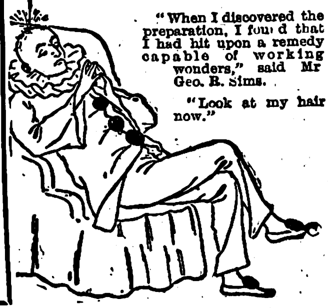
H.N. Nov. 21.



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"Look at my hair now."

MRS. BROWN POTTER, whose beautiful hair is the envy of her sex, writes:

"I Use only 'TATCHO.'"

If your hair is falling or failing, you have your remedy. Don't hesitate. Use "TATCHO." The result will surprise you and will be intensely gratifying. It is sold in bottles by Chemists and Hairdressers all over the world, 2/9 and 5/- or may be had direct in plain sealed package, post free, 2/11 and 5/3. Address:

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FOR ALL

BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS,
Sick Headache, Constipation, Wind and Pains in Stomach, Impaired Digestion, Disordered Liver, and Female Ailments.

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In Boxes, 1s. 1½d. and 2s. 9d. each, with full directions.

Prepared only by the Proprietor,

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Sold by all Druggists and Patent Medicine Dealers everywhere.

Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. To those readers who submit storyettes which are used, a six shilling novel will be awarded. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, November 18th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. for the best storyette published this week has been won by Mr. H. A. Moore, 18 Athol Street, Hulme, Manchester, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

"THIS age demands men who have convictions," shouted the impassioned orator. "Where shall we find them?" "In prison," replied the man in the gallery.

TEACHER (taking the class in English history): "Now, William Johnson, what happened on the Fifth of November?" William (readily): "Please, sir, our Henry got his finger blown off, and dad singed off all his whiskers."

A GENTLEMAN one day took his little lad out for a walk, but the boy, from some cause or other, got lost, and, meeting a policeman, tearfully asked: "Please, sir, have you seen a man without a little boy? 'Cause if you have, I's that little boy."

MISTRESS: "Why is dinner not ready, Bridget? Didn't I tell you to cook it with the gas stove?" Bridget: "Plaze, mum, yis, and I did thry, but th' stove wint out." Mistress: "Why didn't you light it again after it went out?" Bridget: "Yis, mum; but it's not come back yit. It wint out t'rough the roof."

LADY VISITOR (to little girl): "What became of that little kitten you had here once?" Little Girl: "Why, haven't you heard?" Lady Visitor: "No! was it drowned?" Little Girl: "No!" Lady Visitor: "Lost?" Little Girl: "No!" Lady Visitor: "Poisoned?" Little Girl: "No!" Lady Visitor: "Then whatever became of it?" Little Girl: "It growed up into a cat."

A NATIVE of the green isle of Erin called at a chemist's shop the other day with a prescription, the putting up of which he watched with great curiosity. "What's that, ony way?" asked the customer. "This," said the obliging apothecary, "is tincture cemicitaga racemosa and liniment of saponis, cantharides, and opii." A look of bewilderment changed to one of grave concern as the Irishman inquired: "And what is the price?" "Sixpence," was the reply. "Be jabers," said Pat, "I thought two such names as that would cost me at least five shillings."

*A WORTHY doctor, while enjoying a holiday last summer in the island of Arran, took the opportunity, along with a friend, to go whiting fishing. During operations the doctor's sinker came off and was lost. Here was a dilemma—no sinker, no more fishing that day. Ha! happy thought—his flask—no sooner said than done. The bottle was filled with salt water, carefully corked, and sent down on its mission. After a few minutes' interval, "Ha!" quoth the doctor, "a bite!" and up he pulls at racing speed a fine pair of whitings, one on each hook. His companion exclaimed. "Ha, doctor, twins this time!" "Yes," quoth the doctor, "and brought up on the bottle, too."

JONES: "Ah, no! I'm not opposed to women riding bicycles. There are some I would like to see give all their spare time to it." Mrs. Jones: "Who are they?" Jones: "Well, for instance, the young ladies in this neighbourhood who are learning to play the piano."

HUSBAND: "Do you know the reason that Shamrock II. did not win the race?" Wife: "No! Why?" Husband: "Because the Yankees put something into the water to prevent her winning." Wife: "What a shame! Wasn't it found out? What did they put in—oil?" Husband: "No, the Columbia."

AN Irishman in Dublin, happening to break a shop-window, immediately fled. The proprietor of the shop, seeing him running, ran after him, and, after a long chase, managed to catch him. "Are you the fellow who broke my window?" he asked. "Yes," replied the Irishman, "and wasn't I just after running home to get the money to pay for it?"

IT happened in the drawing-room of a boarding-house. He was a young dentist and she a school teacher, but hardly young. "I have made up my mind to speak to you to-night," he said in a low voice. She blushed, looked at the faded tulip in the carpet, and was dumb. "I have established myself in my profession, I have a little money laid by, and I have made up my mind to get married." More blushes and more silence on the part of the maiden. "I am going to ask you——" He hesitated. She moved nearer to him. "I am going to ask you if you know any young girl whom you think would make me a good wife." She stopped blushing, chilled him with a look, and swept out of the room.

IT was a cold, dark night, but Sandy and William were happy, because there sat between them the most charming young lady in Farsley. It was a spirited horse they had hired, and the trap bowled merrily along o'er moor and fell. William held the reins, and as he could dimly perceive, in spite of the darkness, that his side of the lady's muff was unoccupied, he slipped his own disengaged hand into it, and—well, two hands were very soon tenderly pressing each other. And so the happy moments flew, and the drive home came almost to an end. "When you gentlemen have done with my muff," said the young lady presently, "I trust you will not fear to tell me, as my own hands are becoming quite numb with the cold." Then dark suspicion fell upon her two admirers, for things are not always what they seem. And William and Sandy are now sworn enemies.

HIS history is briefly told. After several days of thought he discovered a sure way of making money, and, like other men, he was in a hurry to try it. He made haste to insert the following in several country weeklies: "Sure way to kill the potato beetle. Send twelve stamps without delay to X. Y. Z., who will send a recipe that cannot fail." Then he hired a dray to bring his letters from the post-office and had 50,000 of his recipes printed. Within two weeks something like 46,000 or 47,000 farmers had contributed their stamps for the printed recipes. By-and-by several hundred of them bought stout cudgels and railway tickets and started out to interview the advertiser. At his office they were informed that he had left to attend to important business abroad and was not expected back. All he had left was a package of 3,000 or 4,000 slips of paper on which was printed the following: "Put the beetle on a flat stone, and then hit him with another."

Is your photo on page 624?

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

A Half-guinea Fountain Pen will each week be awarded to the reader who is the sender of the most interesting query answered on this page.

THREE people, especially, will now be sorry that they did not buy the copy of *Short Stories* dated October 26th, as they have thereby lost their chance of each winning a five-pound note. To prevent further disappointments, see that your friends all purchase this and succeeding numbers, so that if their portraits do appear they may be able to send their claims in before the time limit expires.

* * *

THE two claimants of the five-pound notes this week are:

MR. STANTON WRIGHT (No. 21),
1A Hilton Villas,
Champion Crescent,
Sydenham, S.E.

MR. JAMES CATES (No. 23),
28 Esplanade,
Scarborough.

* * *

I SHOULD like to draw your attention to the fact that I am now offering a Half-guinea Fountain Pen to the reader who sends in the letter containing the best query which is answered on this page each week. Remember that it is not for one week only that this offer holds good, but for every week, so that many of you will have the chance of winning one of these pens, which, nowadays, are almost a necessity to everyday life. While I am on the subject, I might as well add that I shall always be glad to receive letters from my readers, whether they contain queries or not.

* * *

ADVICE TO READERS ON VARIOUS MATTERS.

(*Replies to Correspondents.*)

"BELLA."—I should say that the cathedral of Antwerp holds the record for a peal of bells. It consists of no fewer than ninety bells. Elaborate chimes are rung upon them every half-hour. As you are fond of calculations, try to work out the time required to ring the complete changes on such a peal of bells, at the rate of two sounds a second. It will, perhaps, assist you to know that with a peal of twelve bells the time required would be ninety-one years.

"How is it," writes "E. M. P.," "that one seldom sees a sketch of an African scene without it being embellished with palm trees? Now I have travelled very widely in Africa, and have come across vast tracts of country not only innocent of palm trees, but destitute of every sort of vegetation. It seems to me there must be some reason for this peculiarity, besides the crass ignorance of those who make the sketches."

There is certainly a reason, and a very good one. It is entirely the fault of the public. Readers of illustrated papers are convinced in their minds that no African scene is complete without palm trees, and palm trees they will have. I remember an incident in which Sir Francis Grenfell once sent a sketch from the seat of war in Africa to a London illustrated paper. The scene of the battle was a part of the country absolutely destitute of trees. Imagine his astonishment when at length a copy of the journal came into his hands to find that here, there, and everywhere, all over his illustration were stuck palm trees. On writing to the editor to protest, he was informed that unless this particular sort of tree were included in the sketch, the public would believe the whole thing to be a fake and drawn somewhere in the office by an ignoramus.

"FLORIST" wishes to know if there is any way of preserving the green of plant leaves when it is desired that they should remain a long time on exhibition.

I believe that an official of the United States Department of Agriculture has discovered such a method, but it is somewhat complicated and costly. He combines the chlorophyll in the leaves of the plant with copper, in the form of acetate or sulphate, producing a copper phyllocyanide which is insoluble in almost everything except strong alcohol, is not destroyed by light, and gives a colour hardly to be detected from the natural green. The process is, unfortunately, too difficult for anyone who has not a chemical laboratory at his disposal to undertake with any hope of success.

"X. Y. Z." has observed for several years past that it is always colder on Monday morning that on any other day of the week. He wants to know whether I have noticed the same thing.

I confess I haven't. Probably the reason is that "X. Y. Z." does not take any exercise during the week-end, and eats more than he does during the week. If so, his circulation would be in a lower state than usual, and he would feel any cold air there may be about on Monday more readily than on any other morning.

"POPPY" asks: "Which is it correct to serve first at table, gentlemen visitors or lady members of the family?"

Unquestionably, the lady members of the family, except when the hostess herself is serving at the foot of the table, when it would be obviously irregular for her to serve herself before the male guests.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I AM open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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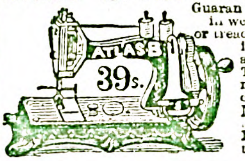

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184s High St., Camden Town, London, N.W.;
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Many people have old or disused false teeth. Messrs. R. D. & J. B. Fraser Ltd., of Princes Street, Ipswich (established 1833), buy old false teeth. If you send your teeth to them they will remit you by return of post the utmost value; or if preferred, they will make you the best offer, and hold the teeth over for your reply. The largest and oldest buyers of old false teeth in the world.

DRUNKENNESS

CURED. This can be done with or without patient's knowledge. Send me a stamp and I will tell you how. (Send no money.) Address, in confidence, Mrs. C. H. (Room 8), 195 Oxford Street, London, W.

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A victim, who was cured after five years' suffering, will gladly send full particulars of an inexpensive, guaranteed Cure on receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—**PACIDERMA, 21 Piccadilly, London, W.**

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can safely **Reduce Weight and cure Corpulency permanently** by taking **TRILENE TABLETS** (Regd.) for a few weeks. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to IMPROVE both HEALTH and FIGURE without Change of Diet. An English Countess writes: "*Your Trilene Tablets act admirably.*"

Send 2s. 6d. to **THE TRILENE CO.**, Sole Proprietors,
66 Finsbury Pavement, London.

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 67 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 28lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Coniston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

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Legible as print, **5d.** page; transposed correctly **6d.** page. MRS. CONYERS, Morchard Bishop, Devon. Recommended by the Marchioness of Waterford, Lady Arthur Hill, Miss Ellen Terry, etc.

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DON'T COUGH USE KEATING'S LOZENGES FOR YOUR COUGH.

ANY DOCTOR WILL TELL YOU, "there is no better Cough Medicine."—One gives relief: if you suffer from cough try them but once; they *will* cure, and they *will not* injure your health; an increasing sale of over 80 years is a certain test of their value. Sold in 13½d. tins.

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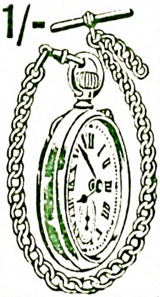
SOLID SILVER WATCH FREE.



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We guarantee these Watches to be **Solid Silver** and Government stamped, with first-class movements, and far superior to Watches generally sold as Real Silver. Our **Gift Watches** are catalogued at 30/- each, but to introduce our **Bargain Price List** and absolutely defy competition we will send you one of these Watches **FREE** if you take advantage of our marvellous offer which we will send. If you want one, write to us without delay. With your letter send us 1/- by postal order, or stamps, for one of our splendid Ladies' or Gents' Watch Guards, to wear with the Watch, equal in appearance to a £5 Real Gold article. After you receive the beautiful Watch, we shall expect you to show it to your friends, and call their attention to this advertisement, and to mention that the Watch is guaranteed for 5 years.—Dept. **F. Hyde Park Watch Co., Delamere Crescent, London, W.**

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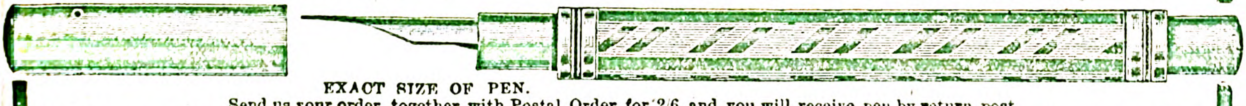

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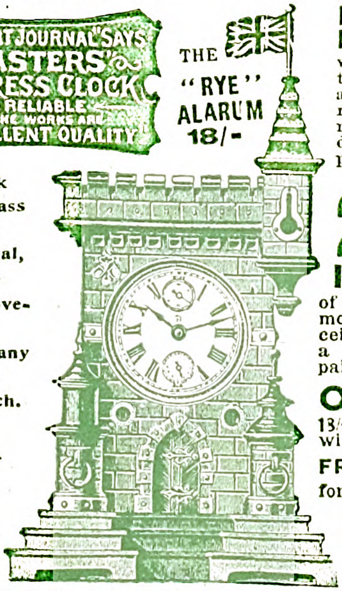

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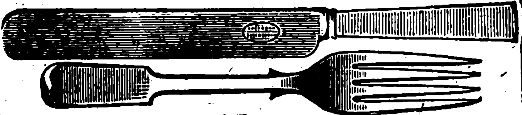

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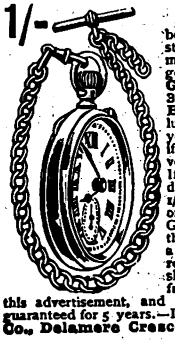

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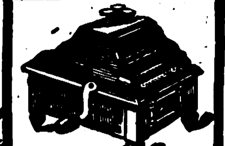

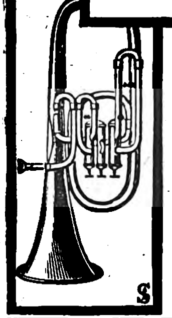

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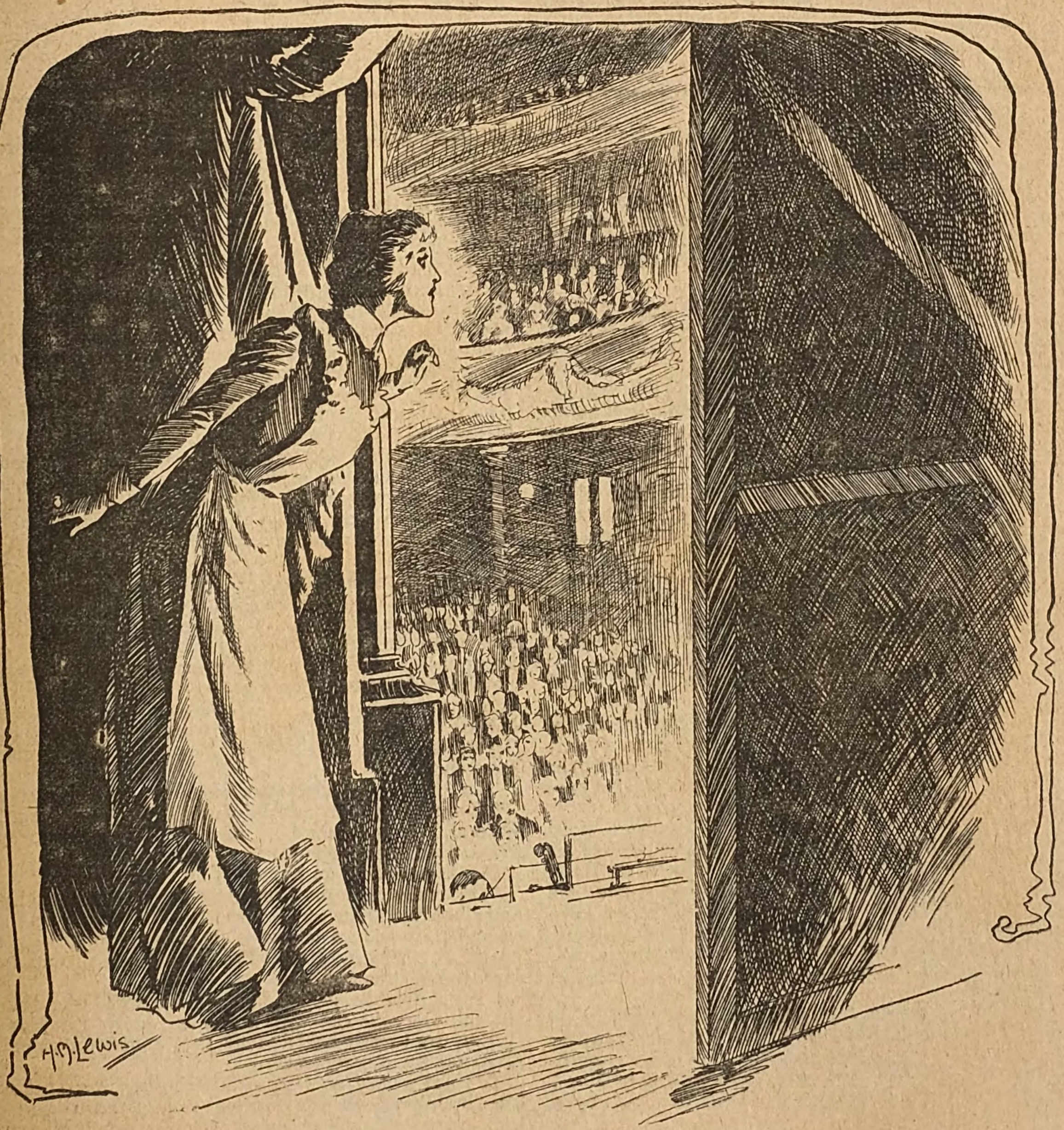

For one fleeting moment Jenny stood as if paralysed.

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THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

XVI.—A LIFE FOR A LOVE.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

The Firing of the Train.

Nowhere is the spirit of cliqueism more rampant than among the ranks of a travelling theatrical company and the members of the *Good Samaritan* Company were no less addicted to cliques than any other of their kindred professionals.

In the first place there were those who radiated round the beautiful "lead," Hazel Harlow, and as amongst these could be numbered Raymond Venables the manager, Eric Monteith, Jenny Lovelace, and a good many of the men, it will be readily understood that this set predominated. It was among the other ladies of the company that divergence of opinion as regards Hazel was most to be looked for, and the reason for this can be put down to one cause—jealousy.

Hazel was practically a newcomer in the ranks of her profession, yet with a bound she had cleared the heads of many who thought themselves altogether superior to her in looks and histrionic abilities, hence there was much heart-burning among those who had not come under the influence of Hazel's sweet personality. A girl of the latter class was Ethel Montrose, Hazel's understudy, a girl who had undoubtedly pretensions to good looks, who was also vivacious, and a fair actress, yet without enough depth of mind to ever make herself pre-eminent in her profession.

Yet Ethel Montrose had a grievance. Her ground for complaint was that she had never yet been given a really adequate chance to display her talent. How could she ever hope to show the world her powers if she were always doomed to be another's understudy?

This view she aired amongst those of her companions whom she knew were actuated by the same feelings as herself, dislike, or in other words, jealousy, of Hazel Harlow. Yet there was one person who lent a ready ear to her complaints from other motives than that of mere dislike to the more favoured actress, and that was a young actor, Harold Kenrick, who played a subordinate part in the piece, and was head over ears in love with Ethel Montrose.

Liverpool had been reached, and already the *Good Samaritan* Company had given the first performance at the Prince of Wales' Theatre, the pretty playhouse in Clayton Square, and once more indorsement of Hazel Harlow's power and beauty had been rendered by a crowded audience.

After the performance Kenrick had induced Ethel Montrose to accompany him to supper at a certain well-known hotel in Bold Street. He had determined to bring affairs to a head, to disclose to his companion in words what he had hitherto only hinted at in a hundred minor ways, his undying love and desire to make her his wife. He was not long in coming to the point.

"I have been long waiting," he said, during a pause in the meal, and speaking in a low, nervous voice, "to have an opportunity of seeing you alone, Ethel, only you have always been with one or another of the crowd, and I have never had a decent chance. Anyhow, you must know what I am going to say, you must know that I love you madly"—this with that slight affectation of theatrical pose that most actors find it so hard to get away from in real life—"will you become my wife?"

The girl heard him out in silence, and it was some moments before she answered him. At last she said:

"I like you very much, Harold, better than any other man in the crowd; but at the same time I don't quite know whether I like you enough to marry you, and supposing we did get married, and you were to find someone else you loved better, well"—with an assumption of archness—"what would become of poor little Ethel?"

"You know that is impossible," came the answer in a low voice fraught with suppressed passion. "You know that I would do anything for you; that I would simply die for you. Won't you say 'Yes,' Ethel? We'll take a flat in London. I believe I could get a part at one of the theatres, and you, with your beauty and talent, will have no difficulty in getting a good shop somewhere."

The girl laughed somewhat bitterly.

"It's all very well to talk of my beauty and talent," she said, "but it hasn't done me much good so far, except to get me Hazel Harlow's understudy."

She gave vent to an impatient exclamation.

"It's really a shame," she went on; "how Venables and all of them kowtow to Hazel Harlow. I'm sure I'm every bit as good an actress as she is, and if only I got a chance of playing Ruth, I'm sure I could convince everybody of the fact."

"You are quite right, darling," answered the man. "I, and everyone else with any sense, know that Hazel Harlow can't really hold a candle to you, but you haven't given me my answer yet."

The girl looked at him scrutinisingly. Her shallow little brain was still running on the idea that possessed her, namely of her superiority to Hazel, and she had not really room in her mind to consider two subjects at once.

Is your photo on page 652?

Then suddenly Kenrick's impassioned glances started a new train of thoughts within her.

"Supposing," she began, "that I were to consent to become your wife, would you be ready to give me some tangible proof of your affection, because, after all, it's only right that I should test you if I've got to tie myself to you for ever."

"Only try me," came the delighted answer. "Anything I can do, I will do."

"Yes, that's just it. I don't know whether you can do it."

"Do what? For goodness' sake don't torture me any more, Ethel. At least give me the chance of trying."

"Very well, I will."

The girl spoke half-banteringly, more as a pretext for putting on one side the attentions of her lover, for whom, if truth must be told, she had not sufficient regard from the point of view of a future wife. "Contrive that I shall play the part of Ruth for one week on tour, and I'll promise to marry you. There!"

She finished up with a little laugh, little thinking what the result of her words were to be. Had she only divined the consequences of her foolish freak, she would then, once and for all, have quelled any hope in her lover's breast of complying with his desire, for she was not radically bad. Foolish and flighty she might be, but not a criminal.

"Get you to take Hazel Harlow's part for one week?" echoed Kenrick moodily; "that's rather a tall order. Not that I am sure you wouldn't play Ruth every bit as well."

"That's just it," broke in the girl; "I'm quite sure I could, and if I was to be given a real look in who knows what it might lead to. Venables might say 'Well, we never knew what a genius we had in Miss Montrose.' It might lead to my becoming the star of the company."

She spoke without thinking, trying to believe that she knew there was truth in what she said, though in her heart of hearts she knew otherwise. She knew perfectly well that she stood on a different plane from Hazel, that she would never be able to reach the level of excellence attained by her more successful rival. And Kenrick, infatuated as he was, quite believed that she was everything she said, nay more, the idea took shape and began to grow within him that it was merely a question of personal spite, that Ethel was being kept from the place she ought to occupy by the intrigues of Hazel Harlow.

"Then you are really in earnest?" he said. "You promise to marry me if you are able to act the part of Ruth for six consecutive nights?"

The girl was secretly somewhat perturbed at his quiet seriousness. Then she broke into a laugh.

"Yes," she said, "I am serious. On the sixth night following a week's performance in which I have taken the part of Ruth, I'll give you my promise to become Mrs. Kenrick."

"Then Mrs. Kenrick you shall become." There was something terribly sinister about the quiet air of finality with which the few simple words were spoken.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORM THREATENS.

It was an everyday occurrence for Hazel Harlow to receive at the theatre a great number of letters, nearly all of them from men desirous of making her acquaintance. Invitations to supper, to lunch, begging letters, letters from unsuccessful actors and actresses, these and many others she received from day to day. On the Tuesday after their opening performance in Liverpool there were as usual three or four communications, among them a note of somewhat different calibre to the usual collection. The note in question ran as follows:

"Miss Hazel Harlow is warned by a friend and well-wisher to at once relinquish her part and to abandon all idea of succeeding as an actress. Miss Harlow is undoubtedly a woman of beauty and charm, but her sphere does not lie upon the stage. She is only standing in the way of those whose heart is in their profession, and would be well advised to abandon as soon as possible any further connection with theatrical life. Unless this letter is complied with Miss Harlow may find herself in a very awkward predicament."

"There! What do you think of that?" cried Hazel, handing the note to her companion, Jenny Lovelace.

The two girls were in Hazel's dressing-room. Jenny took the missive and read it through carefully.

"This was written by a maniac," she answered. "Someone who is completely off his or her head. It's unsigned, and undated, and written evidently in a disguised hand. Are you going to take any notice of it, Hazel?"

"I think I shall show it to Eric," answered the latter. "He may recognise the handwriting."

But Monteith could throw no light upon the epistle.

"It's my idea," he said, when the note was shown to him a little later, "that it was written by someone who is wildly jealous of Hazel's success, but I don't really think it's worth taking any notice of. Anyway, forewarned is forearmed, and we shall have to keep our eyes skinned, as the Yankees say." And so, for the time, the matter dropped.

Hazel took no notice of the mysterious letter, and, indeed, banished the occurrence from her mind. As a matter-of-fact, this was the first move in the game set on foot by the foolish jealousy of Ethel Montrose, and it was the work of Kenrick, who had lost no time in setting his machinations on foot.

He was indeed at his wits' end to know how to accomplish the task imposed upon him, and yet with the end in view that was held out to him he had determined to lose no time in proceeding with his plans. He knew, as did all the Company, that Hazel had on more than one occasion been made the victim of a conspiracy. He knew how often her life had been jeopardised, though he did not know the real reason at the back of the whole story.

He had some vague idea that the adventures through which Hazel had gone had been instigated to a certain extent by herself in order to advertise the charms that he could not understand.

"Yet, if she really had been in danger," he argued, "she would be chary of courting any further. If, therefore, I can intimidate her sufficiently, she will throw up the sponge and leave the road clear for Ethel. And if I can once get her away from the Company it is inevitable that Ethel must take her place."

Thus in secret he watched whether his anonymous communication would bear any fruit. But another day passed away and Hazel showed no sign of being perturbed by the unusual epistle she had received, and so he determined on stronger action.

Again an anonymous note was found among Hazel's letters, and this time the wording was much stronger.

"Unless, after to-night, you hand in your resignation to Mr. Venables, and once and for all leave the *Good Samaritan* Company the result of your conduct will be upon your own head. Your stay with the *Good Samaritan* Company has already been productive of enough unhappiness. You are the Jonah of the voyage, and must be cast overboard. Therefore take this warning and disregard it at your peril. If you leave the Company you will have nothing to fear. If you stay on your blood be upon your own head."

The handwriting was identical with the first one Hazel had received of like character. But there was such an unmistakable air of vindictiveness about the missive that a vague feeling of alarm grew up in Hazel's breast that danger really threatened her. She took counsel with Eric and Raymond Venables as to what she had best do, and it was Venables who came forward with a proposition that seemed likely to help her.

"Let us publish the note," he said, "publicly, and offer a big reward for the writer of it. This sort of thing is intolerable. It surely can't be anyone in the Company and yet it reads to me very like professional jealousy. Let's publish it as I say and offer a large reward for the discovery of the person who wrote it."

But Hazel was strongly averse to his course of action, and Eric came forward with much wiser counsel.

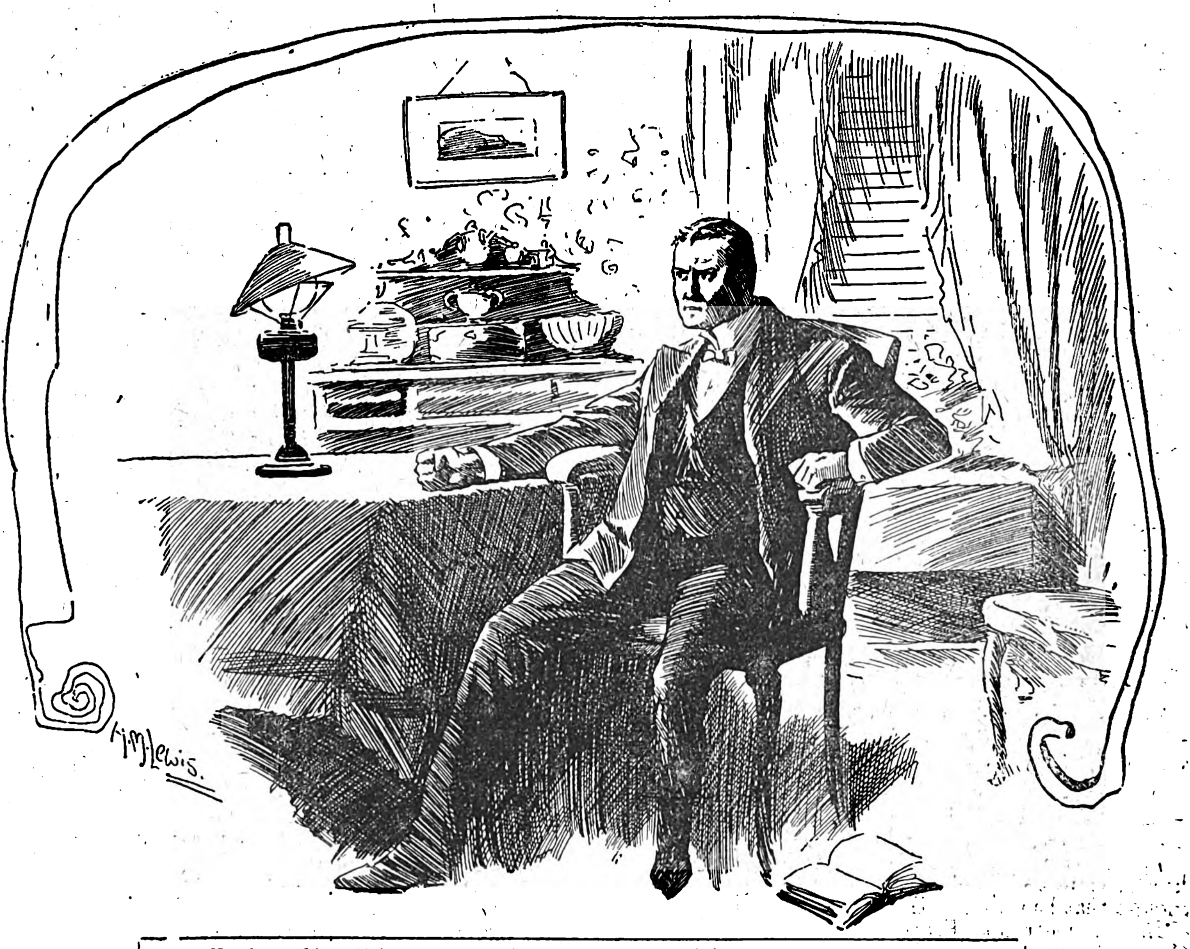
"I am of opinion," he said, "that the letter is written by one of the other members of the Company. Let's call them all together and read out the note. I'll keep my eyes on them while it is being read and surely we shall be able to spot the culprit if she or he exists in our own ranks."

"That's not a bad idea," answered Venables; "and even if it is unproductive I really don't think Hazel need be frightened. We have learnt experience on this tour, and we ought to be able to insure the non-repetition of any of the horrors that have gone before. But still, if the perpetrator of this note is in our midst, the affair had better be stopped before it gets any further on our nerves."

"Then I should suggest," said Monteith, "that the whole Company be assembled upon the stage of the theatre; that Venables makes one of his telling speeches, and I will try and give my capabilities as an amateur detective full rein. It's my opinion that someone is trying to play a stupid practical joke upon Hazel."

The proposal having been thus set on foot, practical demonstration was soon forthcoming. With feelings of the intensest mystification the Company was assembled, and Venables stepped forward primed for his speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began suavely, "I have called you here to-day upon a matter that touches one of your members very intimately, and knowing as I do that I have to deal with honourable men and women, I have no compunction in taking you fully into my confidence. But the fact of the matter is that Miss Harlow



He threw himself into a chair, his eyes burning brightly as the light of a hideous resolve flamed up within them.

has been the recipient of a threatening letter which I think it would be the best for me to read out to you as she has handed it to me naturally under some alarm."

Hereupon the manager produced the last threatening missive that Hazel had received, and read it out in a clear, penetrating voice.

A faint hum of astonishment followed the recital of the epistle, and Venables, allowing a few seconds to elapse so that the full purport of what he had just read might soak into the minds of the assembled Company, continued:

"If there is any one present who has any light to throw upon this extraordinary document the least he or she can do is to step forward and speak out, for I take it that I am dealing with honourable people, and I can hardly believe that there is anyone among you capable of such an outrage on good breeding."

Again he paused. A clamour of indignant denial of any complicity in the matter arose on every hand. There was nothing left therefore but for Venables to thank the assembly for having listened to him.

After the meeting had broken up Venables made his way, as arranged, to Monteith's room.

"Well," cried the manager, "has our detective any report to make? Were you able to deduce anything from the faces of the crowd?"

Monteith paused for a moment.

"I did notice one rather suspicious thing," he said cautiously, "and that was that Ethel Montrose, who was standing in front, went very pale when you began speaking and then got very red. Well, we know that woman is a bundle of nerves, and perhaps surprise may account for her exhibition of nervousness, yet at the same time Miss Ethel is Hazel's understudy, and, as I have good reason to know, would give her empty little head to be in Hazel's shoes. It may be—mind you this is only a theory—that her hand penned the note merely with the idea of getting Hazel to relinquish her part so that she herself might be given a chance of showing what she could do as Ruth. If my theory is correct, I don't believe we need have any serious cause for alarm because I don't believe Miss Ethel is of the stuff that makes a murderess. She'll merely want watching."

"The easiest way out of it," broke in Venables, "is to give her the sack, or to tax her direct with being the writer of the note."

"Now that's just like you, Venables, rushing into extremes the moment an idea is mooted. If you did sack her she would indeed have a motive for paying off old scores against Hazel, and goodness knows, we've got our hands full enough in looking after our 'lead' without having any fresh factor dragged into the business."

There was undoubted commonsense in this view of the case, and Venables thought the same. It was therefore determined to do nothing further in the matter except to keep a keen eye upon the doings of Ethel Montrose, for of course it was admitted that they might be on a wrong scent altogether, and the note might have been inspired from sources outside the Company.

The hand of Horace Caldecott, the one that had already brought so much trouble into Hazel's life, might possibly have something to do with this new phase. Yet neither Venables nor Monteith could divine how near to and yet how far they were from the true motive that had inspired the clandestine communication.

In the meantime Ethel Montrose had sought out Harold Kenrick.

"So this is your doing," she began excitedly; "you have already begun to turn out Hazel Harlow from the Company."

She spoke in a voice in which fear and hope struggled for mastery.

"And what if I have?" came the dogged answer. "I'm going to win you somehow. You must leave me to take my own steps in achieving my object."

A sudden terror clutched at the girl's heart. There was something terribly sinister in Kenrick's manner.

"What are you going to do next?" she asked fearfully.

"I don't quite know," answered Kenrick in the same sullen tone; "but you can trust me, darling. Before many days are out you will be finding yourself called upon to fill the *role* of Ruth. All is fair in love and war. Don't forget that, and besides, I am as firmly convinced as you are that you will do far more credit to the part than Hazel Harlow. I am not alone in my belief. I have been casually inquiring of one or two of the others and they quite agree with me it's all a put-up job. Venables is sweet on Hazel Harlow, and he's running her for all he is worth. There'll be no chance for anyone else so long as she holds the stage."

The girl was silent for a few moments, then cowardice mingled with an unwelcome thrill of satisfaction to think that this man was willing to dare so much for her sake made her resolve to let him go on with whatever he had before him.

"Very well, then," she said finally; "if you have really got a scheme that will insure my taking Ruth's part I shan't say any more, but will only wait to see how you are going to carry it out. But I think it will be best if we are seen as little as possible together, then nobody's suspicions will be aroused, and you will be able to work on without a handicap. But take a word of warning and keep your eye on Eric Monteith. He's a deep one, he is. I advise you to keep out of his way. I shan't give him any ground for suspicion." And in making this resolve the girl was in reality doing the very best she could to further her lover's schemes, whatever they were, for although she was not cognisant of the fact, as we know, she was the very person towards whom the finger of suspicion pointed.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of Monteith," answered Kenrick carelessly; "he's too much wrapped up in the fair Hazel."

CHAPTER III.

DARK DOINGS.

HAVING fully recognised that his first attempt to oust Hazel Harlow had failed, it can be well imagined that Harold Kenrick only made up his mind to concentrate his attentions more fully upon devising a scheme that might bring success to his frenzied machinations.

The power of a true pure love upon a man is too well-known, and its possibilities too potent to need of amplification here, but with a man like Kenrick, who had come under the influence of an all-absorbing passion, the result was the reverse of anything that might militate for good. All his spare moments were given up to brooding over the fancied slight offered to the object of his fierce affections, and the more he pondered the more his passion grew, and with it the resolve to bring about the discomfiture of Hazel Harlow, no matter what the cost might be.

A hundred mad schemes floated through his brain only to be rejected each in turn for another still more

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mad. The fancied wrongs offered to Ethel Montrose became a terrible reality, and thus the monomania, fed by the fires of his jealous passion, grew and grew until at last he had scarcely another thought. And although Eric Monteith had, true to his word, kept a careful eye upon Hazel's understudy, he could discover nothing in her actions or behaviour to justify the suspicion that had been awakened by her conduct on the occasion of Venables' harangue.

And as the days passed by and the final hours of the sojourn of the *Good Samaritan* Company in Liverpool drew ever nearer, it became forced upon him more and more acutely that he had been on the wrong track. The anonymous letter must have been sent outside the Company. And yet it was strange that since Venables had made its contents public property among the members of the Company there had been no repetition of a like unwelcome communication. This fact undoubtedly pointed to the letter having been inspired by one of his own colleagues. All these surmises gave Monteith ground for apprehension, and he was all the more vigilant to keep an eye upon Hazel.

Hazel herself viewed his forebodings with that cheery optimism that none of her previous adventures had ever been able to entirely quell.

"Depend upon it it was a practical joke," she said. "We shall hear no more about it."

And Eric, anxious only to guard the woman he loved, from more annoyance than need be, appeared to concur with her surmise. He kept his own forebodings locked up within his breast. Yet had Monteith or Hazel Harlow been possessed of the power of second sight they would on the Thursday night during their stay at Liverpool, after the performance was concluded, have noticed a strange occurrence in the room taken by Harold Kenrick. Seated at his table with a lamp before him the actor was poring over a book, a volume that he had picked up that same day at a second-hand bookstall, that treated of a no less sinister subject than "Poisons and Poisoners."

To such a state had his morbid desire conveyed him that Ethel Montrose's lover had already determined upon a desperate step. He had now resolved that there was one way, and one only, to remove the barrier that existed between himself and Ethel Montrose—the living barrier, Hazel Harlow—and that expedient was murder. How he was to achieve his terrible end he had not yet fully worked out in detail, but the train of thought that was in him had received further impetus by the discovery of the little book in the obscure bookshop. Thus he sat and pored over the volume, his brain in a whirl with the emotions conjured up by his base purpose.

Yet the book was old and obsolete, and for the most part treated of obscure and forgotten poisons, dealing with the curious compounds that could be made by the admixture of certain alkalis and irritants, the names of which were completely strange to the actor. Old recipes that had been in use in the time of the Borgias, or that had been handed down by wizards and necromancers of the East, filled up a large part of the volume. At last Kenrick flung the book across the room in a pet and began pacing up and down with quick, frenzied strides.

"There's nothing to be got out of that," he muttered morosely; "no chemist would be able to supply me with the things treated of in that old volume. No, it will have to be something that I can get easily, opium or morphia or arsenic, or something like that." He spoke with the utmost callousness as though he were discussing some ordinary everyday occurrence, and had not in his mind the destruction of a young and beautiful woman who had never wilfully done him any harm.

"Well, it's got to be done," went on his thoughts. "There is no other way out of it; the only thing is how can I do it without getting found out, for of course if I am found out it will be good-bye to any hope of ever calling Ethel mine. To call Ethel mine, isn't that enough to fire one to sacrifice a good deal, and besides, it'll only be a just retribution, the overthrowing of a vile conspiracy that has for its object the wilful neglect of true talent and the advancement of the basest favouritism. Who is Hazel Harlow that she should ride roughshod over those to whom she is not fit to hold a candle? It is no crime I am meditating. I merely forestall human justice." And with such ravings the miserable man paced up and down the narrow apartment.

It will be seen from this that affairs with Harold Kenrick were indeed in a parlous state. All his finer instincts, all his better self, had been swamped by his perversion of the word love. He had now turned a deaf ear to all the promptings of his better nature; he had but one motive now in life—the destruction of Hazel Harlow. On to the silent watches of the night and into the small hours of the morning he paced to and fro pondering on how he could best achieve his base ends. At last towards morning an idea seemed suddenly to strike him. He stopped in his feverish pacings up and down, that had been for all the world like those of an animal in a cage, and threw himself into a chair, his eyes burning brightly as the light of a new and hideous resolve flamed up within them.

"Idiot that I was not to have thought of it before!" he muttered. "The thing is simplicity itself; fool I was not to have thought of it before! I have been wasting precious time in devising some intricate scheme, and now I have got a notion that will save me hours of waiting and deliberation. To-morrow is Friday, the last day but one of our stay in Liverpool. Can I but bring off the *coup* to-morrow night, next week will see Ethel installed in the part of Ruth, and then at the end of next week I shall go to her and say, 'Ethel, I have earned the right to make you my wife,' for even if Hazel Harlow be removed from the scene Venables must complete the tour for which he has contracted. Yes, I'll do it—I'll do it!"

Having thus come to so sudden a resolve he went to bed and fell asleep, and slept till ten o'clock on the morning of the next day with all the untroubled serenity of a child. In such curious garb does criminality clothe itself, the instincts of a devil are linked hand-in-hand with the reposefulness of the most perfect innocence.

The next day his first act was to seek out Ethel Montrose, who was astonished to find him suddenly transformed into apparently a very ordinary, calm, every-day individual.

"You said you did not want to be seen with me more than necessary during our stay in Liverpool," he began; "and I should not have come only as we are leaving here in two days I thought it would not matter. And besides, I've hit upon a plan that I feel sure will be the means of transferring the part of Hazel Harlow to you for the rest of the tour."

"For the rest of the tour!" gasped the girl incredulously. "How on earth can that be?"

Then something in the man's face filled her with a nameless dread.

"What are you going to do?" she cried.

"I am going to win Ethel Montrose as my wife," was the calm answer. "It's the one thing in life that, from my point of view, is worth living for, and"—his voice changed—"I have your word that you will marry me after you have performed the part of Ruth for one week. I am risking a good deal for you, Ethel, and were it not that I know you will keep your word I might hesitate before going on with the scheme I have elaborated. You will not go back upon your plighted word?"

The girl laughed nervously.

"What I promised I'll do," she said, though her heart was not in her words, and all the time she was groping about in her mind for elucidation of the mysterious plot devised by her lover. What could he be going to do? On what desperate venture was he about to embark? Surely it could not be so desperate as her suspicions would have her believe. He looked calm and cool enough, and yet his face seemed to have become strangely altered in the last few days.

For a few moments Ethel Montrose entertained the idea of going to Venables or Monteith and warning them that a scheme was afoot that had the downfall of Hazel Harlow for its ultimate object. And then that love of mystery and of power that so often strikes a dominant note in a woman of her composition, banished the fleeting resolve. She would let things take their course.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STORM BREAKS.

THE bookings at Liverpool had been exceptionally large, and Venables noted with satisfaction that he would be able on that night to put up the placard "House Full" outside the theatre. Before the commencement of the performance he and Eric were talking together in the latter's dressing-room.

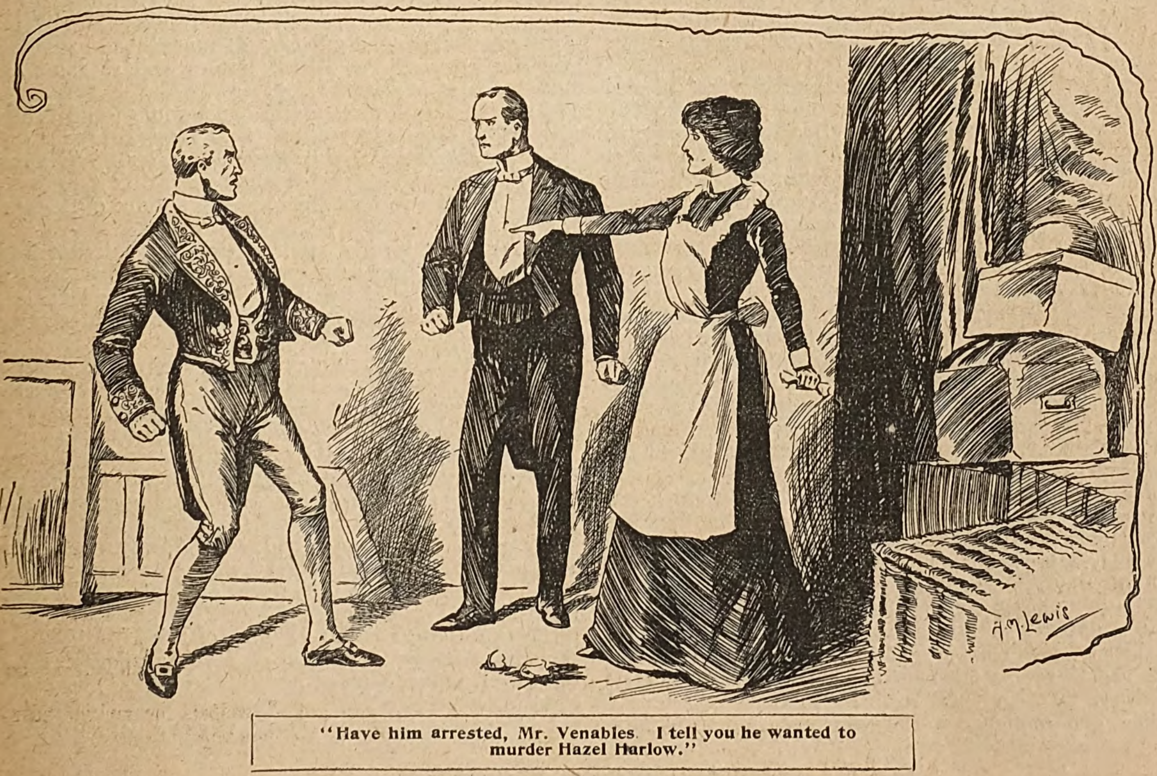
"It's been a bumper week," said the manager, "and it really looks as if we are going to get away from Liverpool without having to add another horror to the long list of those that have dogged our footsteps all through. The more I think of it, the more I feel convinced that those two bogus notes that Hazel received at the beginning of the week were the attempts of some fool to perpetrate a practical joke."

"For goodness' sake don't let us shout till we are out of the wood," put in Monteith quickly. "I believe I am as much of an optimist at heart as any man living, but Heaven knows there has been little reason for optimism lately, and the worst of it is the enemies one has to combat are all snakes in the grass, so to speak. One can never really know from which side the next danger will come. If my experiences have been the average ones of the travelling actor, well, all I can say is, I wonder that the lunatic asylums of England aren't crammed full of raving maniacs who have, at one time or another, been the shining lights of provincial theatres."

Venables gave vent to an uneasy laugh.

"Well, let's hope for the best," he said; "to lapse into platitudes—what can't be cured must be endured."

At last the curtain went up on the first act of *The Good Samaritan*, and the first two scenes composing the act passed off without a hitch. The culminating scene of the play took place in the second act. This scene opened at a big assembly in a London drawing-room, where the guests were gathered together after dinner drinking coffee. Ruth, as the centre figure, was the



"Have him arrested, Mr. Venables. I tell you he wanted to murder Hazel Harlow."

rich daughter of a man who had disappeared from England when she was quite a child, and was supposed to have been lost at sea. Ruth being possessed of great wealth, had determined to devote her money to charity. In the middle of the act a man enters the room hatless, breathless, dirty and dishevelled. This is Ruth's father, who amassed his wealth by criminal means. He has come back to England, only to fall into the hands of the police. He manages to make his way to his daughter's house, acknowledges his identity, and is arrested in the midst of the fashionable assembly. Thus Ruth discovers that the money she has devoted to charitable purposes has been amassed by fraud, and she is the daughter of a convict. The curtain falls on this denouement.

Now, as this scene was a particularly trying one for Hazel, Venables had arranged that instead of a cup of the weak wash that passed as coffee being handed to Ruth, a cup of strong beef-tea should be given to her as a preparation for the very trying scene that followed. The curtain went up upon the brightly-arranged stage filled with its well-dressed crowd. Hazel was seated at the back of the stage, as she did not take up a prominent position among the characters till her great scene came. Jenny was not on in this scene, and she stood in the wings carelessly watching the countenances of her fellow-actors and actresses. Suddenly she became aware that Harold Kenrick was standing close by dressed in the garb of a footman, his part, waiting to hand round the coffee to the assembled guests. He was a man that she had never much cared about, so she drew aside without speaking. Then something in his face arrested her attention. He was looking at someone on the stage with a strange intentness, with eyes that seemed to burn as though fed by some unseen fire. She followed his gaze and found the object of his attention was Hazel Harlow. He said nothing; he only stared and stared, and Jenny could see that his lips were moving slightly, as though in answer to the active working of his brain.

"Why on earth does he look at Hazel like that?" said Jenny to herself; "is anything wrong with Hazel?"

But no, there was nothing in Hazel's appearance to warrant such a fierce scrutiny. A vague feeling of alarm and distress sprang up in Jenny's mind. There was something uncanny about Kenrick's behaviour. "He looks for all the world as if he would like to stick a knife in her," continued Miss Lovelace's thoughts.

Then he turned away in order to fetch the coffee cups and the tray upon which he carried them round. Jenny slipped back behind the shelter of a flap and watched him as he made his way to the table upon which the "refreshments" were set, ready for him to carry upon the stage. He picked up the tray, but before doing so he put his hand to his pocket and threw a small piece of crumpled up white paper upon the ground. Then he raised the tray, and at the words that represented his cue, walked pompously forward.

For a moment Jenny hesitated. Then curiosity got the better of her. She sped forward and appropriated the fragment of paper that Kenrick had flung down so carelessly. It was apparently only a creased and crumpled ball of white packing paper, and Jenny unrolled it carelessly without expecting to find anything upon it that would give her a clue to Kenrick's behaviour. But as she smoothed the paper out it was to find a red label attached thereto, a label such as chemists use, with the one word "Poison" printed in black upon it.

The one ominous word suddenly caused Jenny's heart to stand still. Like a flash her brain leapt upon the one and only solution to the business—the one and only explanation to Kenrick's strange behaviour. The poison that had been in that paper he had transferred into the cup of beef-tea destined for Hazel. Jenny did not stop to think of the why or wherefore of such an act, yet somehow she knew that her suspicions were correct. Why Kenrick wanted to poison Hazel she could not divine, but there was no time to pause and reflect over the pros and cons of the case then. Action, swift, decisive action, therein lay the only hope of saving her friend. She hurried back to her place at the wings, consumed by an overpowering fear that Hazel had already lifted the fatal cup to her lips, and that anything she might do was now too late! Ah, what was that? Kenrick had just reached Hazel. He had handed her the cup, he stood over her with his burning eyes fixed upon her face, another moment and his foul deed would have been accomplished. For one fleeting moment Jenny stood as if paralysed. She seemed absolutely incapable of action, a sort of horrid hypnotic spell seemed to have been cast over her. She could only stand and gaze and gaze with wide-open, almost unseeing eyes at the terrible drama that was being enacted before her—a play within a play. And yet how much more terrible was the reality than the fiction.

Then the mist cleared away from Jenny's eyes. She could not rush on the stage and denounce Kenrick before the whole theatre, could not rush on and announce to Hazel that the cup she held in her hand—was already on the point of raising to her lips—was poisoned. No, she must find out some way more subtly drastic than that. Then suddenly an inspiration came to her. It was her only chance. She was dressed in the garb of a middle-class shopkeeper, and might very well have passed for a servant. Throwing open the door that led into the apartment where the guests were supposed to be seated she hurried across to Hazel, just dressed as she was, and cried out in a loud voice:

"For Heaven's sake, mum, don't you go and drink that coffee; the cup you've got in your 'ands was the one I used to mix the mustard in. You'll 'ave your poor little 'eart burnt out of you if you drink it, and yet what a blessing you got that cup and not one of the fine party folk."

This piece of swiftly extemporised gag, extemporised under what trying circumstances no one save Jenny could know. She snatched the cup out of Hazel's hand, and hurriedly left the stage as a roar of laughter rang through the theatre.

As for the actors and actresses themselves they were for a few moments so completely dumfounded by this absolutely unlooked-for piece of business that it was some moments before they could recover themselves sufficiently to proceed with the play. And even when they did they were all left wondering, and Hazel in particular, as to what on earth could be the meaning of such an extraordinary performance on the part of Jenny. It really looked as if the latter had been suddenly seized by a fit of temporary mental aberration.

As she rushed towards the stage Jenny ran full tilt into the arms of Venables.

"What on earth is the meaning of this?" said Venables in a low voice. "Who gave you authority, Miss Lovelace, to interpolate scenes in the play that have no right to be there? This is not a farce."

"No," broke in Jenny quickly. "It's not, but if I had not done what I have it would have been a horrible tragedy."

"What do you mean?" cried Venables.

With a tragic gesture Jenny held out the cup that she had taken from Hazel's hand, and that still contained the liquid that she believed to contain poison.

"As a proof of what I have said," she continued, "take this cup and have the contents analysed."

A sound behind her caused her to turn her head. A figure had come stealthily forward behind the pair who stood in a recess at the back of the wings, a figure who leapt forward, and with a quick jerk, sent the cup flying to the ground, so that it fell with a crash to the floor and the contents oozed away through the dark and dusty flooring boards. It was Kenrick, still dressed as a footman, with powdered hair and smart livery, his grease-painted face showing out livid beneath the patches of colour that only made his countenance more ghastly. Venables sprang forward and seized him by the arm.

"What the dickens do you mean by that?" said Venables in a low voice of concentrated passion. "How dare you be so unmanly? What the dickens, I say, is the meaning of your conduct?"

But Kenrick made no answer. His lips worked, but no sound came.

"I'll tell you what it means," said Jenny in a low and rapid voice; "the cup that Mr. Kenrick has just broken contained poison put in there by his own hand. He wanted, for some reason or other, to murder Hazel Harlow. I found him out just in time, and now he has destroyed the evidence of his own guilt."

"It's a lie," muttered Kenrick hoarsely, finding his voice at last, and now realising to the full the horrible deed that he had attempted to carry through, and the consequences that must fall on his head, he determined on one last desperate effort to save his skin.

"It's a lie!" he repeated. "Miss Lovelace herself put the poison in the cup. She has the very piece of paper in her pocket in which the poison was contained." For in a quick flash Kenrick had realised how it was that Jenny must have found out his act of criminality.

A low cry of horror came from Jenny's lips.

"How can you be so wicked?" she said; "this paper"—producing the incriminating testimony—"you flung away after you had put the poison in the beef-tea. What reason should I have for poisoning my dearest friend? Only a monster such as you could have conceived such an idea. Have him arrested, Mr. Venables. I tell you he wanted to murder Hazel Harlow. Why did he dash the cup from my hand if, as he says, it was my hand that worked the foul deed?"

Venables made a step forward, and laid a hand upon the other man's collar.

"So you add lying to your crimes, do you?" he said, meaningly.

With a cry of baffled rage Kenrick dashed the manager aside. Like an animal at bay he glared around him seeking some means of escape, but the door that communicated with the staircase that led down to the stage-door was on the other side of the stage. The next moment his mind was made up. With a bound he reached the wings, and dashing on to the stage, he rushed madly through the thick of the crowd assembled there, for the crowning episode of the act was at hand. Knocking over two or three of the actors in his course, he sped across the stage, out through the wings on the other side, down the staircase, and out into the street beyond.

For a moment the audience sat spellbound trying to take in the meaning of so extraordinary an unrehearsed performance. Then a murmur of amazement could be heard growing in volume on every side, the culmination of astonishment was reached when the curtain, by Venables' orders, was rung down. In a few moments the manager appeared in front of the curtain.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, and a deep hush at once fell on the vast assembly, "I must beg of your indulgence for a few moments, but we have a temporary hitch in the performance. The fact is, that one of the members of our company has, to use a phrase which I think, fits the case best, run amok. His is only a subsidiary part, and if you will give us time to recover from the depressing episode we will endeavour to proceed with the play in a few moments."

CHAPTER V.

All's Well that Ends Well.

After the performance was over Hazel was astonished to receive a visit from her understudy, Ethel Montrose, who came into her dressing-room with a face as white as a sheet, and without explanation of any kind, flung herself at the actress' feet.

"Oh, Miss Harlow," she wailed, "forgive me, forgive me! I have been very wicked. It's all my fault; but I did not think he would do anything as terrible as that."

"What is the matter, Miss Montrose? I don't understand you. What is all your fault?"

"That Harold Kenrick tried to poison you." And then in quick, disjointed phrases the wretched girl blurted out the whole story of Kenrick's mad infatuation for herself. How that he had told her that jealousy alone kept her from playing the part of Ruth, and how that if she would only consent to be his wife he would guarantee that she took up the part for which at present she was only understudy. She confessed also as to knowing the authorship of the anonymous communications.

"But I never knew that he meant to murder you," she wailed out: "believe me, I am speaking the truth."

Hazel's soft heart was touched by such evident contrition and grief.

"Look here, Miss Montrose," she said, "let's make a bargain, you and I. Let us undertake to keep to ourselves what you have just told me. No one need ever know, and I am quite sure you did not really mean to do me any serious harm."

"Oh, you are too good—too good," said the other, still weeping; "and I thought you quite the reverse."

At that moment the door opened and Jenny entered. Noting her amazement, Hazel went up to her and said:

"Miss Montrose is in great trouble, Jenny. Mr. Kenrick was her lover, and she is miserable to think that she could have wasted her affection on such a man."

True to her word Hazel resolved to shield Ethel Montrose from any complicity in the affair that had nearly ended so disastrously for herself. Neither was her generosity ill-timed or misplaced. From that moment she had no more fervent admirer than Ethel Montrose. As for Kenrick, he had fled out into the night and away to his lodgings not far from the theatre, there to change his somewhat unusual garb for that of a sober citizen. And from that night all trace of him was lost so far as the *Good Samaritan* Company was concerned.

Next week the *Good Samaritan* Company visits Brighton, where Caldecott again appears on the scene.

That Mysterious Something.

Captain Stowe is the skipper of one of the finest bark-trimmed ships left in the merchant service. Perhaps it is because we don't see much of him, he being away at sea, that he always gets such a hearty welcome. Certainly the first point he strikes for when on shore is our cosy club room, and we give ourselves up to being entertained by his breezy tales of the sea.

"Want a sea yarn?" said he, "bless yer, I've got more than I could tell if I did nothing else from now till I take my last rest.

"Let's see, the last time I was here I promised you some experiences of the psychology of sea life, didn't I?"

"Right!" we all chorussed.

"I thought so. My memory never fails me when I remember a thing. Now I'm going to tell what, you maybe, you won't like to believe, but it's all as true as that you see me sitting here and putting down this Scotch." Suiting the action to the words.

"That's good stuff, boys," he said, smacking his lips. "I'll tell you a little story about what happened to me as a boy first, and then I'll get into some sea yarns, and see what you can make of them.

"One night, when I was a boy of eleven, I was awakened out of my sleep with a strange feeling of oppression and sat erect in bed. The room was dark, and its contents undiscernible, save where the moonlight streamed through the unshaded window and cast its radiance upon the floor.

"I looked out and saw that it was not yet near dawn; and while I gazed a shadow stole across the vision, as if a passing cloud obscured the sky. Then the light grew brighter, and the blood ceased to move in my veins.

"I could not breathe, move or speak. Only power of sight and consciousness remained to me.

"It was my father's familiar figure, unusual only because of the strange white garments which he wore. They were like some soft mantle, too delicate for human hands to make. His face was turned towards me, and the expression on it was sadder than I had ever seen him wear.

"I tried to speak, but the effort failed, and, motionless, I watched his transparent form recede, pass through the open window and dissolve in the night like a cloud of mist.

"Was I dreaming? No! A country-bred boy of eleven, I was not given to fright, and when this paroxysm of inanimation left me, the grief that flooded my eyes with tears was a reality.

"My father was dead! I was as certain of it as if I were then standing by his coffin, and at last, more from sorrow than anything else, I awoke the household and told them all.

"'You were dreaming,' they all tried to assure me, but I failed to be comforted.

"Did I not know that I was the silent observer of his coming, which was as real as my presence in the kitchen was now?

"Dawn came and I sought refuge in work.

"At breakfast a messenger came with the tidings, 'your father died just before daybreak this morning.'

"I was cool and collected. To me the knowledge of his end had been long enough.

"This was my first experience with the 'something.' I will leave others to name it. I was then a boy of eleven. During the years that have since passed I have travelled in all parts of the world. For nearly forty years I followed the sea and gained all the experience that such a life teaches, from the forecastle to the captain's berth.

"While I am no believer in spiritualism as I have seen it interpreted, and although I do not lay claim to supernatural causes and effects in the daily work of life, still I do think there is something in nature relative to mind transference that scientists have yet to learn about.

"My own experience teaches me that there is a principle of higher intellectual perception than has yet been generally cultivated. I think I must possess it naturally to an unusual degree, for my life has been protected many times by the intervention of some power I do not know about.

"The story of my father's death was literally made known to me as described above. I do not try to explain the circumstances, but I do attest the truth of it.

"At one time I was seaman aboard the 950-ton ship *Astrican*, Captain Webster master. He was a man nearly seventy-five years old, and although deacon of a Methodist church, was a brute on shipboard. He went by the name of old Bully Webster, and made himself generally unpopular by feeding us on beef and wormy ship's bread. We left New Orleans bound for Hull, England, with a load of cotton. The ship was a cumbersome craft, with an old-fashioned rudder that would not steer her within two points of her course.

"When well out to sea we encountered a heavy north-easter, during which four men at the wheel had all they could do to keep her steady. It lasted several days, and finally, worn out with exertion, I went below and turned in. I was asleep almost before I touched the pillow.

"How long I remained unconscious I do not know, but suddenly I was awakened as if someone had roughly shaken me. I opened my eyes, but seeing no one thought I had been dreaming and turned over for another nap.

"Again came the rough call, and a voice in my ear seemed to whisper: 'Danger, go on deck.'

"I jumped out of my berth and ran up out of the forecastle. It was very rough, and I could keep my feet with difficulty.

"Scarcely had I reached the look-out when I saw looming up almost upon us a big ship, that was of a sharper. trimmer build than the *Astrican*.

"I shouted at the top of my voice, 'Hard up your wheel,' and the four seamen, terrorised by the spectacle, threw her away over.

"The stranger discovered us at the same time and fell off. A mighty sea pitched us forward with irresistible force, and instead of being struck on the broadside, as we would have been, but for my warning, the old *Astrican* went bow on through the storm-beaten vessel, and crushed the wooden walls as if they had been pasteboard.

"She sank with all aboard almost instantly, and our own salvation necessitated prompt action with nerve.

"We were leaking forward just at the water-line, where a large hole had been stove in our bow. The upper rigging was all hanging over the side, nearly all of our top works having been carried away.

"The storm abated, but it was twelve days before we got into condition to continue on our course. Then we were badly crippled, but had good weather to aid us.

Is your photo on page 652?

"Arriving at Hull we discharged cargo, and loaded with iron for the States. What was the power, or influence, that exerted upon me the warning I have told you? No member of the crew called me, and I am satisfied the second call was not a dream.

"Some years later I sailed as master of a brig, the *Forest.* When off the Jersey shore I turned in, my instruments indicating that I was fifteen miles off shore. In the midst of my sleep I seemed to hear my mother exclaim:

"'John, the *Forest* is among the breakers.'

"I rushed on deck and found the mate in a state of frenzy. Just ahead could be heard the roar of the surf beating upon the rocks. We were thus saved from destruction when less than an eighth of a mile from shore.

"I might cite several similar incidents. There is one that I want to tell you about, however, which can be corroborated by living witnesses.

"When I was one of the crew of a revenue cutter that lay off Porstmouth! I was on watch on the forward deck alone one night.

"Suddenly I felt someone touch my shoulder, and looking round I saw just above my head the figure of my elder brother, who was the captain of a West India brig. He seemed to pause a few minutes on the fore-yards, and then disappeared in the night.

"I immediately asked permission to go ashore, and got it.

"Hurrying to the house of another brother, who lived in Portsmouth, I said:

"'He is dead; I am sure of it. The death is father's over again.'

"They all ridiculed my statements, but two days later a letter was received from his wife conveying the sad intelligence. Getting in from a warm climate he had recklessly exposed himself to the cold and had contracted pneumonia, and died at the very time of my vision. Here was the childhood experience lived over again.

"The most wonderful experience I ever had, though, was when a California gold steamer was lost, I believe, by fire, in the Gulf of Mexico. I was master of the brig *Harvest Moon.*

"One day when the weather was thick, and I had stood for some time in doubt as to my exact whereabouts, suddenly I was struck on one cheek by a land bird, that, after wheeling around my head, flew by me on the other side, striking my ear with stinging force.

"Turning to the man at the wheel, I said:

"'Keep her off two points more. I think we are getting in too close to land.'

"For twenty minutes the mate and I smoked in silence. Then, upon hearing a sound, apparently from over the side, the mate jumped to the rail and shouted excitedly:

"'Good Heavens, captain, we are among a shoal of living people!'

"His words were indeed true. On the smooth surface of the gulf, incased in life protectors, were sixty or more men and women who were among the passengers of the ill-fated steamer. They had been hours in the water and had no hope of rescue, when out of the fog had come the ship so silently that they had not noticed her until she was upon them.

"Was it merely an act of chance that the little bird upon the high sea thus deceived a veteran captain? It seems to me that some other power than man's turned the ship's bows two points off the course laid down on the chart.

"The last accident I can tell you about is more mysterious than all, and can be found recorded in the history of New Bedford, where all the facts are known. Briefly, the story was this:

"A new Bedford whaler commanded by a friend of mine was sailing in the Arctic ocean one night. As the mate on deck looked into the cabin, he says he saw a man sitting at the captain's desk, writing on the log-slate. Half-an-hour later the officer went below, and there he found the command plainly written: 'Keep ship north-west by north till daylight.'

"He did as directed.

"At that hour the captain came on deck, saying, 'Who changed the course?'

"'I did,' replied the mate, 'according to your instructions.'

"'What instructions?' asked the other sharply.

"'Why, those you left on your slate,' said the mate.

"'But I did not leave any,' said the captain; and they went below and with surprise compared the log.

"Sure enough there was the order, but the handwriting was peculiarly fine and altogether unfamiliar.

"Wishing to find the man who had thus planned a very absurd joke, the captain sent for the men, one by one, and got their signatures. Not one resembled the handwriting.

"At this point the look-out shouted: 'A sail,' and soon they came upon another whale ship, the crew of which were literally starving for food.

"Giving relief, the captain of the newly-found craft tendered a receipt, the writing of which was identical with that on the log slate, written hours before in an unknown hand, in the wide ocean, miles away from human life.

"This, perhaps, some of you can explain. I cannot, however. Was there not a mission to be accomplished by that mysterious order: 'Keep ship north-west by north until daylight?'" GEORGE DAY.

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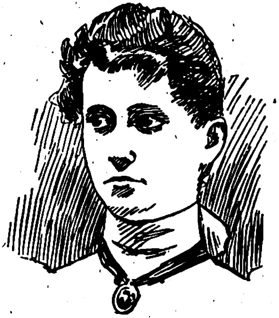

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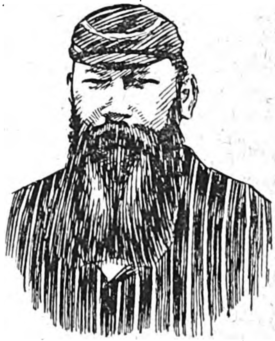

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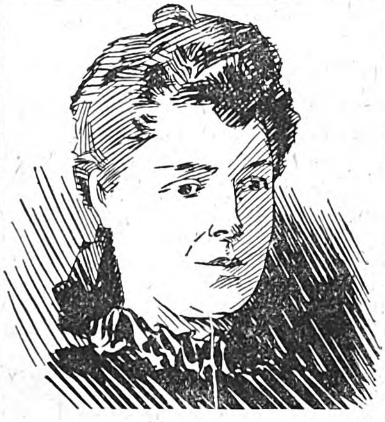

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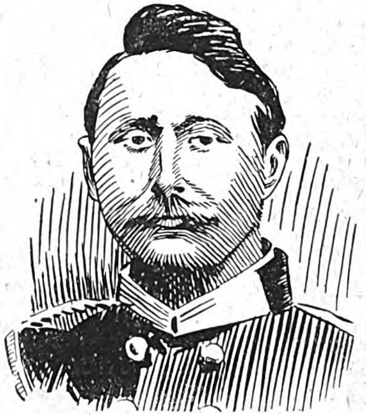

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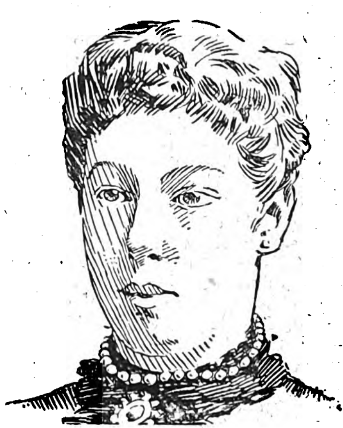


No. 45.

MY MILLIONAIRE PATIENT.

Being Extended Extracts from the Note-book of Septimus Ewles, M.D., Late Administrator of Anæsthetics at St. Andrew's Hospital, London.

PRESCRIPTIVE.

It is only after a long self-debate that I have at last decided to give to the world an account of that which has changed for me the whole course of my life, and left me, at an age when most men are revelling in the sunshine of existence, a prey to disappointment—to almost despair.

The man—the being rather, for man, as God makes man, he never could have been—the being, then, who has thus spoilt my life, who has withered for me every blossom I had hoped to rear and cherish through the years, yet lives.

Wishing him, as I do, dead, dead beyond any power to call him back to earth to torture, and to enslave me, I feel, I know that in some one of the world's many corners he still exists to trouble me.

It is nearly two years now since the scenes were played out—of the play of his own making—since he disappeared, but I am convinced, sadly convinced, that in—it may be Pekin, Benares, Kandy, or perhaps even next door to me in this city of London, he is lying low, waiting the supreme moment to crush me for evermore.

But it is not so much for what I myself have suffered, and still continue to suffer, on account of this man's cruel wickedness, that I grieve and revile the fate that originally called me into so wretched and unendurable an existence; it is for Haidée's sake, for the sake of the one woman in all the world for me—whom this monster in human shape has spirited away, where I know not—it is for her sake that I have sworn to find Siever Crafte, to unearth him, if he be alive, and to compel him to do right and justice.

I have been informed by my friend, Detective Inspector Ryan, that on the evening of June 17th, 1899, Crafte left Charing Cross by the boat train; that he was accompanied by a lady—young, dark, tall, and distinguished-looking—and that, so far as can be ascertained, he booked through to Frankfort.

Beyond that nothing has been seen or heard of him since.

Ryan, who has a personal remembrance of Haidée, is of opinion that she and Crafte's lady companion were one and the same. I do not agree with him, insomuch as my love would, I am persuaded, in no wise have submitted to being quietly carried off by one whom, I know, she regarded with the deepest loathing and detestation.

Still, the fact remains that Haidée disappeared the same day, the same hour almost as did Siever Crafte.

At three o'clock on that afternoon a note from her was handed to me at the hospital just as I was about to administer ether in a critical case. Its contents so unnerved me that my junior, Collings, offered to take the case. The note simply said:

"Dear Old Sep.,—Meet me without fail at 6.15 at the 'Cabin,' Piccadilly; usual table. I want to see you awfully! It is really important—to you, as to me. I shall be punctual, and shall look for you to be. I am both ill and sick at heart. "Haidée."

Until the "Cabin" closed for the night I waited, with what patience I might, but Haidée never came.

My one sorrow and soul-trouble now is that on that day she went out of my life; that, in some mysterious, inexplicable way, altogether beyond my power to conceive, Haidée Van Cloo, my affianced wife, vanished suddenly and completely from haunt and home.

From that day to this I have never seen her!

* * * * *

Before I depart on my quest I wish to say that what I have selected from my diary and put into rough narrative form the main events of the terrible three months prior to the disappearance of Siever Crafte and of my beloved Haidée.

This I have placed in the hands of my old friend and ex-colleague at St. Andrews, George Collings, with instructions to him to publish the same if I do not return to reclaim them within six months from the present 13th of January, 1901.

I am told that I am mad to throw up the finest professional position in London in order that I may go—as it is phrased—on a wild goose chase in search of that which, they say, is unfindable.

So be it. I am content to make this sacrifice if by so doing I may but bring myself to know that I have done what I could.

The venture is mine. Success is with Him who alone can give it.

End of Prescriptive.

Note by George Collings, L.R.C.P., lately appointed Administrator of Anæsthetics at St. Andrew's Hospital, London, vice Septimus Ewles, M.D., resigned.

Agreeably with the wish of my friend, Septimus Ewles, I have this day handed the MSS containing the following narrative to "Pearson's, Limited," who have agreed to publish the same, the said Septimus Ewles not having returned to reclaim it within the stipulated period of six months from the 13th of January of this present year.

End of George Collings' Note.

CHAPTER I.

The Almighty Dollar.

"Gentleman to see you, sir."

I glanced at the card Holmes handed to me.

"Siever X. Crafte.
New York City."

"Patient, Holmes?"

"I think so, sir."

"What's the man like?"

I had a strong prejudice against Americans, and Holmes knew it.

"Peculiar-looking, sir, rather. White as a sheet, too, and as thin as an area-railing."

"Look respectable?"

Is your photo on page 652?

"Oh, quite, sir—if you mean money. Should say he had tons of it by the look of him."

"Well, that's no recommendation from my point of view. Millionaires—and I suppose this to be a bloated specimen of the species—millionaires are, as I think, insufferable."

"Yes, sir; and I fancy this particular specimen is all that, and a little more."

"Has he brought any introduction?"

"Yes, sir, but he sticks to it; says he'll hand it you himself."

"There! show him in, Holmes; let me get this trans-Atlantic infliction over."

The individual who, after being announced by Holmes, carefully closed the room-door himself, before my man could do so, was singular—remarkable even, in more ways than one.

Holmes' description of him was wonderfully accurate. Tall, thin, and of feature cadaverous to ghastliness, my visitor from the very first moment I set eyes on him, exercised, in no small degree, a fascination over me, at once powerful and disagreeable.

Indicating a chair, which he took, I opened the letter which he presented me, to find that it was written by a certain American doctor, with whom I had a scientific corresponding acquaintance.

Dr. Garfield was head of the leading hospital in the States, and was the greatest living authority, not only in his own country, but also the civilised world over, upon mania, more especially mania in its homicidal form.

His note to me was to the following effect:

DEAR DR. EWLES,

The bearer of this is Mr. Siever X. Crafte, of New York City, who, as he has informed me, is anxious to consult you with reference to some internal malady.

I do not know much about the man, except that he is too rich by half.

Personally, I cannot say that I like him, in fact, I have my doubts upon some psychological points in connection with him; but there certainly cannot be any harm in your seeing him.

You will quite understand, however, that I hold myself in no way responsible for him, and that you must use you own discretion and judgment in your dealings with him.

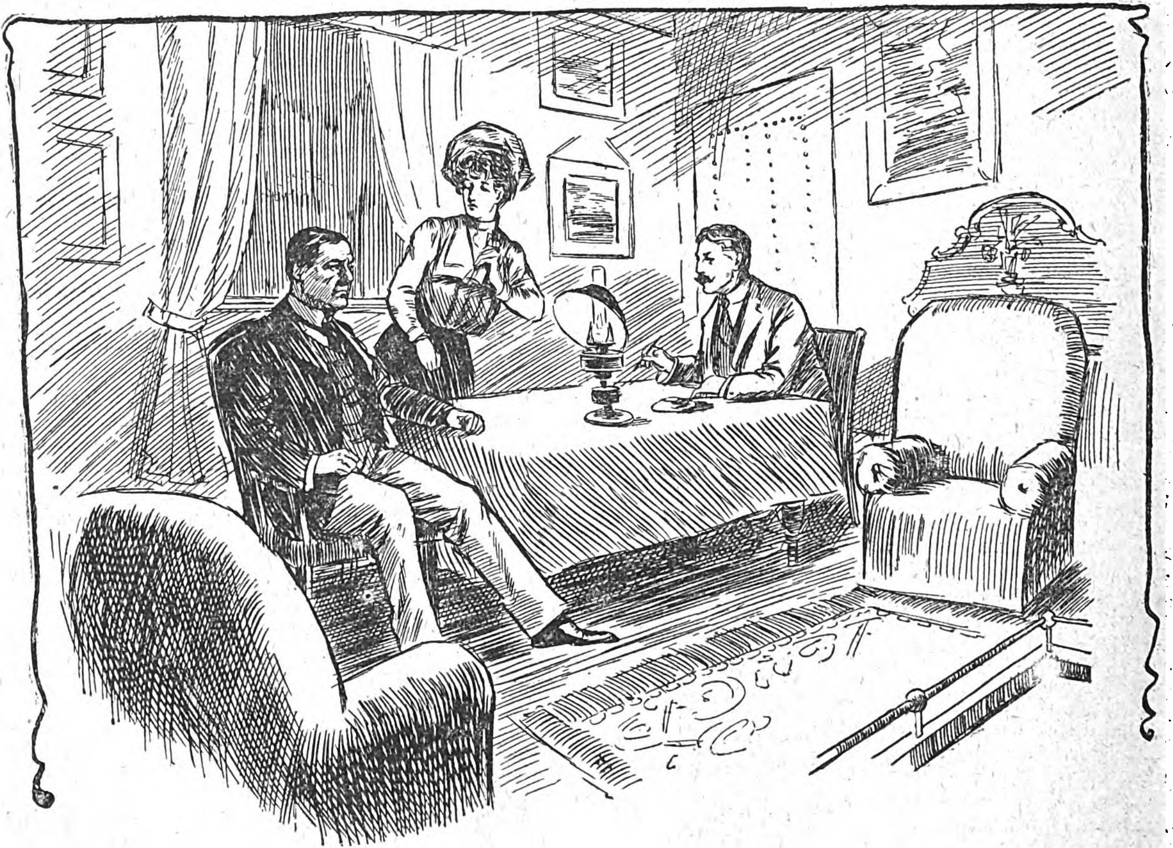
Hoping to see you on this side before long,

I am
Sincerely yours,
ENSOR P. GARFIELD.

To Dr. Septimus Ewles, M.D.

I looked up after reading the letter, to find Mr. Crafte watching me assiduously.

The man had a peculiar trick of inflating his nostrils every now and again. This, with a strange, and somewhat repulsive shrinking of his scalp, gave him a sinister appearance, by no means pleasant to contemplate.



The next moment the cheque was in her hand.

Is your photo on page 652?

"Now, Mr. Crafte," I said, in a business-like tone, "what can I do for you? I must tell you that my time this morning is, in a way, precious, for I have to be at the hospital in less than three-quarters-of-an-hour to administer for a specially important operation."

"Is that so? Well, I don't want much. I can't sleep—just that—can't sleep—that's my trouble. Can't sleep at night, that is. In the day I go off at odd times, but it doesn't do me a bit of good."

"No, I suppose not, it never does. But Dr. Garfield intimates in his letter that it is some internal complaint that you wish my advice about."

"Garfield, like a good many other people, makes occasional mistakes, and that's one of them. Do you think that you can do anything for me?"

"I can't say," I replied, cautiously, "without making a thorough examination; and as I intimated just now, I cannot well spare the time this morning."

"Why not? Never mind the Hospital. Money is no object with me. Only put me on a natural and workable footing again, and you can name your own fee."

"Pardon me, Mr. Crafte, but that is not according to my usual practices; nor is it, if you will allow me to say so, a suggestion such as I am accustomed to have made me. I shall be pleased, of course, to do what I can for you if I am successful—well—you will be satisfied, and I—shall send you in my account in the ordinary way."

Truth to say, I did not care for the fellow's looks. They were positively ghoul-like in their bloodless insistence.

A glance at the clock told me that my time was up, but for the life of me I could not make a move. A curious numbing influence seemed to have me in its grip, rendering me powerless to act upon my own initiative.

"I will call upon you to-night at eleven," calmly and evenly said my unwelcome patient, "if that will suit you."

I was about to say that I never received anyone professionally at that hour; but, somehow, the words froze on my lips. I could only stupidly mutter a few indistinct words, which had no real meaning. "Very well, then," he repeated, "to-night at eleven."

As he rose to leave the room we both heard a voice in the hall—a silvery, ringing voice—asking for me.

Then Holmes entered to say that Haidée—my Haidée—wished to see me.

"Tell my sister," I said, "that Miss Van Cloo is here."

I looked for my American visitor to depart, but Mr. Siever Crafte stood, hat in hand, quite oblivious of the conventionalities, as I interpreted them, and, coolly awaiting developments, as it seemed to me.

Then he said, "Van Cloo! Van Cloo! It would indeed be extraordinary if the young lady should prove to be Miss Haidée Van Cloo."

"The young lady *is* Miss Haidée Van Cloo," I replied, not over courteously, I am afraid.

"Ah, then we are friends," he continued. "That is, I met Miss Haidée in Paris last fall at our ambassador's. The General made us mutually known."

What was it that made me hate this presuming Yankee so? What right had he to talk so familiarly of my little girl?

Another second, and verily, I should have said and done something which I should afterwards have regretted. I was, however, saved in time, though in a way that filled me, upon reflection, with a righteous feeling of uncontrollable jealous anger.

"Sep! just a moment!"

She stood, framed in the doorway, a picture to me of delight.

Siever Crafte smiled, a set, marble-hewed smile, his white face gleaming whiter, in startling contrast to his black clothes.

But it was Haidée's face that told the strangest tale.

Before I could answer her, she had seen and recognised the other.

"Mr. Crafte!" she stammered, and drawing nearer to me. "You here?"

"Yes," he said, with a slight inclination of his head, "and delighted, Miss Van Cloo, to renew our acquaintance."

"Haidée," I then managed to say, "Celia is expecting you upstairs. Mr. Crafte, I shall look for you to-night at eleven."

He took this as a dismissal, and in another moment Haidée and I were free of his presence.

"Sep! This man! What does he do here?"

"He comes as a patient, recommended by my friend Dr. Garfield of Philadelphia."

"Then, have nothing to do with him, Sep—have nothing to do with him!"

"But why, my darling, why?"

"Why!" she almost screamed. "Why; because I know him to have the power to make you—to make me to do his wicked will, whatever it be!"

CHAPTER II.

THE BLANK CHEQUE.

WITH the punctuality of the Evil One (for the devil, they say, is punctual to a fault), my new acquaintance presented himself as the clock struck eleven.

He had evidently been either dining out or amusing himself at the theatre, for he was in evening dress.

I should say here that, late in the afternoon, I had received a supplementary letter by mail from Dr. Garfield. It was an amplification of the one handed to me by Siever Crafte, but with a pregnant addition, which set me thinking.

"Siever Crafte," it ran, "is a very rich man. Still, no one exactly knows how he acquired his dollars. He follows no kind of business or profession; has never followed any.

"He came, a perfect stranger, to New York, from the west, some ten years ago. He at once proceeded to cut a good figure in Society, spending money freely, right and left. Of course he failed to get within the charmed exclusive circle of the Four Hundred, that was only to be expected, for to succeed in so doing, you must be able to produce and prove your birth-strain, as well as your 'pocket' balance-sheet.

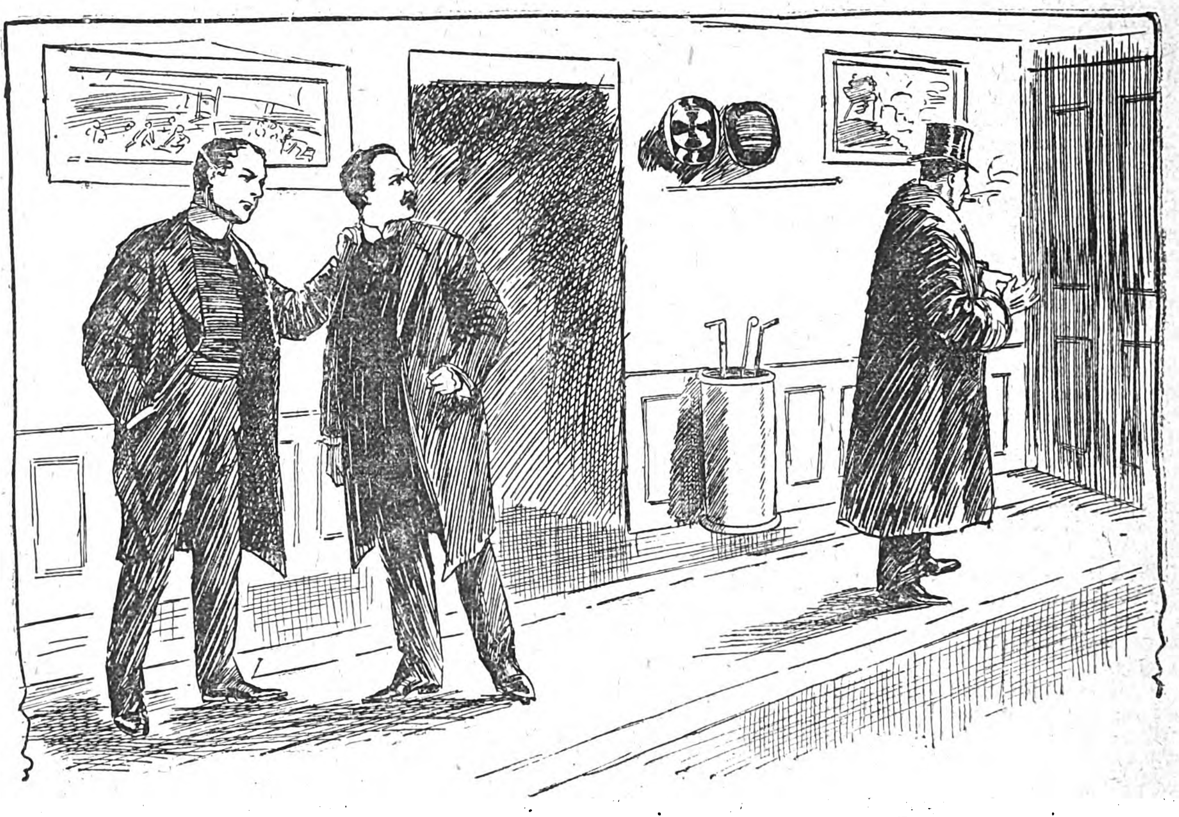
"Siever had no difficulty in giving ample and conclusive evidence of his wealth; but, with regard to his ancestral tree, he couldn't show a leaf or a twig of it.

"I'm rather sorry that I sent him to you, but you can easily drop him, should he prove troublesome.

"One thing about him I must caution you against, and that is his undoubted power to over-ride weaker wills than and by his own.

"I am not quite satisfied that he is in the habit of using this power illegitimately, but would not trust him too far in that direction."

So far Dr. Garfield; and, putting it alongside Haidée's extraordinary statement, I was on the alert, as I thought, when my patient put in his late appearance.



"But I didn't know that he was a friend of mine."

We had the table between us; the reading-lamp I always use in the evenings being placed so that I was in shadow, while my visitor stood out, silhouette-wise, in the beam of light.

At first he talked of insomnia, in connection, more especially, with himself. Then the conversation insensibly drifted into the subjects of psychic force; hypnotic influence, and so on.

Once or twice I caught myself looking fixedly at him, he, the while, gazing steadily into my eyes.

Then I remembered the warning I had but now received, and by a great effort of will, wrenched my attention away from him.

This, as I have said, happened more than once; each time I succeeded in switching myself, as it were, from off him, he manifesting an impatience, not to say irritability of demeanour, not in any way warranted by the subject-matter of our talk.

"Dr. Ewles," he said at length—and I noticed that it was close upon midnight—"what would you do with a million dollars—two hundred thousand pounds sterling—if you had it?"

He shot the question at me so unexpectedly, that, for the moment, I could not answer him.

I needed all my nerve now, for I felt myself unconsciously surrendering myself to a will-influence, greater than my own, and which I was becoming less and less able to resist.

I could not take my eyes from those other eyes which glowed like coals of fire from out that corpse-like mask.

"A million dollars!" he went on. "Just imagine what it is capable of purchasing. Fifty times that amount have I, and yet, I cannot sleep—cannot even enjoy life as can, and does a wretched clerk or salesman upon his miserable pittance of ten dollars or less a week.

"Perhaps had you a million, to do with as you listed, you could tell me something which would open my eyes."

As he spoke he drew from the breast pocket of his coat a folded piece of bluish grey paper.

This he deliberately spread out before him on the table, smoothing it, as if it were of inestimable value.

It was a blank cheque on the Burlington Street Branch of the Bank of England.

Suddenly, I experienced that whatever will-power I possessed, had passed temporarily away from me, and that I was responding to the stronger thought—touch of an influence I could not fight against.

"You see this cheque?"

"Yes."

"Well, you will fill it up for the sum of two hundred thousand pounds."

Mechanically, I reached my arm across the table, and drew towards me the oblong piece of bluish-grey paper.

Pen and ink were on the table.

"Fill up," said Crafte again, "for two hundred thousand pounds."

Is your photo on page 652?

I did so, and the cheque lay before me, made out to my order, and crossed "London and County," my own bankers.

It has always been a mystery to me what the object of this man could have been in thus hypnotically compelling me to do that which he could just as well have done himself; and also, why he should have desired to give me, (if he did really so desire) the benefit of so vast a sum of money.

I say give, for I should never have cashed that cheque. I should have imagined that every coin of it was white-hot with a heat infernal.

But there was another who, like-minded with myself, would none of that, the mere touch of which we both instinctively held to be pollution.

Haidée had remained with my sister since the morning, having agreed to stay, as she often did, for a couple of days.

That she did so now, was a wonderful link in the chain of current events.

Hearing no sound from the drawing-room above, I had concluded that the two girls had retired long before.

It was while I was in a maundering semi-stupid fashion studying the precious slip of paper lying in front of me—a slip of paper which contained in itself possibilities far above the most exaggerated dreams of the average man, that the slight crack of the room door, half-woke me to returning consciousness.

Crafte's back was towards the door, but I, who faced it, could, brain-dulled though I was, distinctly see the form of Haidée pass into the room; sweep swiftly across the beam of light coming from the reading-lamp, and move in my direction.

The next moment the cheque, snatched with lightning quickness from off the table, was in her hand.

Crafte had sprung lightly to his feet.

"Miss Van Cloo!" he said, "this is a little extraordinary isn't it?"

Haidée, one hand upon my shoulder (I was still sitting, in a dull, dazed sort of a way, my limbs, when I tried to rise, seeming heavy as lead), the other having the cheque crumpled up within it, answered him not a word. Her eyes were, unusually for her, ablaze with contemptuous wrath.

Then she spoke to him.

"Mr. Crafte," she said, "Dr. Ewles does not require your money, for which—if I know you at all—(and you well know that I do) you will assuredly exact a terrible consideration."

"Doctor! this young lady is mad!"

"Sep, dear, do not heed him! I know what I do! See here!" and the intrepid girl lifting defiantly a spirit cigar-lighter, touched with it a corner of the cheque, which, in a flash, lay a little heap of grey ash on the table-cloth.

Crafte now looked me steadily for a second between the eyes, and I felt a rapid return of mental and physical vigour. I had come to my right mind.

The whole scene, as I have described it, is indelibly impressed on my memory. I can see it as plainly to-day as I could then.

The American said no more, but demanding of Holmes, who stood in the doorway, summoned by my ring, his hat and overcoat, left the house.

The reaction upon my darling took the form of violent hysterical sobbing.

"Sep!" she at last said, "you don't know from what I have saved you!—you don't know!"

CHAPTER III.

THE SATANIC SHADOW.

From that night onward, until his disappearance three months after his first visit to me, this mysterious man of millions, this incarnation of mad malignity, haunted me beyond endurance.

True, he never again entered my house—did not even call there; but he nevertheless made his baleful presence felt in such subtle, secret ways that I knew no rest, no peace.

My colleagues at the hospital, more especially my great chum Collings, came at last to notice that I was, physically and mentally, falling to pieces.

When administering chloroform or ether my hand would tremble, and my whole body would be damp with a nervous sweat, which threatened near-at-hand weakness, and probable total collapse.

"My dear fellow," Collings said one day. "You can't go on like this. You won't tell us what is the matter. Come! what is it? We would any of us stick at nothing to put you right."

"I know that, George," I answered him, "but neither you, nor anyone can straighten this matter out for me."

I had another trouble, too. Haidée seemed different. Not exactly altered, but—different.

I saw but little of her during this trying time.

She shut herself up in her studio out Kensington way, and not even my sister Celia, her old schoolmate, could penetrate her seclusion.

I was tortured to know what it all could mean.

As for Siever Crafte, he was always with me. His bloodless, cruel face met me wherever I went.

One day I saw him deep in chat with the physician-in-chief at St. Andrew's. I was passing through the main lobby at the time.

"Ah, Ewles!" said the big man shortly afterwards, "that is a most remarkable man, that friend of yours—Crafte, I think his name is. Most remarkable man! He speaks most warmly of you, too!"

"Does he?" I replied wearily. "But I didn't know that he was a friend of mine. I've only seen him twice to speak to. He came to me with an introduction from Garfield, of Philadelphia, the 'mania' man, you know."

"Dear me! Well, I thought you and he were quite intimate, from what he said. I've promised to take him round to-morrow, and explain things here a bit to him."

I came across him once or twice in this way at St. Andrew's, but neither of us spoke.

At parties, meetings, gatherings of all kinds, alike social and public, I met him, and whether or not I was mistaken I cannot say, but I always fancied that people after he had gone, looked askance at me.

Gradually I was conscious that friends and acquaintances became cold and distant; that the world—my world—was not as it had been towards me; was, in fact, dropping away from me.

I must ever except Collings from this list of the disaffected. He, dear old fellow, was always loyal and true.

How I became firmly and absolutely convinced that Siever Crafte was the moving spirit in all this shall now be told.

Sleeplessness at night had now seized upon me for a

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victim. Throughout the long hours I tossed and turned until my brain reeled again.

Tortured beyond degree one night I put on my hat and sallied out into the street. It was a fine night; the sky was studded with stars, but there was no moon. I wandered on and on, until I reached the bit of embankment by Westminster Bridge.

As is well known, just opposite the St. Stephen's Club entrance, on the other side of the road, the pavement for a short distance has two levels, one going parallel with the Embankment roadway, the other sinking a few feet as an approach to the steamboat pier.

I had crossed over from the club corner, and, leaning my arms on the upper parapet, looked down to the lower level. I had heard voices issuing up from there, and perhaps this had something to do with my action.

"I have hitherto failed completely," said a voice I rapidly recognised as that of Siever Crafte, "in getting this doctor-fool entangled in my enterprise; but I think I have got a bit even with him. The few hints I have dropped here and there have done their work. This Anglo-Dutch girl, however, it is who is the great spoke in my wheel. She knows too much. When in Paris last year I became foolish over her, and showed my hand. She is clever enough, too, to know her power, and to use it when she gets the opportunity."

"I should not have given you credit for such soft giving of yourself away," said a deep bass voice in reply.

"Well, we are all foolish sometimes. Unfortunately, this little lapse of mine, from the line of common sense, may have disastrous consequences."

"Not if you, or rather we, succeed in carrying out your idea to-morrow. It is the only way out of the difficulty, and if a hitch occurs I can see nothing but ruin for you."

"There must be no hitch. If you do as I have instructed you the young lady will be silenced, our medical friend reckoned with, and yours truly safely on the way to fresh fields and new pastures."

The voices ceased. My first intention was to descend the steps on the left and confront the plotters; but I quite forgot that steps on the right provided another exit from the lower level. By the time I reached the spot where the two had stood there was no one there.

I rushed up the right-hand steps just in time to see two men enter a hansom on the clock-tower side of the bridge, and drive off rapidly westward.

It was hopeless to track them. The next best thing was to find Ryan, my detective friend, but he was absent, I found on inquiry, on professional business no one knew where.

I decided, therefore, to wait till the next day, when he would probably be free to help me. But here again I was doomed to disappointment. Ryan's man-hunt took him to New York, and before I could see him he had left town for Liverpool.

Then came the little note from Haidée to me at the hospital, the subsequent fruitless waiting for her at the "Cabin," and my own determination to-day, two years nearly, after the flight of Crafte and the disappearance of my love, to seek these two if I have to go to the uttermost parts of the earth to do so.

No one will hear of me until I tread once more on English ground; then, and not till then, will I open my lips to tell of those things which I now go to encounter. I take up the trail at Frankfort. RALPH ENDERBY.

(*The sequel to this strange story will appear shortly.*)

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The Widow's Choice.

HAROLD SIMPSON and Archibald Capper had been friends for years. They both lived in the same boarding-house at Bayswater, and they travelled to the City every morning together by 'bus or tube according to the weather. Both were bank-clerks in different banks, and both were bachelors.

Whether it was the pernicious influence of the money which each in the course of his business had daily to see and to handle, is not certain. But what is certain is, that each, having attained something like the age of fifty, was imbued with a particularly strong characteristic, which characteristic has been aptly summed up in the phrase—"an eye to the main chance."

No mistake about it, both Mr. Simpson and Mr. Capper had eyes of that kind. But it didn't affect their friendship one whit. On the contrary, it seemed to draw them closer together. Thus it happened that they belonged to the same "Social Club," had the same circle of acquaintances, and, on every hand were looked upon as inseparable friends.

This friendship, fostered by long acquaintance with each other's likes and dislikes, might have remained for ever, had not the inevitable woman come between them.

She came in the form of a widow—fair, forty, but *not* fat. Quite a slim thing, indeed, with a face that might have belonged to a woman ten years her junior. Charming in manner she was, as well as in features. Her eyes were perfect—the kind that draw men to them whether they will or not; and Mrs. Peterson—that was the widow's name—knew how to use them. In addition, it speedily became known that she had money, and a good deal of it.

In a week from her arrival, every man Jack in the Belle Vue Boarding House was, figuratively speaking, on his knees to her.

Not even excepting those two confirmed bachelors, Simpson and Capper. They, indeed, were amongst her most ardent admirers, though a peculiar kind of shyness kept them from betraying that fact to other people. Even from one another they, for a time, concealed the state of their feelings.

But being so much together it was obviously impossible for them to do so for long. It was, therefore, not very surprising when, late one evening, after the remainder of the boarders had retired to rest, Simpson should remark to Capper:

"Charming woman!"

"You mean Mrs. Peterson? Yes, very charming."

Both were silent for a moment, puffing reflectively at their pipes. Simpson wondered vaguely why Capper should have known to whom he referred; Capper, equally vague, tried to imagine why Simpson had made his statement without connecting it with a name.

Simpson broke the silence.

"The sort of woman one would like to settle down with for life."

"Yes, if one were of the marrying sort."

"Of course," said Simpson.

"Quite so," added Capper.

They lapsed into silence again.

"We are getting on in life, and are confirmed bachelors, it's strange, isn't it?" Simpson asked, blowing out a cloud of smoke.

"Very strange," replied Capper laconically, blowing out another cloud.

"Do you know, Capper, I sometimes feel as if—as if——"

"So do I, Simpson—so do I!"

"A home of one's own, with the woman of one's heart, you know, Capper——"

"I know, Simpson—I know!"

They were silent once again. Only the pop of their lips around their pipe-stems broke the silence. At length Simpson murmured:

"Charming woman!"

"Very charming woman!"

"Do you know I admire her immensely?"

"So do I!"

Simpson half dropped a suspicious eye on Capper.

"Sometimes," he pursued musingly, "I think that she—in a way—you know the way women have—admires me. Curious creatures, women!"

"Very!" returned Capper drily.

The whole of Simpson's suspicious eye dropped on Capper now. But he removed it at once, and went on:

"Capper, I have known you a good many years, and you and I have been intimate friends. Capper, I want to tell you a secret!"

Capper rose from his chair slowly, and looked Simpson full in the face.

"Simpson," he said, and upon his face was an unusual pallor, "I too, have a secret to tell *you!*"

Simpson rose now. The two bachelors faced one another. Simpson spoke.

"Capper, I am in love!"

"Simpson, I also am in love."

"Capper, I adore Mrs. Peterson."

"Simpson, I worship the ground she walks on."

"As I before said," Simpson remarked, "I have grounds for believing she reciprocates my affection."

"She said she had never enjoyed music so much in her life as when I sang 'Come into the Garden, Maud,'" retorted Capper.

"She has done all that a modest woman can do to show she cares for me," rejoined Simpson hotly.

"She told me she liked my conversation," Capper said, keen on keeping his end up.

"Oh, that's a mere triviality," Simpson chipped in, triumphantly. "She told me I reminded her of her late husband!"

"Not much of a recommendation to a widow, is it?" asked Capper cynically.

Again there was a silence, both men fuming and glaring at one another.

Gradually both their tempers cooled a little. They sat down, still maintaining the most dogged silence, deep in thought.

At length Simpson spoke.

"Capper!"

"Simpson!"

Is your photo on page 652?

Both looked up, and their eyes met.

"Capper," said Simpson brokenly; "it's the first quarrel, I think, that we've ever had?"

"Simpson," returned Capper, snuffling a little; "it is."

"Capper, a dramatic moment in our lives has arrived. We are in love!"

"Deeply!"

"As you say, deeply. That would not matter, but the trouble is, we are both in love with the same woman."

"The same *angel*," murmured Capper.

"Capper, I thank you for the correction. It is perfectly justifiable. We have both fallen in love with the same *angel*; we both worship at the same shrine—the feet of Mrs. Peterson! Capper, can you deny it?"

"Simpson, I cannot!"

"Ah! then may I assume that, like myself, you have so far worshipped in silence?"

"You may."

"Good! Then Capper, I have a plan to propose. We are old friends, and it is at such moments as these that we need to stand together. You will listen to my plan, Capper?"

"Simpson, I will."

"It is this, that neither of us shall propose to her whom we mutually regard as an angel, for the space of one month."

"And what then?"

"After that time we each write a letter offering her our hands and hearts, and post them at precisely the same moment. Then we abide by her decision. Do you agree, Capper?"

"Simpson," returned Capper emotionally, "you have spoken as a gentleman and a friend. Your plan is fairness itself. I agree to it."

"I am glad," returned the other, "because it is fair to Mrs. Peterson as well. She is evidently well disposed towards us both, and a verbal proposal from either of us would probably lead to her accepting whichever of us uttered it. By sending letters simultaneously, it will give neither of us an advantage over the other, and Mrs. Peterson will be left to choose between us. And by her decision, Capper, we will faithfully, if sadly, abide, eh?"

"Simpson, you have expressed the case exactly. If you are the lucky man, I will wish you joy with all my heart."

"And I you!" returned Simpson fervently.

* * * * *

Very conceited were these two old bachelors. Each thought his own chances of gaining the widow's affections were certain.

And here, let it be said, that their intended proposals were by no means of a disinterested kind. Though they never for a moment allowed one another to think it, it is probable that the widow's good looks alone would never have attracted them. It was the fact that she possessed a goodly balance at the bank that interested them; for has it not been said that both Simpson and Capper had an eye to the main chance?

The first week of the intervening month passed quietly enough. The elderly rivals, without breaking their contract, each paid the widow marked attention at every opportunity. Simpson seemed to come in for his share of encouragement, and was once more told of his resemblance to the late Mr. Peterson. Capper, on his side, was made happy by the praises which the widow bestowed on his singing and upon his conversation.

All went merry as the much-quoted marriage-bell, to which, indeed, both rivals felt certain all these things were preliminary.

But then came a startling announcement. It became known one day that Mrs. Peterson was about to leave the Belle Vue boarding house. She was taking a house of her own in Shepherd's Bush.

To Simpson and Capper the news came like a thunderbolt. Unless they spoke to the widow, here was an end to all their fondest plans. So, at any rate, it seemed at first.

But not for long. For that same night Simpson managed to get Mrs. Peterson on one side, and had such a *tete-a-tete* with her as revived his hopes to a point of "moral certainty."

The widow seemed tenderer than ever when replying to his reference to her impending departure.

"Oh, but surely, Mr. Simpson," she said, "because I am leaving here, that is no reason why we should end our friendship?"

The look she gave him made Simpson utter a most devout:

"I'm sure, my dear Mrs. Peterson, I sincerely hope not!"

"On the contrary," pursued the widow, "I trust that you will honour my house with your company very often." Then, after a pause, during which she cast upon Simpson a look of something with a smile in it, she added: "With you by my side, Mr. Simpson, I could almost imagine my poor dear husband had come back to life! You are so like him, you don't know!"

Simpson would have spoken there and then; would have carefully dropped upon one knee and have poured out from his fifty-year old heart all the love that was pent up in his breast. But he didn't. He remembered his compact with Capper. He must wait till the month was up.

Lest it should be too soon taken for granted that Simpson was the object of the widow's affection, let her talk with Capper that very same evening be recounted.

"I'm sorry you're going," Capper remarked simply. "Very sorry. I shall miss you awfully."

Mrs. Peterson cast upon him a look of something like reproach.

"But surely," she said, "you are not going to let a difference of domicile keep us apart? I am looking forward to the time when I shall be charmed in my own drawing-room by that voice which you know so well how to use."

Capper's heart bounded within him. He, too, felt tempted to prostrate himself at her feet and to signify his willingness to go on singing "Come into the Garden, Maud" for ever. But he, too, remembered his promise, and he, too, held his peace.

Both Simpson and Capper were secretly delighted. Each afterwards separately recalled the details of their respective interviews, just narrated, and each thought that he was preferred above the other by the fair widow. But neither communicated to the other these ideas at first. That they experienced them was, however, abundantly evidenced by their demeanour of suppressed jubilation, whenever they discussed the question of their declaration of love.

The time for this declaration was now rapidly approaching.

"Capper," said Simpson a week or so after the departure of Mrs. Peterson for her new home. "Wednesday next will decide our fate! On that day the month is up, and we dispatch our missives to the object of our affections."

"We do, Simpson," returned Capper.

"Capper," pursued Simpson, "we are old friends; we came to an agreement regarding this matter that afforded us the utmost satisfaction. We agreed to abide by her decision and, whatever it might be, to bear no animosity against one another, but simply to wish each other joy?"

To which the laconic Capper returned:

"Simpson, we did."

"That being so," said Simpson, "I feel it my duty, Capper—as an old friend, you know—to let you down lightly."

"What do you mean, Simpson?" asked Capper, looking up anxiously.

"I mean, Capper, that you ought to be prepared for a disappointment. I have reasons to believe that Mrs. Peterson will accept me." And Simpson smiled confidently as he remembered his last talk with the widow.

"Simpson!" returned Capper, and there was a tinge of triumph in his manner as he, too, recalled the details of his conversation just prior to her departure. "Simpson, you are sanguine, which is a pity. Had you not broached this part of the subject, I should not have mentioned it—out of respect for your feelings. But since you have raised the point, I feel bound to tell you that I don't think you stand the remotest chance. Mrs. Peterson undoubtedly prefers me."

"Pah!" exploded Simpson.

"Pooh-pooh!" retorted Capper.

And then the two, each confident of his own chances, started saying extremely rude things in a nice way to one another, till it was time to retire for the night.

* * * * *

The eventful Wednesday evening arrived. The two old bachelors met in the smoking-room after dinner. For a few minutes they were silent. Simpson shot a furtive glance at Capper. Capper shot a similar missile at Simpson. Then Simpson said:

"Capper, the time has come!" and sighed.

"Simpson, it has!" and Capper sighed too.

"Capper, I am going to my room to write my letter."

"Simpson, so am I."

"We will meet here again in half-an-hour."

"Certainly."

They bowed in silence to one another, and each retired to his room, ostensibly to write out his proposal of marriage to Mrs. Peterson. As a matter-of-fact, each had his letter already written, having devoted the best part of the last fortnight to its composition. But they had told one another no word of this.

For the hundredth time, Simpson, in the privacy of his own room, perused his epistle.

As he finished the eloquent outpourings of his soul, he sealed the letter with a sigh of satisfaction.

"She can never resist me," he said to himself. "Capper has no chance."

Capper, in the privacy of his room, read his letter, too. In his eye there was a look of triumph.

"This letter," he mused, "would win any woman! Simpson, you will soon hear of me as Mrs. Peterson's second husband!"

He sealed his letter and descended to the smoke-room.

"Finished?" queried Simpson, who was already there.

"Finished!" returned Capper. "I propose that we go and post them."

Arm in arm and rather slowly, they sauntered down the street to the pillar-box. Then each, with an outstretched hand, dropped his letter in.

"To-morrow!" observed Simpson solemnly, "our fate will be decided."

And Capper assented.

They were back at the boarding-house ten minutes later. On the hall slab, as they entered, were two letters—one for each of them.

Both hearts beat with pleasure as they eagerly scanned the handwriting, but both delayed opening their missive till they reached the privacy of the smoking-room.

"This is from Mrs. Peterson," remarked Simpson, with subdued triumph.

"So is this!" returned Capper, flourishing his letter.

Then as they broke the seal, both were silent.

"She invites me to dinner next Tuesday!" cried Simpson, ecstatically, reading.

"So she does me!" Capper returned.

"There's a postscript to mine," Simpson went on. "—sh, what's this? O—h—h!" Simpson suddenly went pale and plumped into a seat.

At the same moment Capper did precisely the same thing.

Both letters fluttered to the ground. This is how they read, with the necessary alteration of name:

"Dear Mr. Simpson,—Will you do me the honour of dining here on Tuesday next at seven o'clock? I am so longing to renew our pleasant friendship. Yours sincerely—ISABEL PETERSON.

"P.S.—I hope to introduce you to Major Pombridge, to whom, you will be pleased to hear, I am to be married shortly."

"Capper," said Simpson in a broken voice, after a brief pause, "we have made asses of ourselves!"

"Simpson," replied Capper in tremulous tones, "we have!"

"She is a flirt!" said Simpson.

"She has trifled with my affections!" returned Capper.

"We can't go to the dinner, of course?"

"Of course not, now we've sent those letters."

"I don't think I cared for her much," said Simpson, in a "sour grapes" kind of way.

"I'm beginning to think it was a mere passing fancy on my part," Capper returned.

And then the two baffled old bachelors lapsed into silence, and smoked and pondered on what might have been.

G. CARR.

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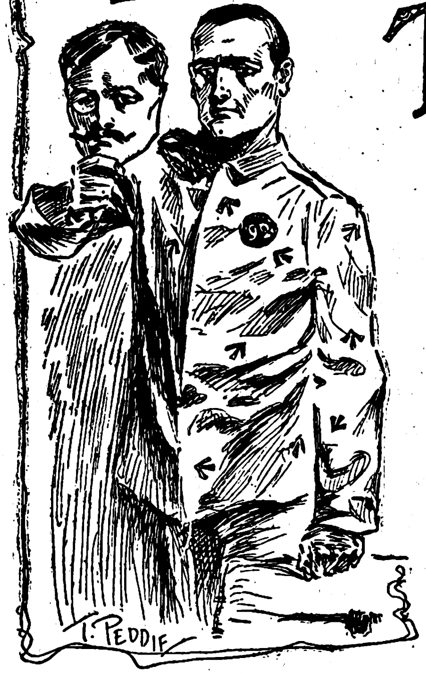

By

Henry T. Johnson.

Author of "Cruce Vincit," "The Pride of the Ring," etc., etc.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

Richard Seldon (Tiger Dick), an escaped convict who murders and then impersonates Cyril Roylance.

Harcourt Dale, a near neighbour of Roylance.

Doris Dale, his daughter.

Jack Branscombe, a young farmer, in love with Doris.

Barker, the Dale's butler, who was murdered by Seldon and two accomplices.

Inspector Rossiter, a detective from Scotland Yard.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST CHAPTERS.

Richard Seldon, a convict, escapes. In a train he meets Cyril Roylance just back from Australia, whom he murders and impersonates. He assumes the rôle of squire, and pays attention to Doris Dale.

While visiting the Dales, the butler is murdered by Seldon and two accomplices, but he so manages that the guilt is fixed on Jack Branscombe, Doris' lover. Branscombe is away from home when the verdict against himself is pronounced.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Fraternal Nubbleys.

In the boughs that shaded the village school, and in the ivy that clothed it like a mantle, the birds were singing, making gentle music to the children's morning hymn, and the morning sunshine was drying the tear drops that the dew had left on the now smiling faces of the flowers. The flowers were pleasant to look upon, and the harmony made by the song birds and the children was pleasant to listen to.

That was why the two old gentlemen who had taken the quaint old cottage contiguous to the school house were sitting out in the old-fashioned garden in the sunshine. They were two nice old gentlemen, not long ago they had been looked upon as two strange old gentlemen, and about nine days ago the Fallowfield villagers had greatly wondered about them, and why they had chosen Fallowfield wherein to sojourn. But the nine days' wonder had worn itself out, and the two strange old gentlemen had become accepted facts—facts all the more gratefully accepted because they were evidently pretty well-to-do old gentlemen, and liberal to boot.

Not that they were exactly refined, in fact, both in manner and speech they were somewhat rough and ready, but Fallowfield tolerated the rough in consideration of the ready, for, whatever their bounds, socially, educationally, or otherwise, their means appeared to be unlimited, the source thereof being generally reputed to be the colossal sum awarded by a certain railway company for compensation in respect of the injuries sustained in an accident on their line by the old gentleman who, at the moment in question, was being wheeled along the cottage garden by the other old gentleman, which injuries, combined with rheumatism, necessitated that wheeling. Everybody said how good and kind it was of the other old gentleman to wheel his brother about in that bath-chair, how tender-hearted he must be, and grown-up people pointed out the two old gentlemen to little boys who were quarrelling as examples of what brothers ought to be. "Mr. Nubbley never picks up bricks to throw at his brother," they said, "he wheels him about in the sunshine in a bath-chair because he likes to listen to the beautiful birds and look at the beautiful flowers." For it should be mentioned that the brothers were known in Fallowfield as James Nubbley and Joseph Nubbley.

"Yes," said Mr. James Nubbley, "brother Joseph is partial to what he calls the beauties of nature, and seeing as 'ow he can't take his walks abroad to enjoy 'em, in course it's my bounden duty to wheel him amongst 'em, and begging pardon, was it the burglary over at Dalehurst Grange as you was talkin' about?"

"No, Mr. Nubbley," replied one of the villagers, volubly and excitedly, "it's nearer home this time. The gang, for gang of 'em there must be, have broken into Brettelby Court."

"And where may that be?"

"Why, about two and a half miles along the Fallowfield road. Our Squire was dining there last night, and on their way back from Brettelby, no doubt it was the same lot, they broke into Fallowfield Hall, and no doubt meant to murder the Squire. As it was, they half-killed poor Mr. Chandler."

"Deary me!" ejaculated the man in the invalid chair. "Brother James, whatever is the world a-comin' to with such a lot of wicked people in it? Have they got any clue?"

"Nary bit o' one," was the answer. "That detective chap from London, he's up there making inquiries and takin' instructions from the Squire; but lor! it seems to me these London police are all very well for dealing with swell mobsmen, but our own constabulary's best to deal with a desperate lot like there is hiding round this countryside. What do you say, Mr. Bingle?"

This last question was addressed to, just as the remark prefacing it was made in deference to a burly individual of severe and self-conscious demeanour, who, halting, returned the respectful salutation of the company with a very proper condescension. And this individual, after the question had been duly deferentially repeated, replied:

"What I thinks is this, Bob Challoner, I thinks, other people thinks what they likes and I also has my opinions," and the group exchanged glances, as who should say: "There's a deep one for you; ah! he could tell us something if he only liked to open his mouth."

The brothers Nubbley meantime interchanged glances, and the one in the wheel chair inquired, after a pause:

"And did they get any stuff; I mean, any plate or money away from the Hall?"

"Not a scrap seemingly," said Bob Challoner, the village gossip; "did they, Mr. Bingle?"

"Now, look here, Bob," said that ornament to the county constabulary, pointing a warning finger, "you know as I'm in a responsible position, and don't you go asking me a lot of unresponsible questions; and, likewise and also, Bob Challoner, you just be careful what you're a-talking about, 'cause in times like these people in unresponsible positions has got to be careful about going about saying unresponsible things."

Mr. Challoner, duly crushed, subsided with becoming humility, and very properly and respectfully begged Mr. Bingle's pardon, and expressed a hope that he hadn't said anything that he oughtn't to have said, but that if he had he humbly apologised and likewise bowed, whereupon Mr. Bingle intimated loftily that there was no harm done for the matter of that, but that, mysteriously, people ought to mind what they said about matters they didn't understand. The brothers Nubbley nodded approval, and when Mr. Challoner had in some confusion shuffled awkwardly away followed by his companions in the direction of the Roylance Arms, Mr. James Nubbley remarked, sagely:

"As you say, Mr Bingle, sir, parties in your responsible position has to be very careful what they says."

"They has, Mr. Nubbley."

"And what they listens to."

"You're right, sir; you're a man of the world, Mr. Nubbley."

"There's a bit of a nip in the air this morning, don't you think, Mr. Bingle, sir?"

"I was noticing it comin' down the road, Mr. Nubbley."

"Was you now, really? What a coincidence! My brother Joseph was just asking me if I'd step inside and bring out the bottle of 'square face' just to keep that cold snap away from inside the chest, Mr. Bingle."

"And he's a werry good judge, Mr. Nubbley. Ah, you has to be very careful, Mr. Joseph, setting still, as you unfortunately has to, to take a little nip of something now and then to keep the circulation going. And a great consolation it must be, sir, for you to 'ave a brother like Mr. James, a-studyin' your every want."

"It is, Mr. Bingle, and I'm grateful accordin'. James is werry thoughtful, and he knows my ways; knows how I likes to see the flowers a-growing in the garden and along the roadside, and the lambs a-friskin' in the fields. Why, if my brother James was to see a lamb a-friskin', he'd hurry home as fast as he could pelt to take me out in this old bath-chair afore it had done friskin' Here he comes with my drop of 'square face.'"

"Yes, here he comes, what an active man he is!" said Mr. Bingle, and then with an air of the most intense surprise as a dwarf tumbler was placed in his hand: "Why, Mr. Nubbley, sir, what's this for? You've brought three glasses!"

"Which I have," replied brother James, "in the 'opes as you'll do us the honour of joining us in a nip." Then, filling the glasses, he continued: "Mr. Bingle, sir, my respects; brother Joseph, here's my regards." Then, smacking his lips, after emptying his glass, he observed blandly: "How sweet it is to hear the little children a-singing of their little songs!"

"It is," assented Constable Bingle, "and that's a drop of real Hollands, Mr. Nubbley," and he produced from his tunic pocket a well-seasoned briarwood pipe.

"Do me the honour of trying a pipeful of mine," said Mr. James Nubbley, taking up the tobacco canister and a couple of churchwardens from beside the bath-chair and filling them. The three filled their pipes, Mr. James re-filled their glasses, the three emptied these, and the ponderous importance and severity of the representative of the strong arm of the Law palpably relaxed.

"It's a very rum start," Mr. James hazarded, "this job up here," and the stem of his churchwarden described a semi-circle with a mile or so of woodland, pasture, and arable between the spot and Fallowfield Hall.

"You're right, it is," said Mr. Bingle mysteriously.

"These London chaps seem to be a little bit off the line, eh?" said Mr. James with a significant nod, and Mr. Joseph from the wheel chair, pointing his churchwarden impressively, said:

"Now, brother James, you know what Mr. Bingle said just now about his responsible position and irresponsible folks asking irresponsible questions. You look after Mr. Bingle's glass and leave such serious matters as his business alone. He knows what he knows, you let him alone for that."

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Joseph," replied P.c. Bingle. "There's no harm in Mr. James making a remark. In course, I am a responsible party, so to speak, but I draws a distinction between intelligent gentlemen like you.—(Thank you, Mr. James; my! this does warm the chest and werry good likewise for the infernal—I mean internal organs)—and the likes of that there fellow Challoner. And you ain't far wrong, Mr. James. These 'ere parties down from London who, with all their swagger and any amount of money at their command, don't seem such flyers at the game when it comes to settling down to work."

"Downright duffers," asserted Mr. James, "by the side of men like you."

"Well," said Mr. Bingle, "here we are. Rossiter lets young Jack Branscombe slip clean through his fingers, 'cause there's no doubt it was him as got out of the train at Mattingham the other day in a travelling cap and ulster; and, before that job's barely a week old, here's Brettelby Court broken into, the pick o' the plate cleared away, and nobody none the wiser till they begins to look for the silver urn to make the breakfast coffee, and then finds enough had been carted away to stock a silversmith. And in less than no time the thieves is cross-country making a very, very early morning call at Fallowfield Hall."

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Joseph. "How on earth do they do it? However can they get over the ground?"

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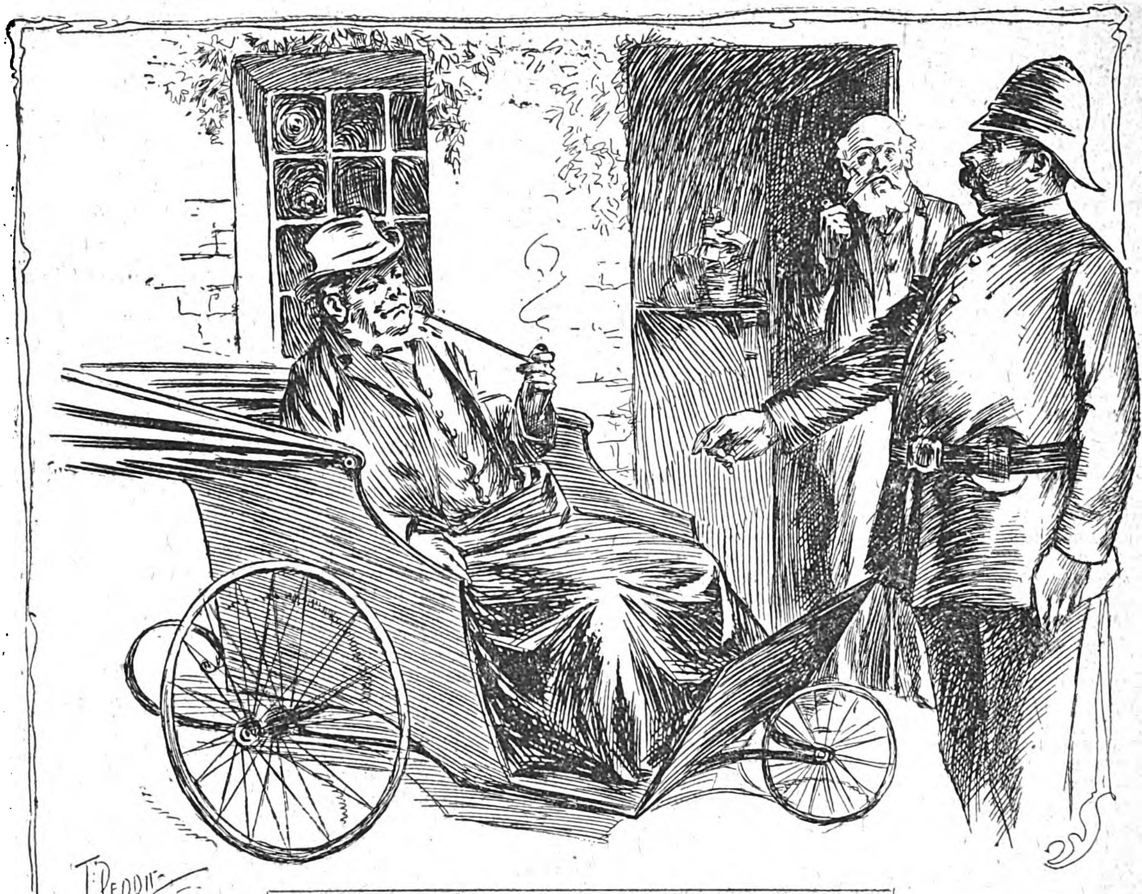

"But what I can't make out is what on earth was Mr. Morgan Chandler doing when he was found?"

Mr. Bingle placed one finger to the right side of his nose, winked his left eye, and said, with a mysterious nod:

"Bicycles!"

Mr. Joseph Nubbley gave a convulsive start. For a moment his cheeks expanded as he clapped his hand to his mouth, seemingly having swallowed a cloud of tobacco smoke.

"Oh! bicycles?"

"Yes, Mr. Nubbley, bikes."

"Not motor-cars?" inquired Mr. Joseph Nubbley almost severely.

"Tut, tut, no!" replied P.c. Bingle, "we should 'ear 'em, even if we didn't smell 'em, and they leave tracks. Don't you see? The man with the bike he can hide his tracks, he can dismount and carry his bike, he can wheel it over the footpath, and take it across a field of grass," and Mr. Bingle nodded and winked again. The brothers Nubbley exchanged glances.

"What did I tell you?" said James. "Didn't I say as if they'd got this man at Scotland Yard things would be different?"

"You did, James," Joseph acknowledged, with the air of one anxious to render due acknowledgment to a correct forecast. "You certainly did, and I can't deny it."

"But what I can't make out," Bingle went on, warmed to his subject by the approbation and the "square face," "is what on earth was Mr. Morgan Chandler doing where he was found?"

"Where was that?" asked Joseph.

"Oh, of course, you haven't heard the rights of it. When Squire Roylance's alarum woke him he jumped up, and to his horror, found Chandler, his resident land steward, lying stretched on the floor in a pool of blood that had flowed from two severe wounds in his head. He rang for assistance, the doctor was sent for, and they brought Chandler to, but all they can get out of him was that he heard burglars in the Hall, got up and dressed, saw, he believes, three, but he's certain at least there were two, men enter the Squire's room. He rushed in to warn the Squire, and one of 'em took him by the throat and the other smashed him over the head with a crowbar."

"Did he recognise any of 'em?"

"Yes," replied the police-constable, "it appears he swears one of them was Jack Branscombe."

The two brothers exchanged glances.

"He won't swear to the other one," Bingle proceeded, "but he says he believes it's somebody who owes him a grudge."

"Somebody what owes him a grudge? Who's that?" asked Mr. James.

The police-constable Bingle relapsed into sphinx-like mystery. He had observed Joseph replace the stopper in the square-faced bottle, and, looking at his watch, found it was later than he thought.

"I've got my ideas," he said, "but, of course, I've got to remember my responsibility. Good morning, gentlemen!"

He strode off, somewhat rapidly, for he had just observed Ned Fletcher loafing along the village green in the direction of the Roylance Arms.

And he meant to ask Ned Fletcher a few questions, one of them being where he had spent the night.

When he had gone, James looked at Joseph and whistled, and Joseph, returning James' glance, mysteriously winked.

"Strikes me," said the man in the invalid chair, "Dick's guess ain't quite so wide; young Branscombe's playing a bit of our game on his own."

"Dry up," whispered the other, "here's the kids a-comin' out of school. How beautiful, my brother, is the 'appy face of childhood to gaze upon! Cher cully, don't that school missus, Miss Morrison I think she calls herself, seem to remind you of somebody you've seed afore?"

"Yes," replied Joseph, "I've been trying to fix her face, but I expect it's only a coincydence. She ain't a bad-looking sort of party, and it's only natural, brother James, for you and me to feel sympathetic towards her, seeing as 'ow all the little kiddies love her so, and you and me is as fond of little kiddies as we is of flowers, and sunshine, and little lambs."

And as the children trooped past the gate, brother Joseph placed the square-faced bottle under the apron of the invalid chair and beamed.

And while he beamed, along the winding road past the school-house and the cottage, there came a man on horseback. It was the Squire of Fallowfield, and with due respect the brothers Nubbley lifted their billycock hats, and brother Joseph deflected the sinister eyelid. The Squire courteously acknowledged their salutation, riding by with a face set and imperturbable. Casually he drew his handkerchief from his left cuff, smoothed his black moustache, then rested his right hand, still containing the handkerchief, on his right knee; and Joseph, turning to James, said:

"D'ye see, Cully! You've got a better headpiece nor me. What's that mean in what you and him call the code?"

"That, my brother," said the other, "is the signal, 'lie low, danger ahead.' Hullo, there's the sky pilot droppin' in at the school-house again. It's a werry beautiful thing, my brother, to see a young man like that taking such a lively interest in the eddication of the young."

"To say nothing of the interest he takes in the school-missus. Oh, my brother, there seems to be a bond of sympathy between that young man and us. His inclination seems to turn so natural to everything what's bright and innercent."

CHAPTER XVII.

Doris Makes a Confidant.

The Rev. Gerald Hastie having knocked, and a musical mellow voice having said "Come in," entered.

"Good morning, Miss Morrison. I'm not intruding am I? Only I was going by and I remembered one or two school matters I wanted to mention."

"I'm quite glad to see you," said the schoolmistress. "I've got quite a heap of things to talk to you about."

A HUMAN FINGER-POST.

The sight of a woman neatly dressed and in the best of health and spirits acting as finger-post and directing people on their way, is rather a novel one. Yet this is what, in a figurative sense, Mrs. R. Ziegler of 2 Withnall St., Wigan, is doing daily. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness restored her to health when she had been in a terrible condition for five years; and all whom she hears of suffering as she did she points to the way of escape. To a *Wigan Examiner* reporter, the other day she said:—"My illness lasted upwards of five years, and in my debilitated state I used to have a feeling that life was scarcely worth living. For days together I was afraid to eat anything, as directly afterwards I was seized with the most horrible pains and other distressing symptoms of indigestion and biliousness. The least effort brought on shortness of breath, and left me for some time as weak as a baby. Palpitation also alarmed me considerably, so that I was really afraid to move. I had pains in my back and side, due to liver and kidney disorder. Then I was weighed down with a dull, tired feeling, making me take quite a melancholy view of life. Frequently my trials were increased by a splitting headache, and chronic constipation was a still further source of trouble. I had medical advice and medicine on many occasions, but with no good result; as in a day or two I became worse than ever. At last, when I was in the depths of despair, I saw in the paper the wonderful manner in which Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness had cured a case just like my own. I thought, perhaps, they might do me some good at least, and I commenced a course, forthwith. Very glad am I now that I did so, for a few boxes have made me feel like a new woman. The pain in the head and back very soon went, and I found my appetite gradually returning. There was no more of that depressing, uncomfortable feeling after meals. At nights I slept very much better, and when I arose in the morning I felt refreshed and equal to the day's tasks. My increase in strength was very marked. It was a great relief to me to have no more of the palpitation. That has now gone entirely. I now feel better in health than I have done for years, and this I owe entirely to Chas. Forde's Bile Beans. I can conscientiously recommend them to other sufferers."

Bile Beans are superior to all medicines for palpitation, indigestion, biliousness, buzzing and pains in the head, pains in the chest, back and side, fulness after eating, dizziness, sleeplessness, piles, constipation, liver and kidney disorders, nervous and general debility, female ailments, pimples, colds, chill, rheumatism, and as a preventative of influenza. All chemists stock Bile Beans, or a box may be obtained, post free, from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 and 120 London Wall, E.C., upon receipt of prices 1s. 1½d. or 2s. 9d.

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"Oh, that's ripping!" Then hastily relapsing into a more suave and clerical tone, he added: "I mean, how truly fortunate that I happened to decide to look in. And how are the kiddies, I mean, the children getting on?"

"They're as good as gold. Of course, they're live children."

"You'd think so if you'd been passing Branberry's orchard just now, ahem!"

"What! my children? Tell me, who were they?"

"Couldn't if I would, wouldn't if I could; whenever I hear sounds of brats up to mischief I systematically look the other way."

"But it's very, very wrong of you," said Miss Morrison, trying not to smile, "and you ought to know better."

"I know I ought, but I don't. You see, I've been there before myself, many a time; I mean to say one is reminded on reflection of the frequency of one's own lapses. Er—let me see, did you say you'd made the stationery account agree?"

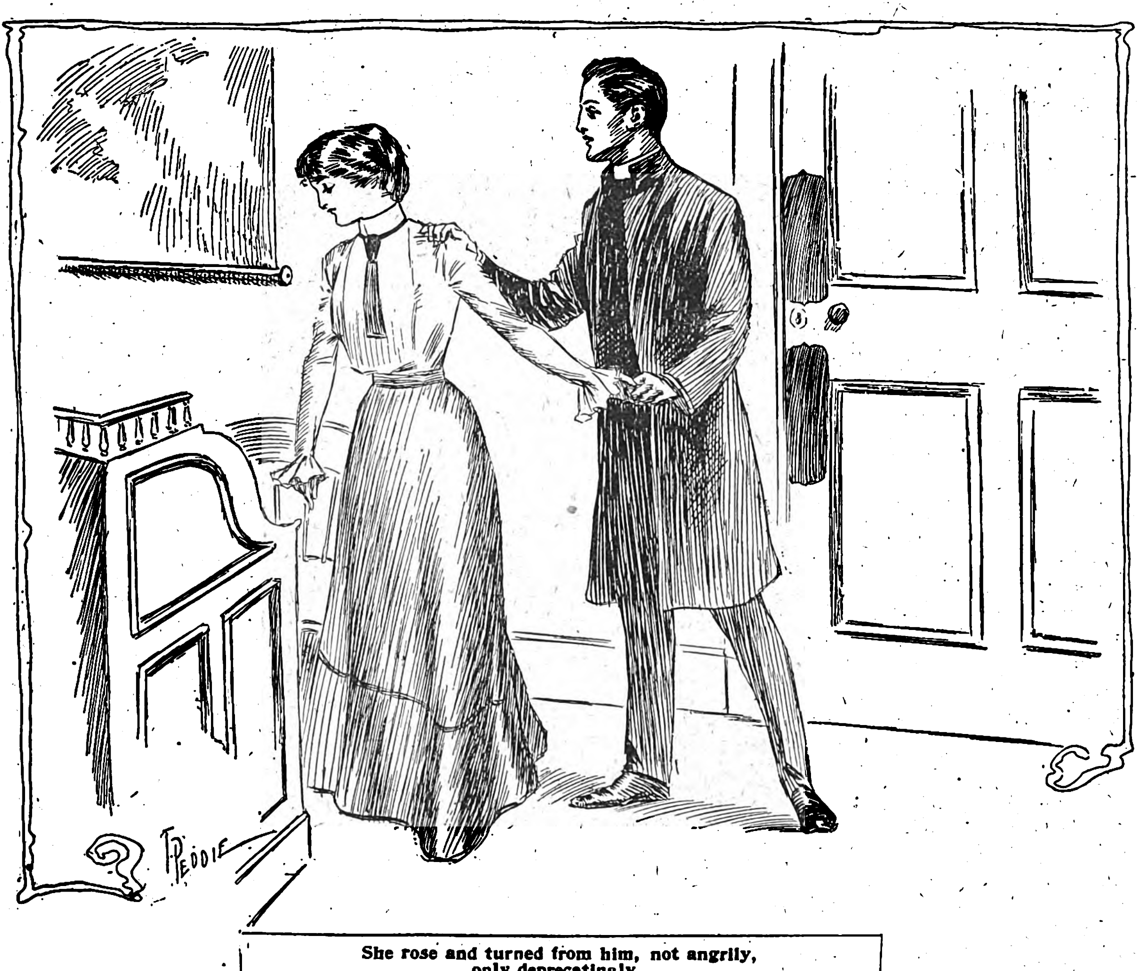
And then they went into figures, though Miss Morrison noted with surprise that the curate of Fallowfield was, for a man who had taken mathematical honours at Cambridge, the unreadiest reckoner she had ever encountered, and perhaps it was because Gerry Hastie's eyes kept roving from the figures inside the red lines on the blue paper to the more interesting figure of the lady whose accounts he was checking. Certainly, the schoolmistress, looking up occasionally from long "tots" with the question, "What do you make it?" found the curate's eyes resting on her with an earnest expression, which somehow brought a deeper rose tint to her comely cheeks. But those tiresome accounts at last disposed of, they chatted on other subjects, Gerry dilating ruefully and in detail on the discomforts of bachelors and the helplessness of a young man at the mercy of an elderly lady, and Miss Morrison sympathised.

"I say, that's a nice old racket, I mean to say, a dreadful state of things, up at the Hall," said the curate.

"I heard something of it from the children, what dreadful things keep happening! There seems quite an epidemic of crime in the neighbourhood."

"Yes, it's a rum start, I mean, it's a bit strange, isn't it. One thing's pretty certain, there's a gang, and a desperate gang, working this district."

"Undoubtedly. And do you think Mr. Branscombe is really at the head of it? It's so shocking to think of



She rose and turned from him, not angrily, only deprecatingly.

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SMALL-POX AND DEAFNESS.

SMALL-POX, in common with other contagious or exanthematous diseases, scarlet fever, and measles, is a fruitful cause of deafness. The inflammatory processes which affect the membranes of the middle ear in this disease may, in some cases, produce simple catarrhal deafness, but the most frequent result is a purulent condition, with formation of an abscess, perforation of the ear drum, and a discharge from the ear. A third a very rare form of deafness, appearing as a complication of small-pox, is caused by changes in the structures of the labyrinth or internal ear, and is produced through the effect of the disease reacting, through the circulation, upon the terminal filaments of the auditory nerve.

These three forms of deafness, resulting from small-pox, do not differ in their treatment from aural diseases due to other causes, and although generally considered obstinate in character, the results obtained by the Drouet treatment show that all but a very small percentage are curable. Further information on the subject will be found in the "Journal for the Deaf," which can be obtained free by post by addressing the Secretary, 72 Regent's Park Road, N.W. This publication gives the symptoms of the various forms of deafness and a resumé of upwards of 200 cured cases. Among the cases lately reported as cured by the Drouet treatment the following are of great interest. The first case illustrates how completely the hearing can be restored, although there may be numerous complications. Mr. H. L. applied to the consulting physician of the Drouet Institute for the treatment of deafness complicated by nasal, Eustachian, and middle ear catarrh, anchylosis of the ossicles, labyrinthian and tubal tinnitus, and discharge from the ears. After a course of the Drouet treatment, under the direction of the consulting physician, a letter conveyed to the Institute his surprise at the results obtained:

Exeter, Oct. 6th, 1901.

Dear Sirs,—I am astonished at the remarkable effect of the Drouet treatment in my case. The discharge has entirely disappeared, my voice has a clear ring, and my hearing has become so acute that I can detect the least sound, which means something to me in my occupation, as I have the superintendence of thirty hands in this establishment. Yours truly, H. L.

(Full address of this patient can be obtained from the Drouet Institute.)

When the Rev. John L. Meredith applied for the Drouet treatment, the consulting physician found that the deafness was of a chronic catarral nature, and obstinate in character, as previous special treatment had failed to effect a cure. Under the Drouet treatment, however, as prescribed for catarrhal deafness, the result was satisfactory, as expressed in the following letter:

Fritwell Vicarage, Banbury, July 22nd, 1901.

Dear Sirs,—You will be glad to know that the treatment as prescribed by your consulting physician has had a curative effect. I do not require any more treatment, and shall be pleased to publicly recommend the Drouet Institute for Deafness.—Yours truly, JOHN L. MEREDITH.

Mrs. E. Green, in forwarding the Patient's Report Form, filled out with a description of the case of her child, aged five years and nine months, gave a history of earaches, followed by discharge from the ears, and deafness. This is one of those cases where, if the ears do not receive proper attention, the ailment takes a chronic course.

Fortunately, Mrs. Green, unlike the majority of parents, realised the importance of the case, and placed her child under the Drouet treatment, and, as shown by her letter, a complete cure was obtained:

Lincoln, Aug. 23rd, 1901.

Dear Sir,—I thank you for your letter this morning, and am glad to be able to say my child has quite recovered from the deafness and discharge from the ears, and does not need any more attention.—Thanking you for your kind advice and treatment, yours truly, E. GREEN.

The case of Mr. George Ryder is interesting as an instance of a cure of catarrhal deafness of ten years' duration. When he asked for treatment by correspondence with the Consulting Physician of the Drouet Institute, the difficulty in hearing was so great that the ticking of a watch could not be heard at all with the left ear, and only when within two inches of the right ear. There was the usual history of deafness creeping on gradually, and almost imperceptibly, which is found in cases of chronic catarrhal deafness, with greatly increased difficulty in hearing following the constant succession of colds in the head, to which Mr. Ryder was subject. He suffered much from noises in the ear and dizziness. Appropriate treatment was prescribed and carried out faithfully by Mr. Ryder, under the directions of the Consulting Physician, as given in correspondence, from time to time, with the result that a perfect cure was reported, as follows:

Bishop's Cottage, Woodcock's Hill, Rickmansworth,
Aug. 27th, 1901.

Dear Sirs,—I beg to thank you for your kind letter, also for the great interest you have taken in my case, and I am very pleased to say that I am quite cured. Before I began the treatment I was quite deaf in my left ear, and could only hear the ticking of my watch two inches off with my right ear, and after only going under the treatment you advised me to follow for two months, I was cured. I shall only be too pleased to recommend it to my friends.—Yours faithfully,

GEORGE RYDER.

Nerve deafness, and the formation of adhesions restricting the movement of the ossicles, the minute chain of bones contained in the middle ear, produce a condition that is regarded as almost incurable; yet this was the cause of deafness in the case of Mr. W. J. Saich, who reports himself cured completely, after a careful course of treatment under the direction of the consulting physician of the Drouet Institute. Let it be added that Mr. Saich had been deaf for years, and given up hope of ever obtaining a cure. His letter speaks for itself.

13 Tennyson Road, Stratford, London, E.,
Sept. 24th, 1901.

Dear Sirs,—I am glad to say that the noises in the head have entirely disappeared, and that the hearing has been restored. You can use my name as an endorsement of the Drouet treatment, and I shall recommend to you anyone that suffers from deafness.—Yours faithfully, W. J. SAICH.

The original letter, with all the others of which extracts have been given above, may be seen in the Autograph Room of the Drouet Institute, where hundreds of letters emanating from grateful patients are kept. The Autograph Room is open to the public every day, except Sunday, from ten a.m. to six p.m.

Let us state again that a copy of the "Journal for the Deaf" will be forwarded gratis to any applicant. All persons affected with a disease of the ear, nose, or throat should read it, and also ask for the report form, which will allow them to submit their case to the Drouet Institute. This form is sent free of charge, and the advice given is always gratuitous. For all additional information write to the Secretary of the Drouet Institute, 72 Regent's Park Road, London, N.W.

Personal consultations are held daily, except Sundays, from two to four p.m. In this case a fee is charged for examination. Special consultations may also be had at any time by making an appointment with the Consulting Physician.

such a nice fellow, and in his position and with such a romantic interest attaching to him, being implicated in such wickedness. What is your opinion?"

"My opinion, no, not merely my opinion, my firm and absolute conviction is that Jack Branscombe has no more to do with the attack on Morgan Chandler, or with the plate robbery at Brettleby Court, or with the murder at Dalehurst Grange than you or I had."

"But his strange and sudden disappearance, the finding of the weapon in his grounds?"

"Yes, yes, I'll grant that. I'll grant appearances are against him. Yes, there's a chain of circumstantial evidence long enough and strong enough to hang any man, if men were convicted unheard, but we've got to hear some day his side of the story."

"What, when he's caught?"

"No, I prefer to say when he's found, for I believe Jack Branscombe is either dead or under duress."

"I'm so glad to meet somebody who believes in his innocence. I somehow can't think such a nice fellow guilty."

"And I'm glad too to hear you speak like that about my friend, for Jack Branscombe and I were sworn chums, and I'm certain that so good a sportsman couldn't be so bad a man. And then again, Miss Morrison, do you think such a dear girl as Doris Dale, and isn't she a plucked 'un, could love a man who could do such things as that?"

Somehow a strange expression, almost a painful one, came into the winsome, comely face of the schoolmistress, the rose tints for a moment died away from it, leaving it all cream.

"I don't think she could," she said slowly, "if she knew; and yet I can understand there being cases of women loathing evil deeds and yet loving evil men."

"What! After they've found them out?"

"Well, yes, even after they've found them out," and the beautiful grey eyes seemed fixed in a far-away gaze, the gaze of one whose mental vision penetrates the vista of the long ago; so that she seemed oblivious of the ardent gaze that Gerald Hastie was concentrating on her face.

"It seems to me," he said gently, very earnestly, "that the trust and love of a good woman would turn even a bad man towards better ways. I think that any man, good or bad, or middling, would be all the better for the thought that a dear, sweet woman loves him. I know I'm not a very good man, nothing like what I ought to be according to my calling and my cloth, but I am sure that if I could only think that you believed in me, cared for me; oh! if I could only think you loved me, there's no temptation I could not resist and no ordeal that I could not endure."

And, love giving him daring, he took her hand; but she rose and turned from him, not angrily, only deprecatingly.

"No, no!" she said in a choking voice. "You must not dream of that. Gerald Hastie, I do believe in you, and, in a way, I do care for you as a dear, dear friend, I honour you as a brave, faithful Christian gentleman; only—never, oh please! never, never speak to me or think to yourself of being anything more to me than a dear and trusted friend."

"But why—why?" he asked with all a lover's blindness to any reason that he should not gain his heart's delight.

"Gerald," he said, looking him straight in the eyes, "you would grant me any favour in reason that I might ask?"

Feeling that he could do much for her, not merely in, but out of reason, he replied: "Yes, ask what you will for it is granted before you ask if it be in my power."

"It is this," she said. "Please never ask me—why!"

He went his way with, for a while, a bowed head and heart, for he had learnt to love this winsome-faced schoolmistress with the tender face and patient ways; he, the strapping, alert, young athlete, a healthful type of young English manhood, whose wooing would have been welcomed in many quarters, socially and substantially higher, and he would have been more or less than what he was, a thorough man, had he not felt his disappointment. But his was not a nature to despair or to rail at the inevitable.

"There is some obstacle," he said to himself as he strode along the country lane. "I have promised not to ask her; perhaps all in good time that obstacle may cease to be; whether or not, she will always let me be her trusted friend, and that in itself is a happiness to be prized."

He was aroused from his reverie by the sound of wheels and his own name called in a woman's voice. He looked up and returned the greeting of Doris, who was driving alone in her pony chaise. In compliance with her request, he stepped in and took a seat beside her.

"Oh,, Gerry dear," said Doris, "it's you I've been wanting to see for days."

"And for days I've been on the point of coming to see you, Doris, only you've had so much trouble I thought you'd like best to be left alone."

"I wish my father were of your way of thinking; dad's very good, but he's one of those who believe the best antidote to a bereavement or other crushing sorrow is a dance or a play."

"I know," said Gerald briskly, "the sort of chap who'd go to a farcical comedy in the evening to forget a funeral in the afternoon. But, Doris, have you any news?"

She was silent for a moment, and he went on: "I'm afraid something very, very serious has befallen Jack, or he'd never be so foolish as to lend colour to the accusations against him by hesitating for one moment to come forward and face them."

"Do you think it is unwise, Gerry, for him to lie low, assuming that he is doing so voluntarily?"

"Unwise! My dear Doris, it is insane. Why, do you know that this latest depredation early this morning, about midnight, at Fallowfield Hall, is laid to his charge?"

"Which proves," said Doris triumphantly, "that in voluntarily absenting himself he is neither unwise nor insane, for he is proving that these terrible acts are the works of others."

"Possibly, if he has reliable evidence that he was elsewhere at the time, but how's he going to prove that? Why, Doris, how strangely you are talking. I believe you know something of his whereabouts. Tell me, for I am his friend and yours, is he safe and sound?"

"He is safe so far, Gerry, that the bloodhounds are not yet on the trail, though they are nearer to it than they imagine, are crossing and re-crossing it without picking up the scent. Gerry, I know I can trust you, and oh! it will ease my heart to share my secret with somebody else," and pulling the pony into a walk along a lonely lane, she told Gerald Hastie where Jack lay in hiding. He listened in amazement.

"You brave girl!" he said, "you are breaking the law, but I believe you're helping the ends of jsutice; you've made one thing clear, that Jack had no part or parcel in last night's affairs, for at that very silent hour when you tell me you, taking advantage of its very silence, took drink and victuals to him, he must, had he been implicated in the events at Brettelby Court and Fallowfield Hall, have been miles away. But it won't do for him to stay there, Doris. Sooner or later he would be caught, and the fact of hiding would be assumed as evidence against him."

(To be continued.)

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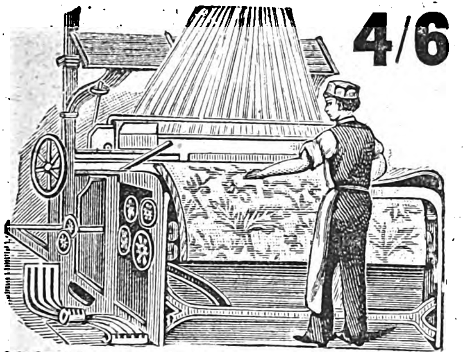

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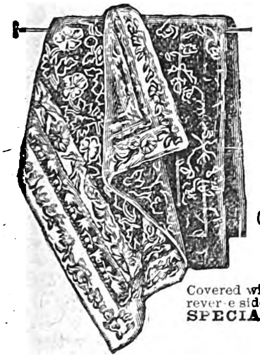

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Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. To those readers who submit storyettes which are used, a six shilling novel will be awarded. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, November 25th. Postcards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. for the best storyette published this week has been won by Miss F. Ray, of 9 Reynoldson Street, Durham Road, Sunderland, whose contribution is denoted by an asterisk thus.*

Professional Instinct.

HUSBAND (the father of six daughters): "Come, Rosa, there is a gentleman in the drawing-room who wants to marry one of our daughters. He is a wine merchant." Wife: "A wine merchant. Heaven be praised. Then he will be sure to select one of the older brands!"

It Wasn't Dark Enough for Gas.

A SERVANT who had suffered from toothache very severely was sent by her mistress to a dentist to have the tooth out. On the following morning the mistress asked her servant if she had had the tooth out with gas. "No, mum," replied the servant, "I got there in plenty of time to have it out in daylight."

He Had To Return It.

SMALL BOY: "I picked up a shilling in the road today, father." Fond Father: "And you restored it to the owner, I suppose?" Small Boy: "Yes, sir." Father: "That's a good, honest boy." Small Boy (conscience-stricken): "Well, father, you see I couldn't very well help it. The man had me by the ear and wouldn't let me go!"

Closely Connected.

"Is the editor-in-chief in?" asked a stranger, as he sauntered into the office at eight o'clock in the morning. "No, sir," replied the doorkeeper, kindly, "he does not come so early. Is there anything I can do?" "Perhaps so. Are you connected with the poetical department of the paper?" "I am, sir." "Oh, what do you do?" "I empty the waste-paper baskets, sir."

The "Board of Health." *

A COUNTRYMAN walking along the streets of London found his progress stopped by a barricade of wood. "What's this for?" said he to a person standing by. "Oh, that's to stop the fever from spreading," replied the other, by way of being jocose. "Ah," said the countryman," I've often heard of the Board of Health, but I never saw it afore."

That Was All.

A LITTLE five-year old boy recently came home from school, which he had only been attending a few days, and his mother asked him what he had been doing. "Writin' M's and shakin' awful," was the child's pathetic reply, which meant that a long course of M's in a copy-book he had gone through had tried his nerves. "Well, how do you make an M?" his mother asked. "Oh, you go up a hill and down a hill, and up a hill and down a hill, and stay there."

No Danger!

IT was during the small-pox scare, and a number of people were waiting in a health office to be vaccinated. "What is your profession?" asked the doctor, speaking to a well-dressed man. "I am a detective," was the reply. "A detective, eh!" exclaimed the doctor, "then you'll not need to be vaccinated, because there is no fear of you catching anything."

He Had Tried It.

MRS. WALLACE: "Did you read about that poor man who stole a loaf of bread, and made the defence that he was starving?" Mr. Wallace: "Was it home-made bread?" "What has that to do with it?" "Because, if it was, he was lying. A starving man would not have the strength to run away with a loaf of home-made bread."

Appreciated.

"AH!" said the editor, as the young poet came in, "that last thing was good. We were much pleased with it." "Well, in that case," said the poet, "I will withdraw what I said in my letter about not liking the way you treated me, and declaring that I should send you no more of my work." "Oh, that's all right," replied the editor, with heartless cruelty. "That letter is what I referred to."

Unkind.

"I WENT in to bathe," said the story-teller, "but before I was long in the water I saw a huge double-jawed shark making rapidly towards me. What was to be done? When he was within about a yard of me I faced round, dived under the shark, and taking a knife from my pocket, killed him with one stroke." "But did you bathe with your clothes on?" asked an astonished listener. "Well," answered the story-teller reproachfully; "well, I do think you needn't be so particular!"

Worked Splendidly.

BROWN: "What puts you in such a good-humour this morning?" Robinson: "I've just got a patent for my new infallible ink eraser. I wouldn't take £10,000 for it." "Didn't you get a patent last year for inventing an indelible ink?" "I did, and I sold it for £6,000, and now I've invented an eraser that will even remove writing done with my own indelible ink." "What are you going at next?" "I'm going to invent another indelible ink that can't be erased with my new eraser. I tell you, there is money in this patent business if you only go about it the right way."

Mistaken Identity.

THERE is a pretty story told of the late Lord Granville at a naval review. Though advanced in years, as in honours, he was accustomed on such occasions to don a simple costume of navy blue and a peaked cap, in which it is not everyone who looks like one of his Majesty's Ministers. In this dress he took his station at the foot of the ladder by which the members got on board their vessel, as he wanted to see some of his friends. Mr. C——was one of them, and as he descended with his daughter his lordship held out his hand. Mr. C—— did not see it, being engaged in conversation with someone behind him, but the young lady did. "Papa," said she, turning to her father, "here is the man for the tickets."

Is your photo on page 652?

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

A Half-guinea Fountain Pen will each week be awarded to the reader who is the sender of the most interesting query answered on this page.

"J. C. K." writes that he has been sending attempts for the Storyette Competition for some time, and has not yet been successful in obtaining a prize. He lives at Liverpool, which he says I seem to have forgotten in making awards, as during the last two years the first prize has only twice gone to Liverpool.

It is not my fault, "J. C. K.," that Liverpudlians are not so successful as you think they should be. I have no grudge against them. Each anecdote is carefully read and the prize is awarded to the sender of the best. Don't give up trying because you have not yet won a prize. Your perseverance is sure to be rewarded some day—perhaps when you least expect it.

⁂

ONE of my correspondents sends me the following interesting anecdote: "Fifty years ago a man was driving a drove of ducks before him down Old Street, St. Luke's, E.C., allowing persons who bought to choose the ones they would have. I stood at my door as they passed and selected two of them. There are now between six and seven thousand vehicles, besides tramcars and 'buses, passing and repassing through the same street daily."

Truly the times have changed!

⁂

Two more claims have been made in connection with the Photo Competition this week, and £5 notes have been sent to:

MRS. CRASK (No. 26),
27 Maidstone Road,
Lowestoft.

MR. GEO. R. SIMS (No. 28),
12 Clarence Terrace,
Regent's Park,
London, N.W.

⁂

IT will be observed that one of the winners this week is Mr. G. R. Sims, the well-known playwright and journalist. He had no idea that his photograph was in *Short Stories* until he saw it there. That may be exactly the case with you. So keep your eye open every week when Tuesday comes round.

ADVICE TO READERS ON VARIOUS MATTERS.

(*Replies to Correspondents.*)

"BENEDICK" wants to know why the "best man" at a wedding is so called. "I should have thought," says "Benedick," "that the man about to be married might at least be called the best man, even if in actual fact he were the worst present."

The "best man" is a survival of the days when a bachelor must capture the girl of his heart and carry her off to the altar by main force, if he wished to marry her—a custom which still obtains in some savage countries. Obviously, then, it would be to his advantage to have a few friends handy to keep the ground in case of opposition; obviously, also, he would choose men of brawn and substance—in fact, the "best men" obtainable. Now that the preliminaries are conducted with more decorum, one "best man" is sufficient. His duties consist in finding the ring at the critical moment, and assuring the groom from time to time that his tie has *not* worked up behind.

"JACK" has been arguing with a friend as to the number of diseases to which the human frame is liable. His friend says 150, and he says more like 1,500.

You are nearest, although a long way off. There are altogether about 2,400. When a man gets rheumatism, though, he begins to think that the whole lot have struck him in a heap. I know.

"HOUSEWIFE" writes: "What a tremendous amount of tea must be wasted every day in this country through insufficient or careless brewing! Can you give me any idea of the quantity?"

I believe it is estimated that at least ten per cent. of the total quantity used is absolutely wasted by careless brewing, chiefly exemplified by the addition of water which is not boiling, and which, consequently, fails to extract the invigorating properties of the tea-leaf as it should. A great deal of waste, too, is caused by persons putting more tea into the pot than is necessary. It will very often be found that when a party of three or four has to be supplied with tea, enough leaf is used to, with proper brewing, satisfy the needs of twice as many people. Ten per cent., indeed, is a very low estimate of the amount of waste; but even granting that it is not exceeded, it is a wonderful example of the tremendous aggregate result of numerous small acts of carelessness, for, assuming it to be exactly correct, the weight of tea which is thus literally thrown away daily in this country amounts to more than 115 tons, which, at a low average price of 1s. 6d. per pound, would represent a value of nearly £20,000.

"GIRLIE" asks if it is a fact that pressing the upper lip is a preventive of sneezing?

Yes, that is so; and if you are an observer of human nature, you will have noticed that sneezing is anything but prevalent amongst engaged couples.

"F. H." asks: "Has there ever been a King of the Isle of Wight?"

In the fifteenth century a Duke of Warwick was created King of the Isle of Wight by Henry VI. The latter placed a crown upon the Duke's head with his own hands, but as the honour did not carry with it the lordship of the island, which was held by the Duke of Gloucester, and was not continued to the descendants, it must be regarded as an empty one.

SHORT STORIES

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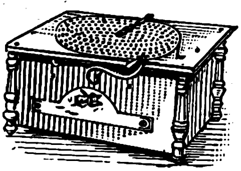

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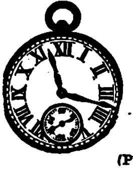

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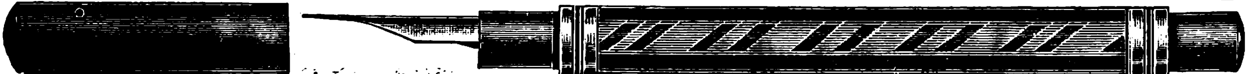

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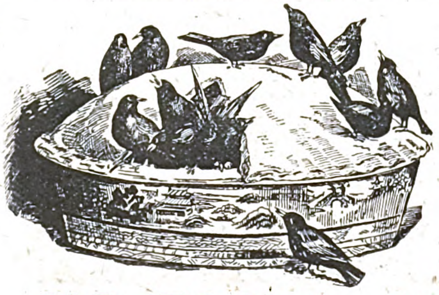

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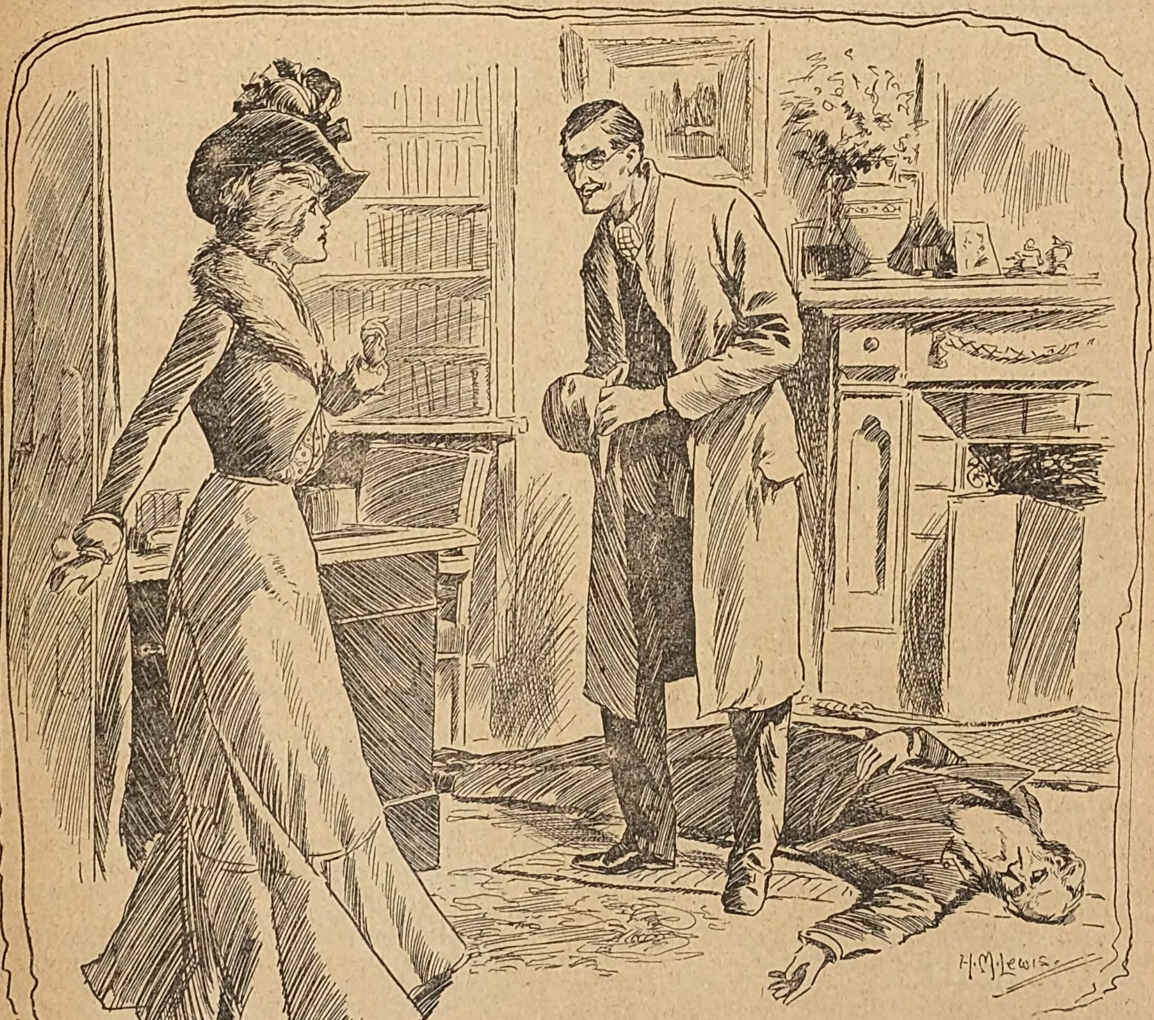
SHORT STORIES

No. 674.] For the Week Ending November 30th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

Adventures of an Actress.



She stood and gazed at the hated face before her, and from him her eyes went to the prostrate body on the carpet.

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THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

XVII.—AN OLD MAN'S DARLING.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

In a conspicuous position upon a hoarding in a Brighton street, was a poster, the portrait of a beautiful girl, with auburn hair and blue eyes, merely a face, yet a wonderful testimonial of the colour printer's art. Beneath the portrait were the words: "Hazel Harlow, the famous actress. For six nights only at the Theatre Royal."

Before the advertisement two men had come simultaneously to a standstill. Both stood regarding the picture in silence. Each was as different from the other in appearance as it would be possible to conceive.

The one was very old, with a benign, almost child-like expression, and long white beard falling over his breast. The other was a man of uncertain age, somewhat shabbily dressed, his eyes hidden behind blue spectacles, his face clean-shaven, his hair long and tawny in hue, a curious combination of shabby gentility and ostentatious carelessness of attire.

The old man's eyes seemed riveted to the poster. Then his lips moved almost mechanically. The other man edged nearer to him, to hear fall from his lips the mysterious words:

"At last! At last! It must be! It must be!"

In a moment the eavesdropper's appearance of careless nonchalance vanished. He looked furtively around him. It was midday and there were very few people about, due to the fact that the season of the year was early winter, and that a raw wind blew gustily and penetratingly from the north-east.

"A beautiful face that!" said the younger man carelessly. "And to think that the owner of it is an actress!"

The old man gave a sudden start, as though surprised in the midst of the most poignant reflections. Then he turned round slowly and fixed his glance upon the intruder.

"A beautiful face, indeed!" he echoed dreamily; "there are none who should know it more thoroughly than I."

"Do you know Miss Hazel Harlow then?" asked the other curiously. "How comes that about?"

There was a far-away look in the old man's face. He had almost the appearance of a person in a trance. There was something uncanny in the way in which his pale-blue eyes fixed themselves upon the face of his interlocutor.

For a moment or so he said nothing. Then, in a low voice, speaking as though the words were dragged from him against his will, he said:

"Her name is not Hazel Harlow. She bears quite another name than that. And to think that after all these years I should see her face gazing at me from the walls of a hoarding."

His words produced an extraordinary effect on his solitary audience, who started violently, as though he had been the recipient of a galvanic shock, and then, recovering himself with an effort, muttered:

"Who is she, then? And who are you?"

Again came a momentary hesitation on the part of the aged stranger. Again it seemed as though he were struggling to keep pent-up within himself the thoughts that surged through his mind. Then, with the same far-away look in his eyes, he murmured:

"She is my daughter, and I must claim her!"

"*Your daughter!* Imposs—" Then the unkempt stranger checked himself. A hundred sinister thoughts were surging through his brain. "Look here," he went on almost roughly, "let us come to some quiet place where we can have a quiet talk about this extraordinary affair. Perhaps I can be of assistance to you. If she is your daughter, she ought to be restored to you. I would help you willingly. What do you say?"

"Yes! yes! She ought to be restored to me. I have been without her so long! And how I have hungered for her!" The old man turned eagerly to his unknown ally. "Will you really help me?" he murmured. "Can I trust you?"

"You can! You can! There is a small tavern not far from here where we can be quiet and unmolested. When I have heard all I shall know more what to do."

Like a man in a dream the old fellow allowed himself to be led away by the importunate stranger, who, conducting him through three or four streets, finally came to a pause before a small public-house not far from the King's Road, to boldly walk inside and ask for refreshments and a private room.

His demands were speedily complied with.

"And now that we are alone," said he, "eat and drink, and tell me your story."

"But can I trust you? I am an old man, and almost friendless. A poor old man, too. Say that you will respect my confidences as sacred."

"You can trust me implicitly. And if I can I will help you. It was Providence that ordained we should meet. Come, to your tale."

The man spoke incisively, with almost the ring of command in his voice. The grey-beard passed his hand almost wearily through his white hair, and began, in a low, constrained voice, the recital of his tale:

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"Many, many years ago, when I was quite a young man I fell in love with a woman. We were married and lived happily for some years. Then my wife died, leaving me alone in the world with one child—a little girl—on whom I lavished all the wealth of my affections. The years passed on and she left childhood's paths for those of budding womanhood. Then came a terrible event into my life. She disappeared, leaving a note to tell me that she had fallen in love with a man, and gone to marry him. She was only a slip of a girl, too young, I had thought, to think of such things. From that day to this I have never set eyes on her, and now it is her portrait I see smiling down at me from the hoardings of Brighton. There is my story. Now you can understand what I meant when I told you her name was not Hazel Harlow."

Silence followed the simple story. Its hearer seemed too much amazed for speech. He could only sit and stare at the old man like a being bereft of his senses.

"Then what is her name?" he muttered mechanically. "Who is she?"

"Her real name is Miriam Lee," came the quiet answer, as though the speaker saw no cause for surprise or, indeed, noticed that his words had had any such effect. "That is my name, Lee—Gideon Lee."

"Miriam Lee!" the stranger muttered dazedly; "not Hazel Harlow, but Miriam Lee!"

"Yes. And you will help me get her back—my little Miriam. You have promised me you will."

Gideon Lee's words had an extraordinary effect upon his companion.

"Help you!" he cried, springing to his feet; "of course I will. Nay, more, I'll see that your long-lost daughter is restored to you. Come, tell me where you live, and all about yourself. But we must be cautious. She'll not come to you unless you set about your work becomingly. Otherwise, why did she leave you, and why has she never communicated with you all these years?"

The old man looked at the speaker hungrily. He was evidently only too ready to receive advice.

"Yes," he echoed dreamily. "We must be cautious. My little Miriam! After all these years!"

CHAPTER II.

The afternoon was already far advanced when Gideon Lee and his unknown, unexpectedly-found ally parted, to meet again, as had been arranged, on the next day.

As the stranger found himself alone again he made the best of his way to an obscure street in Hove, to admit himself into a dingy house, from the front window of which dangled a fly-blown placard, bearing the one word "Apartments."

The stranger entered a room on the first-floor, and, carefully locking the door, proceeded to at once effect a metamorphosis as startling as it was irregular.

His blue "goggles" were removed, the tawny wig that disguised his close-cropped hair was removed, and he stood in his true guise, that of a middle-aged, dark-eyed, dark-haired man, with his cruel mouth made more cruel by the coal-black eyes above it. A small fire was burning in the grate of the room, which had no features to render it in any way different from the usual type of apartments such as are to be met with in cheap sea-side lodging-houses.

The man flung himself into a chair before the fire, and poking the embers up into a blaze, drew forth a cigarette, and began to smoke with almost vicious energy.

"So this is where your 'love' has led you, Horace Caldecott!" he muttered; "this is the result of all your efforts. Instead of a mansion in town and the enjoyment of wealth that is at least your own, you are forced to hide in a Brighton lodging-house like a hunted fox in a hole. Curse everything! And curse especially that officious fool who calls himself Eric Monteith. But for him Hazel Harlow might have been yours by now, and you might have been footing it with the best of them, instead of hiding here with detectives watching round your London house and a price upon your head. And what have you gained by it all? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! And yet"—his voice changed—"I love Hazel Harlow; aye, love her with an all-consuming passion. To think that after all I've gone through she is still as far away from me as ever. Wait a bit, though! What about this old madman, Gideon Lee? Can it be that Fate means to make up for everything by this new turn of the wheel?" He rose to his feet, and began pacing feverishly up and down the narrow chamber.

"It's about the last card," he went on, "and yet I'm ready to risk all in playing it. If only Gideon Lee plays his part properly he'll be the unconscious means to deliver Hazel into my hands. What else is there left for me? How little did I dream, years ago, when I first saw Hazel Harlow, that my life would be ruined by the very passion that grew up within me at the sight of her fresh, fair young beauty. And yet it's true. The only thing that I care for in all the world has—notwithstanding all I have attempted—been denied to me. They say that the more difficult a thing is to attain the more essential it becomes to the would-be attainer. I have lost my soul, as it is, for Hazel Harlow. Shall I, then, lose it for nothing? No, a thousand times no. Fortune has put Gideon Lee in my path; if I can use him to attain my ends, so be it. Yet I must be cautious. No breath of my being in Brighton must assail Hazel's ears. And when I strike it must be with certainty that the blow will fall. Gideon Lee! Is he maniac, or does he really believe the story he told me? Time will show that. He's fully primed now, and if only he obeys my orders Hazel shall be, must be, once more within my power. And this time—" He broke off abruptly and passed his hands across his feverish eyes.

Thus ran the unhappy wretch's stormy thoughts. Notwithstanding all that he had gone through, all the misery his base passions had encompassed, the pitiable ebb to which his own fortunes had been reduced, the fever of his desires still burnt brightly within him. It was Hazel, and Hazel alone, towards whom his every instinct turned.

With the cunning of a snake he had followed the track of the *Good Samaritan* Company, taking good care to let no trace of his presence be known to Hazel or her friends and counsellors. Ever since his last desperate venture at Nottingham he had known that no effort would be spared—even if he had not realised so much before—to run him to earth. And were he to be taken he knew that a long term of imprisonment awaited him.

And now Fate had thrust forward Gideon Lee upon the stage of his base drama. To the old man he now looked to be the means of delivering the unsuspecting Hazel into his hands. He had found a cat's-paw. He would take good care to make use of it.

Yet he had reckoned without Gideon Lee.

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CHAPTER III.

Brighton sea-front wears a very different aspect in November to its summer garb. In August crowds of excursionists, trippers, German bands, and holiday-makers in general, all combine to endow it with an atmosphere of life and jollity.

But in November only a fashionable few walk up and down the marine parade, few that is compared with the summer throng, and yet infinitely more "swagger" and select.

Hazel Harlow and Jenny Lovelace were among those walking upon the front one morning in the middle of the week devoted by the *Good Samaritan* Company to "London-by-the-Sea."

The two actresses were talking gaily to one another, both infected by the keen vigour of the sea air.

"I wish we were here for a fortnight," said Hazel.

"So do I," echoed her companion fervently. "That's the nuisance of being 'on the road.' Just as a nice place is reached it's a case of 'move on' before one has time to really settle down."

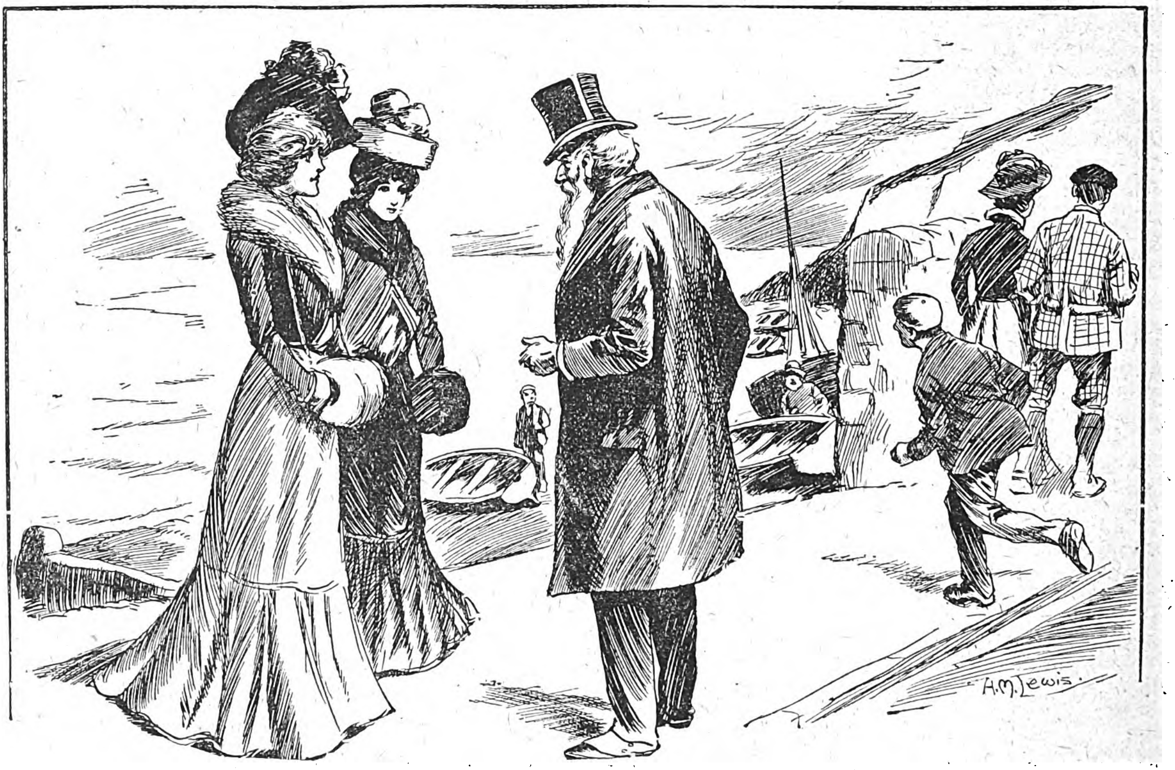
The two girls had, just as Jenny finished her speech, been preparing to retrace their steps, by reason of the fact that they had come to the end of the long promenade by the Hove sea wall, when suddenly a voice in Hazel's ear caused her to halt.

She turned round to find an old man at her elbow, a man with long white beard and a face like a winter apple, with two remarkably clear, pale-blue eyes set beneath bushy white eyebrows.

"Pardon me for intruding myself upon you," he said, in a mild, rather tremulous voice, "but I am, I must be, addressing myself to the lady known as Miss Hazel Harlow?"

Surprised though she was, there was still such an undeniable tone of gentle friendliness in the old man's voice, that Hazel could only answer gently:

"I am Hazel Harlow. How can I serve you?"



"No harm shall come to you, if you will only put yourself into my hands."

"By granting me a very great favour," came the soft reply; "and in granting that same favour you will be at the same time, I believe, benefiting yourself. It is not much that I have to ask you—only that you will let me drive you to my house in Rottingdean in my carriage." And he pointed to where a handsome carriage and pair was drawn up against the curb on the opposite side of the road.

"But you are a perfect stranger to me," she stammered. "I don't understand."

"Not so much a stranger as perhaps you imagine," came the quiet answer; "believe me I wish you no harm; on the contrary, I wish you only the best and the brightest that life can offer. You can trust me without reserve, my dear." He spoke almost with fatherly tenderness.

Hazel's brain was in a whirl. She turned to Jenny, as if for guidance in this unexpected episode, and Jenny, who had followed the conversation with the greatest interest, was almost as much astonished as was Hazel herself. And yet it seemed impossible to connect this beautiful old man with anything sinister or base.

The old stranger looked wistfully into Hazel's face.

"I am an old man," he resumed quietly; "an old man who has seen much trouble in a long and not altogether uneventful life. You are young and beautiful, and when your eyes are opened you will understand why I have asked you to accompany me to my home. Believe me, I repeat again, no harm shall come to you if you will only put yourself into my hands. If you do it will only be for your own good."

Feminine curiosity now got the better of Hazel's latent suspicions. There was something irresistibly pathetic in the way the aged stranger spoke. It was impossible to connect him with villainy.

"Very well," Hazel said. "I will come with you. I will trust you, for I feel sure that you do not mean me any harm."

"God bless you for that!" came the answer. Then Hazel turned to Jenny.

"Have no fear, Jenny," she said. "I am sure this old gentleman means me no harm."

Jenny was too much astonished to offer any opposition to her friend's intention, and yet it was not without a slight feeling of foreboding that she watched her accompany the old man to the elegant equipage, enter, and drive away along the sea front.

"I wonder if I have done right in letting her go?" she murmured to herself; "but surely that old gentleman is incapable of wickedness. I wonder what he meant by saying it was only for Hazel's good? Who knows? Perhaps it is. Perhaps he has become smitten with Hazel, and wants to leave her all his fortune. He seems a nice old man. Ah, well! let's hope for the best."

In the meantime the carriage was bowling swiftly along towards Rottingdean. But little conversation passed between Hazel and her companion on the drive. The old stranger seemed curiously preoccupied, and little inclined for conversation, though every now and then his old hand would take hold of Hazel's and pat it gently, almost lovingly, accompanying the gesture with a glance of tender solicitude at the beautiful face beside him. Thus the farther they drove the more mystified Hazel became as to what on earth could be the meaning of this extraordinary excursion.

Eventually the carriage reached Rottingdean, and entered the lodge gates that opened on to a long carriage drive leading to a big white house set amidst the trees. The old gentleman helped Hazel to alight, and the door of the mansion was thrown open. In a moment a fierce baying resounded through the house, and six great wolf-hounds dashed forward and began fawning round their old master and Hazel, who shrank back in some alarm at so unlooked-for a welcome. But the great dogs seemed gentle enough, and at a word from their master slunk away whence they had come.

Gideon Lee, for he of course it was, conducted Hazel into a beautifully furnished room with a great open fireplace, from which a huge log fire threw a cheerful warmth into the apartment.

Carefully closing the door, Lee motioned Hazel to a seat. Then he turned to her, and she saw that his eyes were full of tears.

"At last, Miriam," he murmured brokenly; "at last you have come back to me, after all these years!"

Hazel stared at the speaker in the blankest astonishment. What on earth could he mean?

"Miriam?" she echoed faintly. "Why do you call me Miriam?"

"Oh, there is no need for further deception," came the answer; "we are here alone now. You are back in your old father's home; the old father who has waited and yearned for you so long; who has hoarded up his money and all these beautiful things for you. I knew it was you when I saw the poster in Brighton. Ah, Miriam, you should never have run away from me; but now you have come back to me, you won't leave me any more."

Hazel rubbed her eyes. Was she dreaming? The old man might as well have been talking Greek. What was all this about Miriam, the daughter who had run away from home?

"But my name is not Miriam," she said gently, "my name is Hazel—Hazel Hazlow—and I am the daughter of a farmer who lives in the Midlands. You must be labouring under some delusion if you think I am someone else."

A puzzled expression came into the old man's face. He looked fixedly at the beautiful girl before him.

"No, no," he said excitedly; "I know I am not making a mistake. You are Miriam, my long-lost daughter Miriam!" He went across to a bureau that stood at the far side of the room, and, after fumbling about in a pigeon-hole, produced a daguerreotype, a relic of the days when photography was in its infancy.

"See, here is your mother's portrait," he said. "You are just like what she was at your age."

Mechanically Hazel took the leathern case inclosing the portrait in her hand. It was the face of a very beautiful woman, but so far as she could see, there was very little likeness between herself and the original of the daguerreotype.

Gideon Lee looked at her fixedly as she regarded the portrait. She handed it back to him, and said:

"This is not the portrait of my mother. There must be some mistake!"

"Why do you say that? Why do you say that?" murmured the old man; "when you know that you are Miriam Lee, my daughter. Why do you persist in denying it when all that I have is yours. Now that I have brought you back to share my home with me; to be the light of my declining years, and never to leave me again—never, never, never!"

Hazel now began to feel vaguely alarmed. It was plain that the old man was possessed of the idea that she was deceiving him; that she was really the Miriam Lee, his daughter, whom, as he said, he had lost, so long ago. How could she convince him of the truth and escape from a position that she began to realise might lead to an awkward development? Vainly she cast her eyes about as though to seek some elucidation of the mystery. The old man noted her action.

"No, no!" he said, with a strange ring of cunning in his voice; "you can't escape, Miriam. I haven't brought you back home to send you away again. You stay with me now; you have been away long enough. Think how happy we will be together here, you and I, Miriam, my daughter, my little queen." And he advanced to her side and taking her hand with an almost reverential air, he raised it to his lips.

Hazel was a prey to the most mingled feelings. She could not help feeling somewhat drawn towards this curious old man, who, she became momentarily more and more convinced, was suffering under a delusive vision. She could not feel alarmed, because it was evident that did she but humour him, he would only treat her with the affection and respect that he evidently felt due to his returned child. Yet she was rather perturbed in her mind as to how she was to give him the slip.

"But think," she said, coaxingly, "I cannot stay with you now for always. I have no things here, and besides I must play at the theatre to-night. I have other obligations to think of."

"The first obligations of a child are towards its parents," answered Gideon Lee, brushing her pleadings aside; "and I have been waiting for you so long that I cannot let you go lightly now. No, Miriam, you must stay with me."

These words convinced Hazel of the truth of what she had already suspected, namely, that the old man's mind was unhinged. She regretted now the kindly impulse that had led her to accept his invitation. The case was beginning to assume a rather serious complexion. This old man, gentle and harmless as he seemed to be, might perhaps turn out to be possessed of qualities quite the reverse of pleasant if she persisted in attempting to thwart his purpose. Thank goodness, it was early in the day yet; perhaps later on she might find some means of making good her escape.

CHAPTER IV.

It is perhaps needless to state that Horace Caldecott had been a witness of the meeting between Gideon Lee and Hazel upon the sea-front. Disguised as a seedy tramp he had lurked about watching with the intentness of a hawk. But his amazement was profound when he saw Gideon Lee escort Hazel to the elegant carriage and pair and help her inside. He watched the carriage drive away in the blankest astonishment.

"What on earth is the meaning of that?" he muttered to himself. "Who is this old fox, Gideon Lee? I thought he was some seedy old chap living in a little one-storied cottage at Rottingdean. There's more in this than meets the eye. Let me recall the conversation we had together the day before yesterday. He seemed as innocent and as helpless then as a baby. 'How am I to get my daughter to come home with me?' were his words. And what did I say? I said, 'It will be useless for you to go up to her and say, Miriam Lee, you must come back to your old father,' or anything like that. 'You'll have to use strategy in this game, Mr. Lee. If the girl had wanted to come back to you she would have come back of her own accord long ago'—for of course I wasn't going to tell him that I knew his Miriam was really Hazel Harlow. 'No,' I said, 'you must go up to her and ask her to come and see you at your cottage, and pitch some high-flown yarn that would get her to come back to you.' And he seemed to swallow it all up; thanked me most profusely; hoped I would come to Rottingdean and be introduced to his dear daughter. Told me the time when he was going to try and find her. And now he turns up in a carriage and pair and drives off Hazel like a duchess. There is something in this that I don't quite understand."

The crafty villain felt somewhat uneasy as he realised that he had been duped by Gideon Lee. Yet on maturer reflection, he thought it possible that Gideon Lee, whom he had already come to look upon as a harmless old lunatic, had other designs upon Hazel than those he had given out.

"Perhaps he wants to kidnap her," thought Caldecott, "and get a reward. If that is his game, well, it will suit me as well as any other. Anyhow, the best thing I can do is to get out to Rottingdean itself and look about me. Anyhow, this is pretty plain; there's only a doddering old idiot between me and Hazel Harlow, and Rottingdean is not a big place. If it is only Gideon Lee I've got to tackle, well—" an evil glance came into his cruel eyes.

But in his estimate of Gideon Lee, Horace Caldecott was woefully outside the mark. The awakening awaiting him was to be a rude one indeed. He determined to traverse the few miles that lay between Brighton and Rottingdean on foot. It would look suspicious if he, in his character of a seedy tramp, were to be seen driving in a hired vehicle. Besides, it was not yet noon, and he felt confident that, for a few hours at least, Hazel Harlow would be unable to escape from the old man's clutches. As he stepped out along the road he had plenty of food for reflection. The evidence that he was able to deduce from the unimpeachable testimony of his own eyesight, namely, the presence of the two-horse vehicle, made it quite obvious that Gideon Lee was not the poor old pauper he had first imagined him. No. It seemed much more likely that he was a man of means, and therefore inhabited one of the big houses in the neighbourhood of the little Sussex village. He felt that his first work in Rottingdean would be to discover, by means of careful inquiries, who Gideon Lee really was and where he lived. He would then be able to formulate some scheme for carrying out his own fell ends.

"If Hazel learns that the old fool thinks himself her father and intends, as I know he does, to keep her with him at all hazards, it would of course be imperative for her to find some means of escape." He mused. "Here comes my chance. So long as the hue and cry is not raised in Brighton by the members of the Company, and that officious fool, Monteith, I am all right. But still, if she does not turn up at Brighton again this afternoon they will probably send out to look for her. No, if anything is to be done it must be accomplished as soon as possible. Thank goodness, I am very adequately disguised, and if I can step in and rescue her, well, it will be a case of out of the frying-pan into the fire, before she realises who her rescuer is."

He reached Rottingdean in the midst of a driving drizzle of rain, having fully matured his plans on his walk. He stopped at a cottage outside the village, and knocking boldly at the door, was confronted by a man in his shirt-sleeves, evidently a farm labourer.

"Good afternoon," he said blandly; "can you tell me if there is a Mr. Gideon Lee living in Rottingdean?"

The man stared at him, evidently taken aback at being accosted with such a gentlemanly voice by a man whose clothes belied his speech, for Caldecott was still in the shabby clothes he had assumed to throw any would-be tracker off the scent.

"Why, yes," answered the man, "if it is old daft Lee you mean. He lives up at the White House. You can see the lodge gates up the road there."

"And what sort of a man is he?" asked Caldecott casually.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"A rum one if ever there was one," he replied. "As rich as blazes, and quite off his chump from all accounts."

Caldecott hesitated. Then he put his hand in his pocket and produced a sovereign.

"Do you feel like earning that?" he said.

The man's eyes glistened.

"It depends," he replied cautiously. Then, unable to contain himself, he blurted out. "You're a rum one to go about throwing sovereigns away. What may your game be, governor?"

The other laughed.

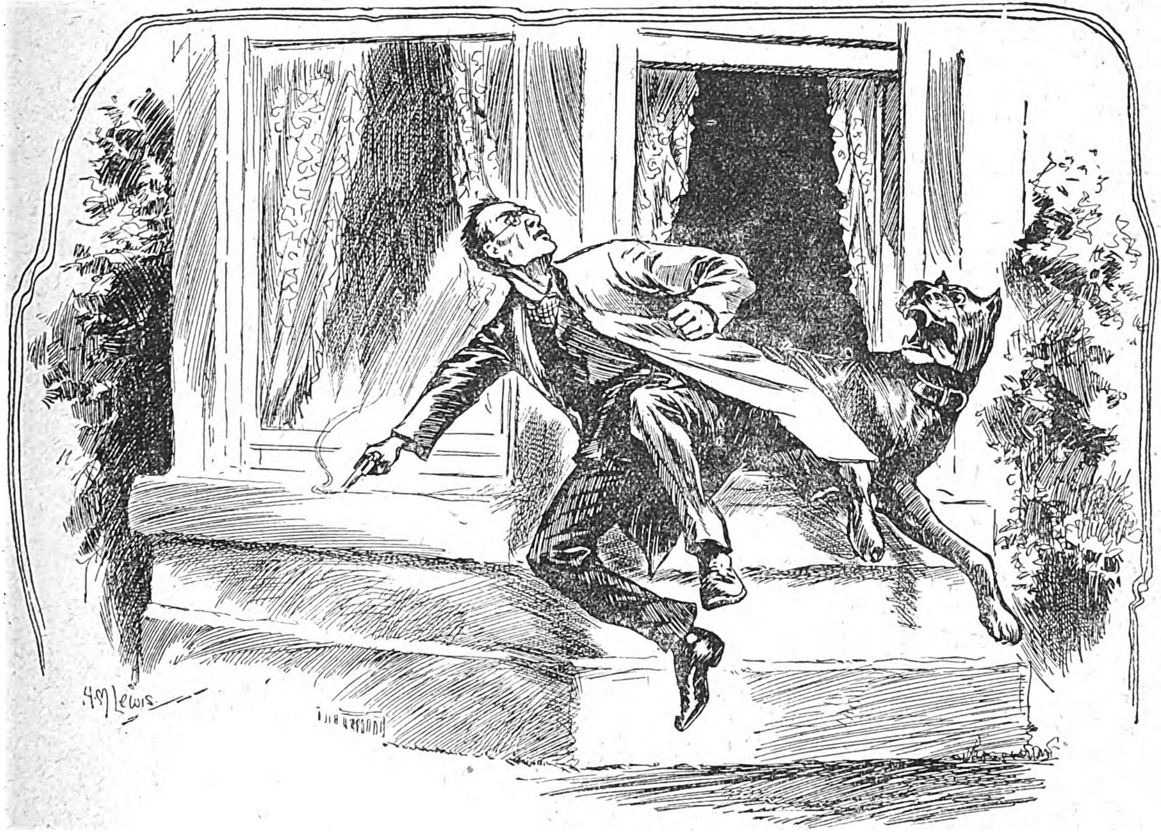
"Ask no questions and you'll hear no lies," he said curtly. "It's a free country, and I suppose I can go about as I like."

"Right you are, governor, no offence," retorted the fellow; "how do you want me to earn that sovereign?"

"Before long," answered Caldecott, "someone is sure to come along and ask the same question that I have asked you just now about old Lee. Yours is the first house in the village, and naturally they will come to you first. The man will probably be a tall, clean-shaven, well-dressed young fellow, and it's very important for old Lee's sake and my own that he should have dust thrown in his eyes. If you will stay here and keep your eyes open, and tell him that no such man as Gideon Lee lives in Rottingdean, well, I'll make that sovereign two, and give you this one as earnest money. I think you'll admit that that is an easy way of earning a bit of money."

The man hesitated. It was a strange request, and although cupidity urged him to close with the offer at once, caution counselled him to adopt wariness. Caldecott noticed his hesitation.

"You needn't be afraid," he said; "you are not implicating yourself in any way. A smart man like you need have no fear that you can't get out of a little hole like that."



He tore open the window and sprang out like a man possessed, the other dog still at his heels.

The man's hesitation fled to the winds before the plausible rascal's words.

"Right," he said; "hand us over the sovereign and I'm your man."

Caldecott smiled, and tendered him the coin. "And remember there is another waiting for you," he said, "if you do as I tell you." And with these words he disappeared in the direction of the White House.

The entrance gates through which Hazel had driven only an hour or so previously were, to Caldecott's disgust, locked. A high hedge shut off the grounds of the house from the road. It seemed at first glance as though there was no possible means of obtaining ingress to the place. But having come so far on his enterprise, Caldecott determined not to let anything stand in the way of the furtherance of his plans. He hurried on along the side of the hedge until at last he came to a place where the bare screen, reft of its summer foliage, was much thinner than it had been near the gate. Even then it was only after some difficulty, and not before his shabby clothes had suffered still more, and he, himself, had received sundry scratches on hands and face, that he was able to crawl through the hedge and into the garden grounds.

With extreme caution he crept out into the open, and across a huge sweep of lawn fringed with cedars and other trees. At first he had determined to try and enter the house by stealth, but on maturer reflection he decided to go boldly up to the front door and demand to see Mr. Gideon Lee. It had of course come to him as an immense surprise to find the old gentleman living in such a splendid mansion, though his astonishment had been tempered somewhat by the pair-horse carriage that had conveyed Hazel out of Brighton.

He walked up the drive where it swept round the head of the lawn and advanced boldly to the door to peal vigorously at the bell. In a few moments the door was opened and, to Caldecott's infinite amazement, by Gideon Lee himself. So surprised was he at this unexpected meeting, that for a few moments he could only stand mutely upon the doorstep and gaze into the beautiful old face before him.

"Well," said the old man blandly, "and what may you want here?" He seemed to have entirely forgotten the meeting that had taken place between himself and Caldecott in the obscure Brighton tavern; to have forgotten, indeed, the very existence of the man who was now confronting him. Caldecott was quick to see this. Fully cognisant now of the fact that the old man was not entirely responsible for his actions, he determined upon cutting his cloth to suit his customer.

"I must have a word with you, Mr. Lee," he said; "and that is why I have come to you so unceremoniously. What I want to say to you concerns your daughter Miriam most acutely."

"My daughter Miriam!" the words seemed to let loose the floodgates of the old man's warped intelligence. "What can you have to say about her? She has only just come back to me."

It was now plain beyond all doubt that Gideon Lee had not the faintest recollection of ever having met this man before.

"But can I see you alone?" continued Caldecott in a quiet voice. "My business will not wait."

"Yes, yes; come inside. We can talk alone in the study."

"And your daughter, where is she?"

"Oh, you cannot see her. But come, let me hear what you have to tell me!"

Caldecott said no more. He perceived that the old gentleman could not be forced to do anything against his will, and so in silence he followed Gideon Lee.

The old man ushered him inside the study and closed the door.

"Now then," he said, "I am at your service. What have you got to tell me about my daughter Miriam?"

"Why this," said Caldecott, in an impressive voice, "that unless you are very careful your daughter Miriam will not be here with you for very long. There are people on her track, people who wish to take her away from you, who wish her harm, and that is why I have come here to-day."

A dazed look crept into Gideon Lee's eyes. The other man's words seemed to have suddenly reduced him to the helplessness of a little child.

"What can I do to save her?" he wailed. "What can I do to save her?"

Quickly the thought flashed through Caldecott's mind, "now is my time, the old man is perfectly imbecile; he will do anything I tell him, if only I harp on the same string sufficiently. The house seems quiet enough; there are evidently but few servants about. I must act quickly, for time is precious, and even now Monteith and his crew may be off on their precious lead's track."

Then he turned to Lee.

"Do," he said hoarsely; "there is but one thing to do. Let me take charge of your daughter for you; at any moment those who wish to take her away from you may be here. Put her into my charge, and I will hold her for you until her pursuers have disappeared again. That is your only chance of saving her."

The effect of his words on Gideon Lee was, however, absolutely the reverse of what he had anticipated. A sudden light blazed up in the beautiful old eyes as Lee sprang forward and cried out in a voice of thunder.

"Take my darling from me, never, never, never! I have been without her all these years, and now that she has been given back to me, do you think I will deliver her up into the hands of a stranger? No, no! a thousand times no! If that is all you have to say to me, you can go whence you came, and leave me to fight my battle alone."

Caldecott shrank back in amazement before such an outburst.

"Go!" repeated Gideon Lee; "go, or——"

His last sentence was never finished. Goaded to sudden fury at this check to his schemes Caldecott flung himself at the venerable figure and hurled him to the ground. The poor old head struck a chair-back in his fall that effectually stunned him; motionless he lay upon the carpet at his assailant's feet.

"Have I killed him?" muttered Caldecott in some alarm, bending down over the prostrate figure. "No, he is only stunned." He turned round with the look of a wild animal in his face; "well, I must take the law into my own hands," he said hoarsely, "and find where Hazel is for myself."

He turned towards the door, but before he could reach it it was opened from without and Hazel entered the room. The scene that met her gaze brought a quick cry from her lips. Horror-stricken she stood and gazed at the hated face before her, and from him her eyes went to the prostrate body on the carpet. With a low cry Caldecott sprang forward:

"Ah, Hazel," he muttered; "so you have come to me of your own free will."

With a scream that echoed through the house the girl shrank back.

"Help! help!" she cried. And help was at hand from an unexpected quarter. The pattering sound of quick, lithe feet, accompanied by a quick snarling sound fell on Caldecott's ears, and the great gaunt wolfhounds bounded into the room and flung themselves straight at the villain's throat. With a scream of terror he struck out blindly at his unexpected assailants, and then leaping back in blind terror, rushed towards the window at the end of the room, the hounds leaping up and mouthing fiercely at him with blood-curdling snarls. He felt the deadly fangs of one of them pierce the sleeve of his coat and draw blood upon his flesh. With a howl he raised his pistol and fired it point-blank at the animal's head. Then in quicker time than it takes in telling, he tore open the window and sprang out like a man possessed, the other dog still at his heels, for his bullet had found a billet in the brain of one of his attackers.

CHAPTER V.

"Where am I? What has happened?" Those were the first words of Gideon Lee on returning to consciousness. He was lying upon his bed, and over him bent the beautiful face of Hazel Harlow, whose one soft white hand was upon his brow, and who was holding a cup of some cool liquid in the other. He gazed in a bewildered fashion into the fair face.

"Who are you?" he murmured. "Your face seems strange to me."

Hazel's heart gave a great throb. What could be the meaning of such a complete change in the old man's behaviour as regards to herself?

"I am Hazel Harlow," she said in a gentle voice; "you have met with an accident. I am here to nurse you."

"A nurse! an accident!" There was a look of absolute bewilderment in the speaker's eyes.

"Yes, yes; but don't try to speak now. Just lie quiet."

"You are very good to me, Miss Harlow. I will try and keep quiet now." Then he went on. "You have a sweet face; you remind me somehow of my lost daughter Miriam."

His words gave Hazel the clue to his behaviour. She saw it all now. Before his accident Gideon Lee had been a witless being possessed with a single idea, the recovery of the daughter who, it afterwards transpired, had died years before, but whom the old man had always looked upon as being alive, and had waited and waited for her return, though those about him knew that such a thing could never be.

Hazel had heard of such things happening. How that a sudden accident would bear fruit afterwards as the means whereby recovery of sanity was achieved, and that was what had undoubtedly happened in Gideon Lee's case. The blow that had deprived him of consciousness had, as it were, struck some cord in the poor diseased brain that had acted as an antidote to the previous disaster that had deprived him of his real understanding. A doctor was sent for and fully indorsed Hazel's suspicions. Gideon Lee was as sane as the sanest.

As for Caldecott, when he sprang madly out of the window with the wolf-hound at his heels, blind, unreasoning terror took the place of the sinister designs of a short time previous. He had still another cartridge in his revolver, and with this he dispatched the second hound, and then fled away to be heard of no more at present. But to show how correct his suspicions had been as to the course pursued by Eric Monteith, the latter did actually drive into Rottingdean with Jenny later on in the afternoon of that same day, when still no signs of Hazel were forthcoming, and did inquire at the cottage for Gideon Lee. True to his word, the labourer stoutly maintained that there was no such man as Lee living in Rottingdean. Eric looked surprised, as well he might, but Jenny was not to be put off with such an assertion.

"The man is lying," she said, in a low voice. "I feel sure of it somehow. He has some reasons for the lie. Let us make inquiries elsewhere."

The man overheard her words and flushed a dull red. He had not bargained for this, and he realised at once that if further inquiries were to be put on foot the whereabouts of Gideon Lee must necessarily be discovered so in a blundering, stupid way, he suddenly said:

"What name did you say?"

"I did not say any name," said Eric. "I merely asked you if there was a white-haired old gentleman, in well to do circumstances, living in Rottingdean, and you answered 'No.'"

"Well, I was wrong," came the sullen answer. "There is an old man living in Rottingdean, a rich old man too, named Gideon Lee. You can see the lodge gates of his house right away up at the end of the road there;" and then he muttered, as if thinking aloud, "anyhow, I got a quid."

Eric's quick ear heard the words.

"Got a quid," he repeated; "what do you mean by that? Who gave you a quid? Here, you had better speak up and say what you are driving at. It will be the worse for you my man, if you don't, for I'm not a sort of person to stand much nonsense."

"A chap came along here some time ago and gave me a quid not to tell you anything."

"And what then?" Eric repeated sharply.

"Why, then he went off to old Lee's at double quick."

A sudden feeling of fear thrust at Monteith's heart.

"Come on, Jenny," he cried, and sped away down the road towards the lodge gates as fast as his legs could carry him with the result that he soon outdistanced Jenny, who hurried after him as quickly as her skirts would allow. The horse and trap Eric left standing outside the cottager's abode.

"Well, I'll keep an eye on the horse, anyhow," muttered the man audibly. "Perhaps I'll make another five bob over that job. Twenty-five bob won't be bad for a day's work."

The lodge gates were open as Eric came up to them; he sped down the drive and up to the front door of the house, noting, to his absolute amazement as he did so, the dead body of a huge wolf-hound lying in the middle of a flower-bed close to the house. He pealed at the bell, the door was opened by Hazel herself in walking attire.

"Why, Eric!" she cried; "how came you here? I was just going to the inn at Rottingdean to see if I could hire a conveyance to take me back to Brighton."

Then, in as few words as possible, she told him the story of what had happened, and how that Caldecott's base scheme had been the means of giving Gideon Lee back his reason. Of course what she and the others never knew was the true story of the meeting of Lee and Caldecott as narrated at the beginning of this story, and as the old man's memory failed him with all the details as regarded this they were never to know the true facts of the case, but the indisputable fact remained that Gideon Lee had regained his senses. When he died some years later he left his property to the girl who had been unconsciously the means of giving him back his reason.

The following week the *Good Samaritan* Company visits Cardiff. While there Hazel is suddenly summoned to London by her father's solicitor, and she has an unpleasant adventure which will be fully described in next week's *Short Stories*.

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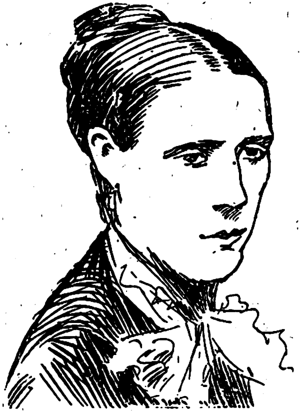

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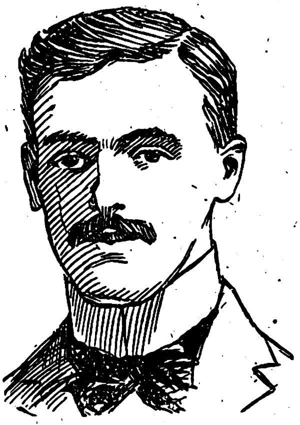

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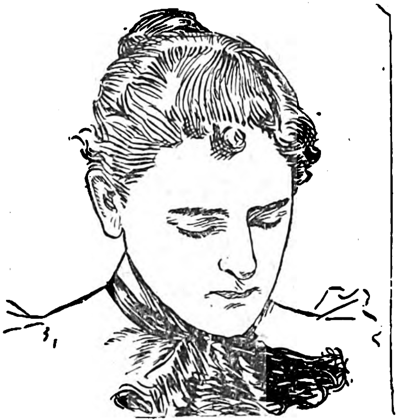

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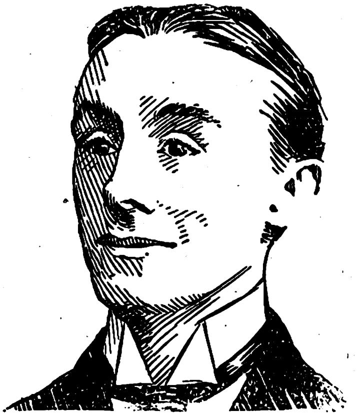

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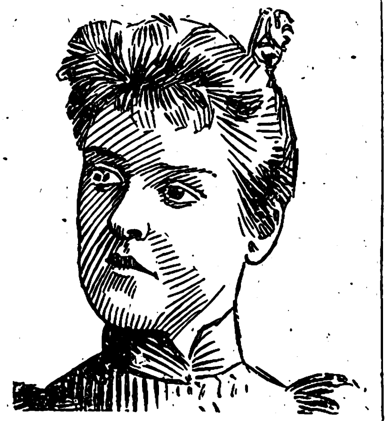

No. 50.

THE PARTNERS.

THE warm light of an October day was falling over mountain and valley as Mark Wilson slowly made his way up the rocky gorge that lay in the heart of the Black Range. The patient little burro which he led was loaded with his prospector's outfit, provisions to last him two weeks, and a Winchester rifle.

"It's strange what could 'a' become of Ben Armstrong," said Mark, as he picked his way along the margin of a little stream that came bubbling merrily from the hills. "Somethin' must 'a' happened ter him, er he'd 'a' been back afore now."

Leaving his burro, he climbed to a little elevation and scanned the valley closely, but no trace of his missing partner could be seen. Returning to his burro he continued his course up the valley.

Mark Wilson and Ben Armstrong had been prospecting among the mountains of South-western New Mexico for several months, but ill-luck seemed to follow them. Ben had found Mark at Kingston dead broke, and had given him assistance in the way of furnishing him with money to pay his board, and pay the expenses of a prospecting trip into the mountains. Finally the two had drifted into the little town of Bluerock without enough money to buy a meal. They managed to obtain work of the more fortunate miners, but this was not suited to their plans, and one day Ben had said:

"Mark, I don't like this idea of wearing our lives out workin' for other people, when we might be makin' a forchun of our own by keepin' up our prospectin'. Now, s'pose one of us keeps at work hyar ter keep us in grub, while the other goes a-prospectin'. We can do it easy enough, an' who knows how soon we may stumble upon a forchun."

"That's my idee exactly," responded Mark, and from that day the two had worked and prospected alternately, but ill-luck seemed to follow them. Once, when Mark returned from a week's prospecting trip without having discovered so much as the colour of gold, Ben grew despondent, and complained bitterly of their bad luck.

"'Taint no use, Mark," he said, complainingly. "We ain't never goin' ter strike anything—that's my opinion. I ain't got no courage to prospect any more, and I reckon there's nothin' left fer us but ter tramp back ter civilisation where we can get enough ter eat, if nothin' more."

"Gettin' discouraged don't help matters," replied Mark. "As fer me I hain't never had no luck, but I jist keeps peggin' away, an' some time, mebby, I'll run on to a streak o' luck and meek my pile. But I'm powerful onlucky, and mebby if you go out prospectin' this time, an' leave me ter work hyar we'll have success."

"I reckon ye're right; ye're powerful onlucky. I'll try it once more, an' if I fail, I'll strike fer the States."

And so the next morning Ben departed on his prospecting tour, expecting to be gone but a week, yet at the end of two weeks he had not returned. There had been a band of Apaches seen prowling among the hills a week after Ben's departure, and fearing that harm had come to his partner, Mark had packed his effects and gone in search of him, taking his tools and a supply of provisions a'ong.

"Pore feller," said Mark, as he made his way up the valley, "he must 'a' fell inter the hands o' some o' them hostiles——"

He stopped abruptly, for in rounding a clump of bushes, he came suddenly upon a man busily engaged working in the bed of a small stream. So absorbed was he in his work that he did not hear the approaching steps till Mark was almost upon him. Then he rose quickly, and turned to confront the intruder.

"W'y, bless my soul, it's Ben!" exclaimed Mark joyfully, advancing to grasp his partner's hand. At the same instant his eyes fell upon a heap of dull yellow nuggets lying at Ben's side. A single glance told him that they were gold.

A gasp of joy came from Mark's lips.

"It's gold—it's gold!" he cried, in a sort of ecstasy. "Our luck's changed at last—no more diggin' an' sweatin' now fer just enough to live on fer us!"

In his excitement and joy he was about to throw his arms round his partner, but Ben pushed him aside and drew back, an angry light shining in his eyes.

"What aire ye doin' hyar, an' what do yer want, Mark Wilson?" cried Ben, with a gesture of impatience.

Mark stopped abruptly, amazed, stupefied at his partner's strange conduct. His hands dropped helpless at his side.

"W'y—what—what's the matter, Ben?" he said at length, the astonishment upon his face deepening.

"Matter?" responded Ben, "matter enough, Mark Wilson! What do ye mean by follerin' me out hyar?"

"What do I mean? W'y, Ben, I came ter look fer ye—ain't I yer pardner, an'——"

"My pardner? Not you! Didn't I tell ye ye war unlucky? An' I tell ye now that I don't want nothin' more ter do with ye! Clear out o' this! 'fore you have all the sneaks in Bluerock nosin' round hyar!"

He made an angry gesture with his hand as he spoke, while a strange, greedy light shone in his eyes as they wandered to the nuggets that lay at his feet.

Mark Wilson had staggered back as if he had received a heavy blow. He put his hand to his face as if to shut out the sight of his partner's angry face. Then he spoke, his voice sounding strangely hoarse.

"Ben, do ye mean this?" he asked, "ye must be only jokin'—I can't believe it—'taint like ye, Ben."

A bitter oath escaped Ben's lips.

"Git out o' this, I tell ye!" he cried savagely. "I tell ye agin, I don't want nothin' ter do with ye! I found this gold an' it's mine—all mine! Git out o' this, I say—do ye hear?"

He laid his hand on his pistol as he spoke, a savage glitter in his eye.

Mark fell back a step or two. His face grew deadly pale, and he made an involuntary movement towards the pistol in his belt. But a sudden change came over his face; his hand fell at his side, and there was a reproachful look in his eyes.

"Ye don't mean ter shoot me, Ben," he said in a choking voice. "If ye say the gold's your'n it's your'n." I—thought we were pardners—but no matter. Ye found the gold, an' I reckon it's your'n."

Is your photo on page 682?

He turned abruptly, and taking the rein of the burro moved slowly down the cañon.

Ben stood watching the retreating figure, a look of exultation on his face, but gradually his face softened.

"Mebby I wor a leetle too hard on him," he muttered, "but he's powerful onlucky. An'—I found the gold—it's mine. But I don't mind—"

He stooped down, and picking up a small nugget hurried in pursuit of his retreating partner. Mark heard a step behind him, and turned to find that Ben was approaching.

"I don't want ter be hard on ye, Mark," Ben said, "but it's only a pocket I've found—there ain't no more in the gulch, fer I've looked it all over. Hyar, take this, it will meck ye a leetle grub stake."

He threw the nugget at Mark's feet as he spoke. Mark stood looking at him a moment in silence, emotion written upon his countenance. He shook his head slowly.

"No; 'tain't mine," he said. "I'm pore—I'm onlucky but I ain't no dog ter pick up a bone that's throwed ter me. Keep it—it's your'n," and with this he turned abruptly and was gone.

It was nearly noon on the following day when he reached Bluerock. Stopping his burro in front of the cabin that had been occupied by himself and Ben, he entered. Gathering together a few effects that belonged to him, he carried them into a deserted cabin a short distance away.

"I reckon I'll just camp in hyar till I git a stake," he said, and kindling a fire in the rude fireplace, he began to prepare his dinner.

That evening, just as night was coming down over the little town of Bluerock, Ben Armstrong arrived at his cabin, and hurriedly removed the sacks of gold that were fastened to the animal's back. Conveying these into the shanty, he concealed them under a pile of rubbish in a corner of the room.

"I reckon thar ain't no more trampin' among the hills for Ben Armstrong," he said, rubbing his hands with satisfaction as he glanced towards the gold.

He made a light, and glancing about the cabin, continued: "I reckon Mark's moved his traps—I don't see 'em hyar. Waal, I can't say that I'm sorry, for he might be holdin' it ag'inst me that I hadn't used him right. But didn't I find the gold, an' ain't what I find mine?"

Late that night he was awakened by hearing the sound of some one moving about in the room. Instantly he thought of the sack of gold concealed in the corner, and quickly sprang from his bed. He saw the dark outlines of the form of a man and sprang forward to grapple with it, but at that instant he received a heavy blow upon the head, and sank down unconscious.

When his senses returned it was daylight. Weak and dizzy, he staggered to his feet, with only a vague and confused memory of what had taken place. With a vague fear he went to the corner where he had placed the bags of precious nuggets. They were gone; a deep groan came from his lips, and staggering to the door, he threw it open. Some miners were passing, and calling to them, he told them of the robbery that had been committed.

The news created a great deal of indignation among the miners, who were accustomed to look upon such an offence as the gravest that could possibly be committed, and in a short time a crowd had collected at the cabin.

No one seemed able to offer a clue as to who the robber could be till half-an-hour later it was discovered that Mark Wilson was gone and also a horse belonging to Jim Muggins, who lived near by the cabin where Mark had taken up his abode the day previous.

"It's Mark's work, the ugly scoundrel!" exclaimed Ben. "He was the only one who knowed I had the gold an' he's gone and robbed me of it."

"That means a rope if we ketch him," said one of the men as they made ready to go in pursuit of the robber. That Mark Wilson was the one who had committed the robbery there was no doubt in the minds of the inhabitants of Bluerock, and if he were caught summary punishment would be meted out to him.

"Bring some hosses, boys," said Ben. "We must overtake that cuss afore he gits out o' the country."

While the horses were being brought, he seated himself upon the door-step, and took a deep pull at a bottle which one of the men had given him.

"That kinder nerves me up," he said, "but that was a wicked blow that skunk gave me. Makes me feel kinder dizzy yit, drat his ugly hide."

Half-an-hour later, Ben Armstrong, accompanied by the city marshal and two citizens of Bluerock, spurred their horses up the narrow defile that led across the mountains.

They had ridden some three miles when the marshal brought his horse to a sudden stop.

"Look thar, boys," he said, pointing to a clump of bushes where a riderless horse, saddled and bridled, was cropping the grass, "that's Jim Muggins' hoss, shore as shootin'!"

"So it is," affirmed Ben, "the one rid off by the robber. Hello! what's this?" The speaker suddenly reined in his horse, and dismounting, stood bending over the prostrate form of a man that lay in a lifeless heap on the margin of the trail.

The others quickly dismounted and came to Ben's side. The prostrate man was lying upon his face, dead to all appearances, his lifeless hands still grasping the three heavy bags of gold. They turned him gently over, and gazed at his pallid face.

"It's Mark Wilson!" cried Ben, "an' here's the gold he stole from my cabin."

"I reckon ye're about right," said the marshal. "But he's done fer, I allow."

"What's happened to him?" asked Ben.

"Hoss throwed him, I 'low," responded the marshal. "Leastways, he's done fer, if I'm any judge—which saves him from comin' under the jurisdiction of Judge Lynch."

A feeble moan came from Mark's lips, and he opened his eyes and gazed blankly about him.

"W'y, he ain't dead—quick, give me yer canteen, Ben," exclaimed the Marshal, and kneeling beside the injured man, he bathed his face with water, and forced some spirits between his lips. As he did so, he gave a quick gasp of surprise.

"Look, boys!" he cried, "there's the mark of a bullet, or my name ain't Sug Martin!" and he pointed to an ugly wound in Mark's breast, from which the blood was still issuing. "What's the meaning of this? I tell yer thar's something wrong—somethin' about this business that we don't understand!"

The four men gazed at each other in blank surprise.

"So thar is," said Ben, "but look, he's comin' to, an' mebby he can tell us how it happened."

Mark opened his lips and spoke in a feeble whisper: "It's all right, fellers," he said, "I got the gold, but he gave me a shot that's finished me."

"Who was it shot ye? How did it happen?" asked the marshal.

"It was Zeb Conner," replied Mark, speaking with an effort.

"What! do ye mean Zeb Conner, the desperado that was run out o' town about three weeks ago?"

"Yes," went on Mark. "I seed him prowling around Ben's cabin last night, an' I watched fer 'im. He got the gold an' was makin' off with it—my pistol snapped an' he got away—I followed 'im on Jem Muggins' hoss—I overtook him up thar on the mountain—we both fired at once—he's lyin' dead up there in the trail—I got the gold from 'im an'—an' was bringin' it back when I found I'd been hit by his bullet, and fell down hyar. It's all right, Ben, I've saved yer gold—but—but I'm powerful onlucky—he's done fer me—"

His eyes closed, his voice ceased, and he lay as if already dead.

Ben seated himself in the grass and lifted the wounded man's head, and placed it in his lap, a look of sorrow and compassion on his face.

The marshal and one of the men hurried up the mountain trail. In a short time the former returned.

"It's jest as Mark said, fellers," he exclaimed. "Zeb Conner's lyin' up thar—only he's not dead—but wounded perty bad. Sez he got the gold and would er got away with it only fer Mark. I left a guard over him, and if I ain't fooled we'll have a chance for lynchin' yit, but it won't be Mark. Pore feller! How is he, Ben?"

"He—he can't last long," replied Ben in a husky voice. "He's saved my gold fer me, fellers," he went on, "me, that's treated him like a dog! We were pardners an' when I found that gold—something—the devil, I reckon, whispered that it was all mine, an' I went back on—on my pardner!"

The dying man moaned feebly and spoke in a whisper, but he was sinking rapidly, and it was plain his mind was wandering.

"Hyar's got the gold—I've brought it back," he said. "Give it ter Ben—tell him that Mark—but never mind—he done me a good turn once; but I—I was onlucky—" His voice died away.

A choking sob came from Ben as he bent his face down to Mark's ear.

"Pardner," he said, his form shaking with emotion, "I want yer ter live—the gold's all your'n, Mark—I don't desarve it—it drives me mad—made me treat ye like a dog—ye that war my pardner. Speak to me, Mark—pardner—take the gold, it's all your'n—"

His voice died in a sob of anguish.

"It's all right now," said the wounded man in a faint whisper. "I've got the gold an'—I'll take it ter Ben. What's that pressin' and burnin' my breast?—blood! It wor Conner's bullet. I'm done for, but they all sed I wor onlucky—"

There was a faint fluttering of the lips, and Ben Armstrong's unlucky partner lay dead in his arms.

H. Clifford.

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The Life of Her Lover.

CHAPTER I.

"Dulcie, what has Happened?"

"Not a great deal of difference, Mortimer, except that the gramophone has displaced the musical-box and the cinematograph the peep-show. But the fair itself is just as I remember it twenty years since."

"Come, come," was the answer; "my dear Eustace, you are not going to pretend that you had any knowledge of Steeple Garston Fair at the early age of nine?"

Eustace Lane smiled, and his stern, rather melancholy features softened into an expression of thoughtful amusement.

"You were a virtuous little boy then, Phil," he said; "and I—I was the worst kiddie in Dame Jessamy's school at Garston Royal. One fair-day I played truant and tramped here. By Jove, how frightened and enchanted I was! I must have a glimpse of the genuine hurly-burly—these are nothing but the outskirts."

"Very well," assented his companion; "though if your precious arm gets damaged, you mustn't ask me to face Joan. A man with a splintered elbow has no business in a crowd."

"Rubbish!" declared Lane; "it's as right as a trivet, only your wife's taste for nursing has to be humoured. All the same, you will either have to support me in a judicious degree of rebellion or I make for South Africa and liberty. The mine is in full swing now and I shall be needed."

Philip Mortimer studied the speaker.

"I believe," he retorted, "that you are yearning to find yourself back at the Cape. Joan vows there is some special attraction—of a romantic nature."

Lane shrugged a pair of broad shoulders.

"Mrs. Mortimer," was his comment, "is an inveterate sentimentalist, and fancies everybody to be in the power of Cupid. She forgets that my work lies in South Africa, among stamps and batteries. This confounded elbow brought me to England against my own desire, and now it is on the mend the object of my visit is accomplished."

"On the mend, no doubt," admitted Mortimer, glancing at the brown wrist supported by the loop of a silk handkerchief on the engineer's breast; "but you're yet not delivered from the specialists."

"Pshaw!" cried Eustace Lane; "the whole thing disgusts me. Nice sort of hero I am. The bullet which did the mischief was a criminal's and not a Boer's, and my experience of the war is confined to guard duty on absurdly safe lines of communication, and several months in the enteric wards of base hospitals. I didn't anticipate when I joined the Light Horse that I should leave it unwounded and return to the mine to be shot by a common safe-robber. A truce to me and my grievances; let us investigate the wonders of Steeple Garston Fair."

Philip Mortimer yielded to his friend's determination, and they went forward through the crowd of country folk and gaping sight-seers.

On each side the mob of rustics pushed and jostled between stalls of rough construction and rougher decoration that bordered narrow aisles of clayey soil, cut into ruts by wheels and beaten to mud by iron-shod hoofs, and the no less ponderous attacks of human feet. A patent roundabout, a large circus-marquee—inclosed by a ring of travelling cages—and a cheap theatre, towered over their smaller competitors of wood and canvas, and the blowing of horns, the shouting of showmen, and the din of the steam-organ, mingled in a fierce clamour.

Further off, horses neighed, cattle lowed, the voices of sheep and pigs blended with the uproar, and the occasional shrill fanfare of a riotous donkey pierced the hubbub.

"Don't you suppose," asked the engineer, who had recovered his cheerfulness amid this quaint carnival, "that you ought to buy a yard or so of pink ribbon for Mrs. Mortimer? Who ever heard of a loyal swain returning from Steeple Garston in fair-week without a fairing for his Angelina?"

"My dear Lane," was the tolerant response, "fairings are a tribute bachelors must pay. If you hanker after pink ribbons, purchase a stock of them, not for Joan, but to carry south for the future Mrs. Lane."

The other frowned—a frown that ended in a sigh.

"There is no prospect," he said curtly, "of my creating such a——"

Eustace Lane stopped, his gaze was following down the crowded species of alley a girlish figure whose trim prettiness and shy self-possession contrasted with the plump good looks of the country lassies near her, and drew not a few appreciative remarks.

"Hullo!" cried his escort; "feeling queer? Slip out of the crush; I thought it would be too much for you."

The engineer ignored the well-meant advice; he roused from his absorption to mutter a rapid sentence, muffled by the prevailing clamour. Yet he did not cease his keen observance of the retreating form.

"Phil," he said, "either there are two people in the world more alike than twins, or a person has passed us whom I imagined to be six thousand miles away; I must be sure which it is, Phil—coincidence, or—Dulcie."

With this intimation Eustace Lane began to thread the groups of rustics that lounged in front of the show-booths and their vociferous proprietors. Mortimer tracked him vigilantly. Lane himself was pursuing the figure which had flitted by them an instant before. It was that of a young and graceful woman, clad in a loose, dark ulster; a tiny heel, twinkling under the hem of the long garment, betrayed neat, even coquettish, shoes of tan. A second touch of elegance in her toilet was a black velvet toque, relieved by a cluster of violets, and the rolls of chestnut hair visible to Lane and Mortimer were smooth and characteristic.

The engineer, swerving dexterously among the uncouth multitude, contrived to get on a level with the subject of his attention, and Mortimer saw that he sprang to her, forcing a path in a fashion ominous for his splintered elbow. Struck by a profound curiosity at the latter's unwonted excitement, Philip Mortimer imitated his proceedings; the friends came face to face beside the wearer of the violets and the black velvet.

"Heavens, Dulcie!" gasped Eustace Lane; "what are you doing in England, and in this tag-rag-and-bobtail, alone?"

A strange light leapt into the hazel eyes which looked up at the astounded engineer—a light that revealed an overwhelming joy, tinged with embarrassment and alarm. The profile of their owner was regular and delicate, her mouth firm and sensitive, her cheeks, at the moment, flushed.

"Mr.—Mr. Lane!" she stammered, "is it really you? I thought you were in South Africa—oh," she broke off, "you have been wounded!"

Lane winced. "A mere accident," he said; "nothing in the least heroic. As for being in South Africa," he added, "I believed you there; is your father in England also? And how, by all that is wonderful, Dulcie—Miss Calderon, do I meet you here?"

Eustace Lane had made his hasty and significant correction after a nervous glance at Philip Mortimer.

Dulcie Calderon drooped and her colour faded.

"Grandad brought me from the Cape," she faltered; "did you not learn of father's death? It was six months ago, in a fight at Kraalfontein. He had been transferred to Kitchener's Scouts; his company was surrounded by the Boers on a march, and father was one of the first shot." The words trembled, and the narrator's lashes were wet.

"I'm sorry," murmured the engineer; "it's news to me. I was stewing in the Orange River Colony on the lines of communication. Then I went back to the mine and helped to start operations again, but got winged in a struggle with some scoundrels who had designs on our opening clean-up. That drove me home to have a tendon transplanted—I was promising myself to be in Capetown, hunting you out, in a couple of months time. I never dreamt of—of your father coming to any harm."

He stood lost in a sorrowful reverie. Dulcie's gaze stole to the interested countenance of Philip Mortimer. Lane observed it and wakened from his meditations.

"This is Miss Calderon, Phil," he said, "the daughter of as honourable a gentleman and as true a friend as ever set foot in stirrup. Miss Calderon, Mr. Mortimer has been a chum of mine since boyhood."

Philip Mortimer acknowledged the introduction by a cordial hand-clasp.

"Charmed to make your acquaintance, Miss Calderon," he assured her; "won't you allow my wife to share the pleasure. My place is at Garston Royal, Lane is staying with us, and we should be delighted to see you and—your grandfather."

"Thanks, Phil!" put in Lane eagerly; "yes, do, Miss Calderon. By the bye, I have never met your grandfather; I doubt if I realised you had one. I must call on him—where can I do so?"

Mortimer was watching his companion acutely—the engineer seemed to be as nervous and confused as a small boy at a children's ball. He surmised that the reason for Eustace Lane's perturbation was the old and romantic passion of which the South African had been speaking so disparagingly.

The girl, thus warmly welcomed, strove in vain to conceal her own agitation and distress.

"Mr. Lane," she said, "you mustn't think of seeing me any more or of calling on grandfather. I wish you had not noticed me just now—many things have happened since we knew each other at Johannesburg, Mr. —Mr. Mortimer is very kind, but it wouldn't be right of me to do as he wishes."

"Dulcie!" cried the engineer, aghast, "I don't comprehend you in the least. What is it that has happened? You are ill; you are unhappy, cannot I help you?"

"No, no, *please!*" and Dulcie Calderon shrank from him. "I must go. I am late already. Good-bye, Mr. Lane; good-bye, Mr. Mortimer."

Eustace Lane would have protested against her ultimatum, but she checked him with so beseeching a gesture that he paused, despite himself. While he hesitated, with a swift, backward glance at his grief-wrung visage, and a cold little bow to Mortimer, she slipped away, and was swallowed up by the crowd.

The engineer leant heavily upon his friend and was silent. At length he roused himself and began to move onward in a slow, mechanical manner, suggestive of the strain he was putting on his powers of self-control.

"You can work it out, Phil," he muttered; "she was the solitary girl I ever took a fancy for. I imagined her in Cape Colony, and wanted to get back to search for her. What is the meaning of her presence in this bedlam, and of the mystery with which she chooses to surround her position? Not that she shall shake me off so; her eyes said she was glad to meet me, if her lips didn't. I must have time to consider—let's strike out of the din."

Mortimer assented, and they strode down the thronged aisle between the booths. Half-way along it bent at a wide angle, and in the angle was a tent of new white canvas with a wooden erection, by way of front, crossed by a blue and red balcony. The hoarding was hung with pictorial advertisements of the entertainment to which the tent was devoted, and from the platform of the balcony, a short, red-bearded fellow in a khaki suit and slouch hat proclaimed its merits by the aid of a huge speaking-trumpet.

"The great Calderon," shouted the wielder of this instrument, "the renowned and only Calderon, the Pistol King! Fresh from South Africa, where he has been loyally serving his country. Admission threepence and sixpence. Walk in and witness the exploits of the Pistol King, in collaboration with his beautiful grand-daughter, the Belle of Johannesburg!"

At this point the crier halted for breath; Eustace Lane was staring at him incredulously.

"Walk in and see the great Calderon!" bellowed the showman, who had regained the thread of his announcement; "he will shoot a shilling out of the fingers of the Belle, he will outline her in pistol shots on a plank target, he will remove an apple from her head with a single cartridge. See the Belle of Johannesburg dance the crystal dance to an accompaniment of shattered glass and flying bullets; see the great Calderon shoot the pips out of a ten of hearts!"

Lane gripped his friend's wrist and dragged him to the entrance of the tent; the engineer's jaw was set and his face pallid.

"It's her for a thousand, Phil," he said sternly; "her and her grandfather. If Dulcie were nothing to me, yet Dick Calderon, her father, did me many a good turn; he wouldn't sleep in his grave did he know that his child was posing publicly in a fair for her bread."

Eustace Lane reached the curtained-doorway, threw a coin to the attendant, and stalked into the shadowy structure. The cheaper parts were packed, the dearer sparsely tenanted. The engineer and his ally chose a couple of chairs in the rear row—before them was a blank series of similar seats, beyond, a low stage and a scene-drop.

As they took their places a bell rang, the scene-drop rose, and a very tall man, with hair and moustaches of a grizzled yellow, stepped to the footlights and spoke a few memorized phrases, so casually delivered as almost to be inaudible. He, too, was dressed in khaki, but wore high boots instead of the cloth putties sported by the trumpeter outside.

"The dickens!" whispered Lane, in his friend's ear; "do you know who that is?"

"The Pistol King, no doubt," said Mortimer, scanning the powerful frame of the orator.

"Impossible," responded Eustace Lane; "he must be an assistant or something. Calderon will come on later with his—his granddaughter. No, that's the scoundrel I've been wanting these three months—the beggar that winged me and shot the manager of the Bilboa Deep dead in his tracks. I only got a glimpse of the villain, but I could pick him out of a regiment, and that man on the stage, masquerading in the King's uniform, is he."

"Go—go easy, Eustace," Philip Mortimer warned him; "didn't you spot the painted atrocities at the door? The man on the stage is Calderon himself. He has gone to the table and is loading a pair of pistols. And here—here comes your little sweetheart herself."

It was true, the girl they had overtaken and conversed with on the fair-ground had appeared behind the footlights and joined, at a sort of gilded bench, piled with weapons, the moustached and booted performer concerning whose identity Eustace Lane had made so singular a discovery. Dulcie Calderon had abandoned her ulster and stood to attention in a khaki skirt and military blouse with leather gaiters. But she had donned neither paint nor powder.

Catching up a pack of cards, she selected several, and retreated to the left of the stage. Unconcernedly she extended them one by one at arm's length, while the marksman, from the opposite side, shot out the pips with unerring accuracy. Dulcie did not flinch or change colour, not even when a silver coin was placed between her finger-tips, to be removed by a bullet, nor when the promised apple was sent spinning by the same agency. The engineer watched, horrified yet fascinated. At last the Pistol King strode to the middle of the stage.

"While the target is being adjusted for the trick in which I outline by bullet holes the figure of my granddaughter," he said, "that gifted young lady will dance her famous——"

He stopped—his glance had fallen upon Eustace Lane. A second the two gazed into one another's faces, the engineer's white and set, the marksman's calm and smiling, and then the speaker finished.

"Her famous crystal dance," he concluded, and turned to the table for a couple of revolvers. But Dulcie Calderon was contemplating the audience with a fixed and anxious stare; she, also, had perceived the presence of Eustace Lane. A moment she looked at him, as if affrightedly, before passing from the stage.

"Did you notice that?" asked Mortimer cautiously; "he saw and recognised you."

"Yes," said the engineer, in a similar fashion; "and so did Dulcie. There she is back and going to dance, poor child! Mortimer, what ought I to do? Calderon is a murderer, and Dulcie is his granddaughter; it would be horrible to betray him."

Mortimer did not answer—he was engrossed by the performance that had begun on the stage. Dulcie had reappeared in a gay frock of pink tinsel, with a silk Union Jack for apron. Evidently her khaki garment was made to slip on and off over it.

The feature of the dance consisted in the rhythmic tossing up, almost to the iron roof of the stage, glass balls of an opaline tint, which were shattered by the upward shots of the marksman's revolvers. The Pistol King moved round the dancer in a deliberate circle. A limelight was played upon the performers, and the sparkle of the broken balls and the crack of the cartridges was effective enough.

The marksman reached the centre of the stage, firing as he went. Suddenly his shoe seemed to slide on the boards and he staggered, bringing his arm to the level. The revolver was discharged—a figure started upright in the audience—to reel and fall, overthrowing a dozen chairs.

The figure was that of Eustace Lane, and the bullet had struck him in the chest.

CHAPTER II.

THE FACE IN THE TREE.

"MY dear fellow, do go slow; Joan, prop him up on the other side. There's the sunniest bit, at the end of the verandah."

Philip Mortimer walked gently along the covered wooden terrace that skirted the front of his pleasant, unpretentious country residence and overlooked a large old-fashioned garden. Eustace Lane moved with him, supported on his friend's strong arm and aided by a plump, fair-haired little matron in a smart morning-gown.

"Nonsense," he said; "you will turn me into a perfect child. Joan, will you never understand that I am quite convalescent and able to get about by myself?"

Mrs. Mortimer shook her head reprovingly, as she helped to deposit their patient in a wicker chair, and proceeded to arrange a pile of cushions.

"We are not going to risk a set-back, my reckless cousin," she told him; "if you don't choose to be obedient we shall condemn you to a couch in the library. Remember this is a special privilege and you must be grateful. Why Phil has even obtained permission for you to smoke."

"Has he, though?" exclaimed Eustace Lane, a flush of masculine satisfaction mounting to his wan cheeks; "that is good! I suppose I have some cigarettes, at least I had. when——"

The engineer stopped abruptly, thrust a hand into his bosom and brought out a flattish silver case, rounded to fit the curve of the owner's body. The metal was dented and scratched. Lane contemplated it with an odd expression on his thin features.

"A bit of luck this happened to be in my upper pocket," he observed drily. "Phil, may I trouble you for a match?"

His friend struck a vesta and held it. Eustace Lane drew a couple of deep breaths, enjoying the familiar flavour.

"Sit down; sit down!" he broke off to say; "you people must drop the habit of waiting on me—I won't have it."

Mrs. Mortimer snapped her fingers at him. "That for your 'won'ts'!" she cried, "you are not your own master yet, by any means. Well, I must go and give some orders. I suppose you will want a trifle of lunch about noon. Phil, you can stay and talk to him for ten minutes, and then he is to be left to his cigarettes and a book while the sun lasts. *Au revoir*, you rebellious invalid; I have to make sure that your fish is fresh and your chicken tender."

She flitted away and vanished through an open window. The two men glanced at one another, and Lane shut the silver receptacle with a click.

"Phil," he asked, between the puffs of the fragrant smoke; "how long is it exactly since——"

"Three weeks," said Mortimer, lighting up himself; "and if the bullet hadn't been clean it would have been longer, for it swerved off your case there and cut up your chest to some purpose. I had a most instructive glimpse of your fourth rib when the surgeons were dressing the wound—the groove torn by the bullet had bared the bone. How's your elbow, my hero of many tribulations?"

"As right as ever," answered the engineer, bending the joint referred to, "I conclude, with my laying in bed so much. By the bye, Phil, let me comprehend the public aspect of all this—where—where are the Calderons?"

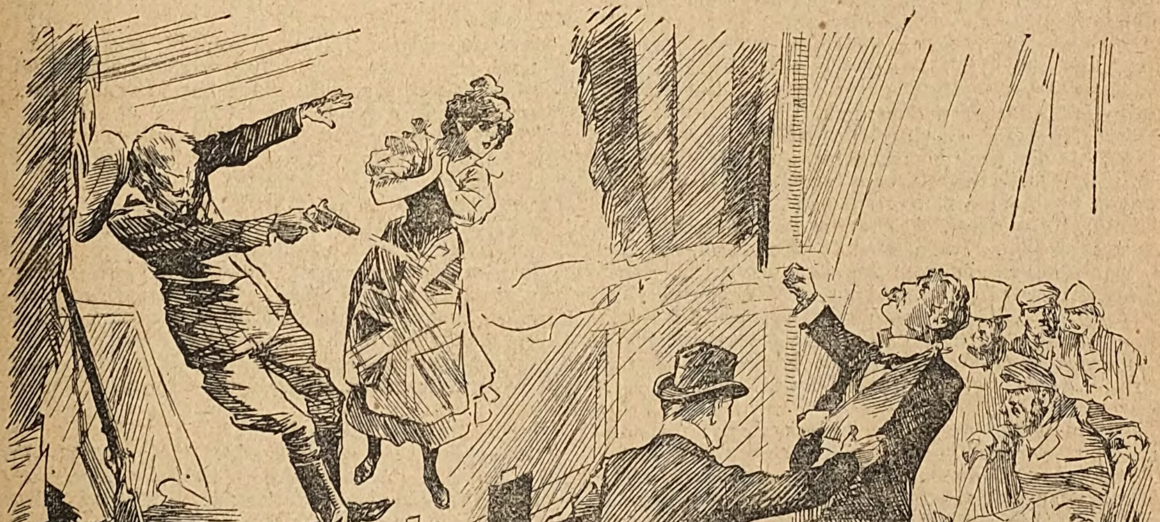
"I—I've no precise knowledge," said his friend; "of course your getting hit was universally regarded as an accident. What you told me about the beggar could not be described as evidence, and it would have been the dickens of a job to prove that Calderon's foot didn't slip by chance—dash it, I wouldn't suspect him myself had you not recognised him for the fellow who cracked your elbow and shot your manager. But the authorities could hold no inquiry if you didn't succumb, unless an accusation were lodged against Calderon. And, on account of Miss Dulcie, I felt you'd rather I raised no fuss."

Eustace Lane put out an impulsive hand and grasped his companion's.

"You were quite correct," he murmured; "a thousand thanks, Phil."

The dissolving cloudlets stole silently from the lips of the smokers—both had relapsed into meditation. At length Mortimer spoke.

"Lane," he began, "perhaps you ought to be told something. Not that I believe it wise, but I can't be disloyal to you, even for your own sake. Miss—Miss Calderon has called every day during the last three



The marksman reached the centre of the stage, his shoe seemed to slide on the boards. He staggered, and the revolver was discharged.

Is your photo on page 682?

weeks to ask, ostensibly on behalf of her grandfather, after your condition."

The engineer's cigarette fell to the floor of the verandah—he crushed the glowing tip and took another.

"Every day!" repeated Eustace Lane; "yet the fair must be over long ago."

"Yes," said Mortimer. "To be honest, I fear she walks a considerable distance. But she will reply to no questions, accept no refreshment, permit no sympathy. The nearest town is four miles off and boasts a low music-hall. Driving through it recently I noticed an advertisement of Calderon's performance—he is starring there."

Lane's mouth set and his eyes moistened.

"Phil," he muttered, "she—she—seems not to be indifferent to me."

"It may be a blind on her grandfather's part," urged Mortimer, with reluctance. "He could do no better if he wished to lend countenance to the view that his shot at you was accidental. Your recovery though, threatens his neck. You might, to be sure, keep his secret out of regard for Miss Dulcie, but he does not dream probably, that you are interested in her. On my honour, Eustace, I don't like the situation—it's too full of risk. That's what reconciled me to telling you of Miss Calderon's apparent devotion, and so increasing your fit of the tender passion. Either you must have Calderon arrested, or you must go back to South Africa."

"And leave Dulcie to the life of a strolling player," added Lane; "no, Phil, I'm not the sort. It is a bit of a puzzle, but I shall try to ferret out some less ignoble solution of the problem than flight."

Philip Mortimer consulted his watch; its verdict led him to start from his seat, draw a tall screen round the invalid's chair, push a bamboo table to the latter's side, and toss his match-box upon it.

"Well," he rejoined, "I'll allow you to tackle the enigma forthwith. I've a horse ill, worse luck, and the vet promised to run in about this time. Ta-ta, and don't be too chivalrous in your decision; you have evidently to deal with a ruffian as desperate as he is quick-witted."

Thus saying, Mortimer descended the verandah steps and strolled past the gable of the house towards the stables—a stalwart, cheerful, placid figure. The engineer looked after him.

"Dear old Phil," murmured Eustace Lane; "one of the best, the very best—where are those matches of his?"

A vesta spurted, the wisp of paper and tobacco—forgotten in the gravity of the just terminated conversation—was coaxed to a glow, and the convalescent puffed reflectively under the mellow radiance of the September sunshine.

His reverie was disturbed by a sudden sound, and he turned in his chair. The action hurt the newly-healed muscles of the engineer's chest, and he winced. The next instant a shock of surprise and delight had displaced the pain. Before him, on the path that stretched out to the garden entrance, stood Dulcie.

To the most casual observation she was fatigued and dusty—the slipping of a tired foot upon the gravel had served to indicate her presence, as the suppressed exclamation wrung from Lane by his rapid change of posture had aroused her to his.

Eustace Lane sprang up and advanced to the edge of the verandah. Reaching it, he staggered and clutched at the trellis for support. Dulcie darted across the lawn and mounted the wooden platform—his palm sought her shoulder, she was obliged to stoop under his weight. She caught at the seat he had abandoned, dragged it near, and helped him to sink into it.

There was ice-water on the table close by, Dulcie poured some out and extended the glass to him. Lane drank a mouthful as she held the vessel.

"It's—it's nothing," he gasped. "I've grown weak with confinement, that's all."

He took the glass and set it down, still holding her hand. "Dulcie," he said, "you have come miles. Don't deny it, there isn't a bus and you are exhibiting in Market Garston."

The girl leant on a pillar of the verandah, trembling.

"I—I had to," she faltered; "it would have been awful if he had killed you, I never knew him miss except then—he always told me he couldn't."

"So you are only here out of regard for him?" asked Eustace Lane coldly. "He may even have sent you."

"N—no," stammered Dulcie Calderon; "he—he doesn't suspect where I am. He has looked in the *Journal* every morning, though—there have been regular reports how you are. But I—I wanted to be certain."

The engineer clasped her small fingers, damp with perspiration. "And you have walked eight miles a day for three weeks to inquire," he murmured. "Dulcie, I wonder whether you would have regretted me much if I had died?"

Dulcie shuddered. "Don't, don't!" she pleaded: "I have dreamt about it! But you are better," she urged, falling on her knees beside him to scan his face; "you are really going to get well again, Mr. Lane."

"Of my wound, yes," admitted Eustace Lane, gravely; "but I have a serious type of heart disease, Dulcie. I am afraid that is incurable."

The listener blanched to her forehead.

"Oh," she whispered, "how terrible, how terrible!"

Lane studied her white features.

"It is not so very serious," he reassured her, smiling: "not at all dangerous, unless—unless I receive a great disappointment. Hearts in love do sometimes break, Dulcie, and it is love that is my heart complaint. You would not break my heart, would you, dear, if I were to ask you a momentous question and beg you not to say 'No'!"

Dulcie Calderon recoiled.

"Please don't!" she besought. "I'm not fit—I'm not a lady! I might have been if father hadn't been shot and granddad hadn't taken me. I wish you hadn't seen me, now, or at the fair—I do, indeed. Good-bye, Mr. Lane, I must go—I shouldn't have come."

"You are the one woman I shall ever wish to marry," declared the engineer, maintaining his grasp upon her; "I loved you in Johannesburg before the war. I went through it for your sake; I was going back to South Africa to find you again, and if I failed, to seek my quietus at the muzzle of a Boer rifle. Dulcie, you can't reject me just because you have shared your grandfather's mode of earning his bread."

The girl, still on her knees by the chair, resisted Eustace Lane's attempt to detain her; she was strangely pallid and resolute.

"You—you don't understand," she said; "it's as much as your life is worth to have anything to do with me. You will get yourself murdered."

Dulcie bent towards him shaking fearfully.

"Granddad hit you on purpose," she added. "I saw it in his face—he was looking at you the whole of the time I danced. And after I heard him talking with Mr. Lomas—the man who shouted in front of the tent at the fair. I ought to tell you that they said, and will, though I wanted not to. They think you are dangerous in some way, and if you do not die of your wound they agreed that you should be murdered later on."

The Pistol King's granddaughter paused a moment—her self-control threatened to desert her.

"I don't know why," she continued, "but they hate you, especially Mr. Lomas. He—he is anxious to marry me, and granddad encourages him. Yet I won't, not if they kill me for it. Never mind me, Mr. Lane, you must get abroad at once, while you are safe."

Lane rose, lifting her to her feet.

"Poor child," he observed, "the Law will defend me and I will protect you. We will have Lomas gaoled and your grandfather shall meet with a worse fate. I recognised him that day as the murderer of Isaacson, the manager of the Bilboa Deep mine. He shall expiate that crime without adding another to it, as he endeavoured to do in order to annihilate my testimony—I having been the solitary witness of the deed."

Dulcie sprang off the shallow ledge of the veranda, horrified.

"No, no!" she protested; "you mustn't, you mustn't! You would have him hanged—it would be frightful. Father made me swear to stick to granddad and stand by him always, he isn't as bad as folks imagine. No, you must get abroad, that is best, and I will think of you all my life. Don't speak to me, I can't bear it!"

She put her hands to her ears and fled athwart the irregular grass plot to which she had descended. Lane followed her, but her hasty footsteps had already carried her through the distant gate into the road.

As she disappeared the foliage of a lofty oak by the garden rails began to rustle and quiver. The engineer perceived among its swaying branches a sullen visage and a stunted figure. They were those of the man he had seen proclaiming the Pistol King's ability at Steeple Garston Fair. Doubtless he had been spying upon the interview that had taken place between Eustace Lane and his colleague's granddaughter—the girl whom the former now knew that he coveted for his wife.

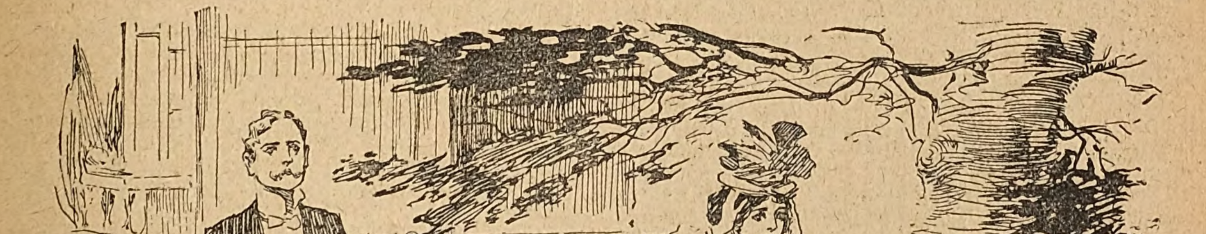
With a fierce effort Lane hurried down the path to the wicket by which Dulcie had made her departure. The walk was lengthy and he himself weak. He arrived at the exit to discover that both Miss Calderon and the presumed spy had vanished.

CHAPTER III.

"When Rogues Fall Out——"

"My good man, I don't want to witness his performance, I wish to learn where he lives! surely you know that much about him?"

Philip Mortimer fidgeted in a tawdry ante room at the



She put her hands to her ears and fled across the grass plot.

narrow window of a provincial box-office. He had stooped, the better to peer within.

"Sorry, sir," said the attendant, "but it's quite against our rule to give artists' addresses—you can see for yourself that it wouldn't be reasonable."

His interviewer put a hand on the brass money-plate of the window, fingers down. There was a faint click, when he lifted it, a half-sovereign lay upon the metal. With a smile and a casual gesture the other party to the discussion took up the coin.

"Thank you, sir," was the recipient's brief acknowledgment. "I mustn't do as you ask, all the same. But if you were to inquire of the first barman at the 'Rainbow'—over the road—he would tell you."

The amateur diplomatist nodded, and hastened out of the music-hall. A Ralli car waited at the kerb, and in it sat Eustace Lane, composed and upright, though very pale. His friend paused at the step.

"Dropped on a trail," he said; "another moment and we shall be running it down."

He traversed the mean thoroughfare and passed in at a wide entrance under a gaudy sign.

The engineer trifled with the reins and studied a neighbouring clock. It pointed to the second quarter after one—not much time had elapsed since that pathetic parting which had been so singularly spied upon.

At last Philip Mortimer emerged from the "Rainbow," to spring into the car and shake the cob to a trot.

"Got it!" he declared; "and now, my dear Eustace, if you'll try to keep cool, we will probe this affair to its depths. You are sure that the fellow you saw descend from the tree was the same you noticed at the fair?"

"Absolutely!" assented Lane; "they had had her tracked, therefore they suspected her. If they conclude, as they will, that Dulcie has been betraying them, who can say what will happen to her? I—I dare not guess."

"Nonsense!" objected Mortimer. "Calderon is her own kith and kin—he would not have her injured."

"Let us hope not," murmured the engineer, and the palm that rested on the edge of the car clasped and unclasped in the keen agony of his suspense.

They stopped in front of a dingy lodging-house at which they alighted, and in answer to their ring a female head peered at them above a balustrade at the back of the lobby.

"We wish to see Mr. Calderon," said Eustace Lane sharply.

"On your right," responded the owner of the head, which ducked out of sight without more ado.

Lane stepped forward, taking precedence of his friend, and turned a knob at his elbow. It gave access to a bedchamber, correctly if dingily furnished. On the opposite side were folding-doors, slightly ajar, and through which there penetrated the sound of voices.

Through a crack in the door they looked into the room, which contained a table at one side, covered by the remains of a meal. Near it lounged Calderon, stirring indolently a cup of tea, and behind him, trembling and alarmed, stood Dulcie.

In the centre of the room—his legs straddling and his hands on his hips, was planted the man whom Eustace and Mortimer had seen at the fair, and whom the former had detected in the act of spying upon himself and Dulcie.

"Granddaughter or no granddaughter," they heard him say, "she's a little traitor, and I'll have her made to smart for it. The hussy! I watched her cuddle and fuss over him as if he'd been a six months' baby. The fool wanted to marry her, and she told him she wasn't fit for him. Split on both of us, she did, and warned him to do a guy while there was time."

The Pistol King stroked his moustache and whistled softly; he was a massive figure, despite his years, and not without a certain ease and grace. He threw down his spoon and turned to the girl behind his chair.

"Dulcie," he said, "is Lomas right; do you—do you care for this Mr. Lane?"

"Care for him!" put in the other: "oughtn't I to be a good judge. You don't suppose I enjoyed her little flirtation, do you?"

"I spoke to my granddaughter, Job Lomas," retorted Calderon, coldly. "Have no fear, my child," he added; "hawks don't pick out hawk's eyes—if he be your lover he is secure from me. Why should I break your heart and risk my neck to no purpose? Tell me the truth, are you fond of Lane?"

A moment Dulcie struggled with her pride and maidenly reserve. Then she hid her face and burst into tears.

"I—I have always loved him," she sobbed.

"Don't you see, Lomas," said the Pistol King. "I acted hastily in potting this fellow—he would have kept silence for Dulcie's sake, he will keep it now. No one wants to drag his sweetheart's name through the mud of a public trial, with an execution for a relative of hers at the end of it."

Job Lomas uttered a howl like that of a wild beast.

"And where do I come in?" he snarled. "She protects you from your share in our bit of business at the Bilboa Deep and I lose her. You promised me I should have her if I would leave working on the cross and take to the show racket. Well, I've done it, and I'd peach on you and knife her before I'll give her up. So have your choice between settling Lane and chucking me."

By way of lending point to his ultimatum he pulled out a dagger-knife and opened it. Calderon rose leisurely from his chair, poised the mass of wood and upholstery on high, and dashed the weapon out of the bully's hand. Job Lomas flung himself on it, caught it up, and threw the steel blade—javelin fashion—into the Pistol King's face.

It passed upwards into the left pupil, and, with a groan, the marksman toppled to the floor as Lane and Mortimer dashed in to seize and pinion his antagonist.

When they lifted up the Pistol King his jaw was set in a horrible grin—the last expression that his handsome dissipated countenance would wear on earth.

* * * * * *

Job Lomas was hanged by the public executioner in Market Garston gaol, after a trial that sorely puzzled the readers of the newspapers. But little evidence was required to convict him of murder, and Eustace Lane did his best to keep the memory of the Pistol King unsullied by the exposure which he had so richly deserved. For Dulcie Calderon was then the guest of Mrs. Philip Mortimer, and his betrothed. Besides, he could not help a feeling of tolerance for the rogue who had so calmly attempted his life in an inspiration of diabolical craftiness, and afterwards granted it as calmly to the tears of a woman

R. NORMAN SILVER.

Is your photo on page 682?

A RUINED INVENTION.

Mr. Bugge, who styled himself on his cards "Inventor," hurried from the backyard into the kitchen, where his wife was just washing up the dishes from breakfast.

"Where is that file?" he asked hurriedly of his wife, as he looked nervously in several directions.

"What file?" she asked, putting her arms akimbo and still holding the dish-cloth in her hand.

"Why, the file I was using a couple of days ago and hid down here somewhere. If I can get that coupling made a little stronger this thing is going to work and then Hooray! Farewell to poverty!"

His wife looked steadily at him and the suspicion of a sneer was on her face. Then she threw the dish-cloth on the table, and began as follows:

"Look here, Bugge, I'm getting pretty well tired out with this silly nonsense. You call yourself an inventor, and what in the world have you ever invented, I'd like to know? You run round the house like something crazy and look wild-eyed enough to be put in a cage, and yet there is never a farthing coming from any your 'inventions,' and, for my part, I declare I think I've married a maniac." This last remark was accompanied by a stamp of the foot.

"Oh! now, come, dear," said the busy Mr. Bugge; "don't talk like that. You know that I'm working hard on this machine, and you must realise that I've got too much sense to get to work on a thing unless there is big money in it. Now, let me describe it to you. Here is a locomotive in these days going along at comparatively a snail's pace, puffing and blowing, throwing out cinders and smoke, endangering the crops in its path and ruining the clothes of the passengers it is drawing.

"Now look at my liquid air locomotive with its millions of horsepower, its unlimited speed, its absolute cleanliness and its minimum of danger. Just think of speeding along at the rate of 600 miles an hour instead of sixty. Then, my dear, but painfully obtuse Mrs. Bugge, think of the day when your dear husband, whom you now so cruelly characterise as a maniac, becomes chairman of the Liquid Air Transportation and Railroad Company. Think of the magnificent private car in which we will tour this great and beautiful land! Let yourself be wafted mentally into the luxurious and palatial private offices which will be erected for my sole occupancy. Think——"

The front door bell rang, and the wife hastened to see who was at the door. She returned in a moment, with a slip of paper in her hand and a gleam of triumph in her eye.

"Look here!" she said, coming up close to Mr. Bugge, and holding the paper before his eyes, "look at that bill from the grocer's, and we can't get another thing until it is paid! Look at it!—look at it, will you, and then tell me about your gorgeous offices and your private car. You had better get into somebody else's private office and push a pen for awhile, even if it's only a pound a week you make, instead of depending on the poor little bit that I have to feed you and keep you throwing away your time on such drivelling foolishness as you've just been telling me about. Now, if you want any dinner you drop that lot of trash out there and get your other things on. Then you march yourself down to the centre of the city and look up some of the situations that are advertised in the morning paper.

"That child," continued Mrs. Bugge, warming up to the subject, "wants a new pair of shoes, and its poor little feet are on the ground. And yet, there you stand and trifle away your time. You never think of doing a hand's turn that would bring you in a few shillings."

"But, my dear," began the inventor, when he was interrupted by his wife.

"No, I am not your dear, unless it's your dear slave, who works her hands off for you and who scrubs and cleans and mends to keep the things from falling apart. Don't talk to me—I'm a slave, that's what I am."

"But, Mrs. Bugge," remonstrated the inventor in a tender tone, "just have a little more patience. I know you have a great burden on your shoulders with these household duties, and I know that you are rarely able to get out of the house; but just wait and some of these fine days—only a little while away now—I'll be able to give you the finest of dresses, the most expensive of bonnets; you shall ride in your own carriage, and the little one will have a dozen pairs of shoes if necessary."

"I wish I could believe you," said the wife doubtingly. "Well, I might just as well keep it up a little longer, but I feel in my bones that your wasting you're time, and that all this is foolishness."

"Indeed, it's not foolishness."

"I say it is," said Mrs. Bugge, getting back to her original temper rapidly; "and I won't stand it. You've got to go to work, and that mighty quick."

"But let me finish my liquid air engine," protested Mr. Bugge, meekly.

"Let you finish it!" shouted Mrs. Bugge, loudly. "I'm the one to do that. I'm tired of all this foolishness and nonsense, and now you've got to go to work. Watch me while I finish your liquid air engine, or whatever it is."

So saying, Mrs. Bugge went to the coal-hole and secured the hammer. Then she rushed into the old stable that her husband used as his workroom. There on the floor stood the invention, nearly all put together. Mrs. Bugge raised the hammer and let it fall, while her husband tremblingly watched her through the half-open door. One blow broke through a bar of metal and caused the top to fall off, and the second rap threw bits of the liquid air engine in every direction. As she struck the last blow and completed the wreck, she turned and saw her husband, but as he was no match for her at any time, and certainly not when she had a hammer in her hand, he fled.

"You'd better run!" she called after him. Mr. Bugge redoubled his pace.

"Don't you come back here till you've got a job!" was the last thing the inventor heard as he scaled the front railing of the house.

F. H. T.

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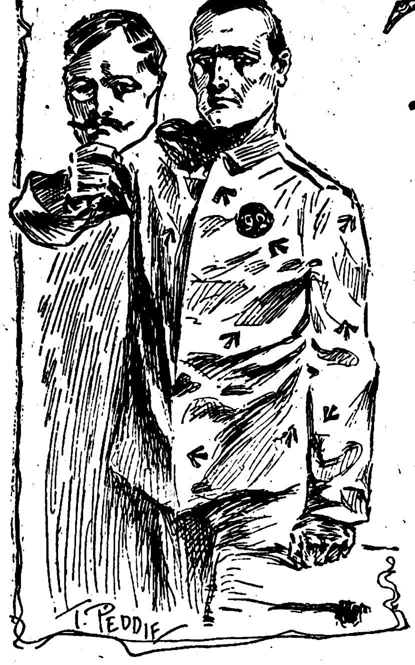
DEAD TO THE WORLD



By

Henry T. Johnson.

Author of "Cruce Vincit," "The Pride of the Ring," etc., etc.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

Richard Seldon (Tiger Dick), an escaped convict who murders and then impersonates Cyril Roylance, of Fallowfield Hall.

Harcourt Dale, a near neighbour of Roylance.

Doris Dale, his daughter.

Jack Branscombe, a young farmer, in love with Doris.

Inspector Rossiter, a detective from Scotland Yard.

Rev. Gerald Hastie, curate of Fallowfield.

James and **Joseph Nubbley**, two brothers living in a cottage near the school at Fallowfield; they are known to Seldon.

Miss Morrison, the schoolmistress.

THE THREAD OF THE STORY.

Seldon, aided by two friends, also ex-convicts, murders Barker, the Dale's butler, but the guilt of his death is fixed by circumstantial evidence on Jack Branscombe. He then organises a series of robberies at the principal houses in the neighbourhood of Fallowfield Hall. Branscombe is hidden by Doris in a secret chamber at Dalehurst Grange.

CHAPTER XVII. (*continued.*)

"I know—I know, I've thought of all that," said Doris. "What, what else is to be done, what alternative is there other than rushing headlong into the trap, into that trap whose jaws are set with prison locks and prison bars?"

"Too true," replied Gerald Hastie, "and we must think it out. But there's one thing certain, you mustn't run the risk you've taken any longer."

"But who else is there to dare anything for him but I, who love him? All his friends have turned against him."

"No, not all, I haven't."

"But what can you do, Gerry?"

"I think I can face danger as well as a girl. The harboring of suspected criminals is not quite in my line, but the charity that thinketh no evil is, and I cannot, will not, think evil of Jack Branscombe. So this is my plan, Doris. You must see to-night that the coast is clear, and just about midnight Jack must get away from the Grange and make his way across the fields to my cottage. I'll be his custodian, there'll be less danger, and what danger there is will be faced by a man instead of by a girl."

"Oh, Gerry, Gerry, you're arguing just as he argued. It makes him mad to think of me running the risk; he wants to go straight out into the world and face it. I wouldn't hear of his plan, but I will listen to yours, because I think there's safety in it."

"And now, Doris, put me down. My way lies towards yonder cottages. By Jove! Doris, I always knew you were a brick; now, my girl, I know you for a heroine."

He alighted from the basket chaise and made his way down a side lane on a visit to some cottages. And Doris, waking her pony into a trot, proceeded along the hedgelined lane. And from the further side of one of those hedgerows a man, whose crouched form had been silently stealing along level with that pony chaise, stood still, and, pushing aside his tweed cap, scratched his head.

"Eh! but this is a rum start," soliloquised Ned Fletcher. "Dang me, there's a bit o' sport in this. Man alive! I've been used to a bit of hidin' mysen in bracken, and in ditches, and in boughs. I've been in hidin' for my liberty, but never for my life. I'll not give the game away, twouldna be sport to do so, but dang me! if I don't tell the squire—'twill amuse him."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Mr. Rossiter Receives a Message."

Thanks, possibly, to that abnormal thickness of skull with which his intimates generously credited him, Morgan Chandler, some sixteen hours after the receipt of those two merciless head blows, was in a fair way of recovering from them. He had regained consciousness for some hours, and the doctor had scouted any apprehension of brain trouble, he also alleging the disproportionate density of the casket in relation to what it contained. The first to hint at such trouble was Chandler's master, and what suggested it to him was the injured man's persistency that Jack Branscombe was his assailant, whereas, as a matter of fact, his master knew better. Further questioned as to the identity of the other of his assailants, Morgan Chandler mysteriously hinted that it was someone who owed him a grudge, someone whose line of business led him to be abroad o' nights. No, he would name no names at present, but there would come a time when squire would see how he had been misled and the sort of party he'd put his trust in."

"Very well, Chandler," said the Squire, "keep quiet and don't worry, and when you're quite well you and I will have a long field day on the estate accounts."

And then Chandler hastily and emphatically clapped his hands to his head and vowed that he was suffering from concussion of the brain, and that it would be days, perhaps weeks, before he was able to bring his mind to figures.

"And how long, Squire, do you think 'twill be before they collar that murdering young villain?"

"I can't say, Chandler, but you must make haste and get well so that you can give evidence against him."

"Ah, I'd like to be doing that," said Chandler; and the Squire, leaving the sick man's room, hummed softly to himself:

"Not the least doubt of it, Mr. Chandler; you'd like to see him in the dock and give evidence against him to avert the possibility of his doing so against you," and going direct to his land steward's office in the eastern wing he once again went through various ledgers and day books and compared the accounts posted with the vouchers on various files.

"You've been playing a tall game, Mr. Chandler, and for pretty big stakes! I wonder you haven't feathered your nest better. I wonder what you have done with all the money. It hasn't gone on the gee-gees, no, nor the cards—that sort of investment's too solid for you, my friend; these bundles of correspondence point to riskier gambling. The bucket shopkeeper, not the 'booky,' has benefited by your picking and stealing. You've dabbled in differences instead of S.P., but they're very much alike underneath, the grain runs very much the same only there's some variety in the veneer."

Forraging through account books, invoices, vouchers, and schedules, he came again and again upon discrepancies, suspicious erasures, and other evidences pointing unmistakably to fraud and embezzlement on a huge and systematic scale.

"I've got him set," he muttered. "There's enough here to clap the handcuffs on him, and yet, though I must get rid of him, that isn't the wisest way. I've been quite close enough in touch with magistrates, detectives, and constables of late, too close for my liking, too close to be safe; the fox may sometimes be safe close to the kennels, but he doesn't talk to the hounds. No, Richard, you must clear this fellow out, but not that way."

"Mr. Rossiter, sir," said the servant.

"Oh, yes, I'd almost forgotten," and he hastened to the handsome reception hall, glorious with skin rugs, mammoth vases, antlers' horns, spears, battle axes, and other trophies of sport and battle, and greeted his guest cordially, like, as that guest remarked later on, "one of the right sort."

"And real swell as he is," Mr. Rossiter declared next morning, "he made me feel just as comfortable and at home as if we'd been pals all our lives. And, my! he knows how to put a dinner on. Yes, he can do himself very well, Mr. Cyril Roylance can, if he has lived the best part of his life up country in Australia. Ah! that port of his! It'll always be one of my most exquisite memories!"

"Well, any news?" said the Squire, tucking his serviette inside his collar, preparatory to attacking the turtle soup.

"Well nothing particular at present, sir; at least, nothing I can say much about."

For it was Mr. Rossiter's way to be mysteriously reticent—when he had nothing to report.

"Try a little milk punch," said the host, and the guest complied without a murmur.

"What do you make of Chandler's story?" inquired the host.

"Simply confirms what I've said all along," replied the guest, "young Branscombe's in it."

"But he's the last fellow in the world one would have thought so desperate. You'll try the *suprême de sole à la Morney?*" Then to the servant, "The Hochheimer to Mr. Rossiter."

"Well, you know, sir, in my line of business it ain't so extraordinary perhaps to meet with people that lead double lives as it would be in yours. Excuse me making the remark, Mr. Roylance, but this hock is a wine; I'm very partial to a hock."

"You're naturally a good judge. A keen brain and a keen palate very often go together, Mr. Rossiter. So you credit Chandler's story, and you don't think the shock of the affair has at all unhinged him?"

"I'm certain that Jack Branscombe was in your house last night, I'm certain he's hiding somewhere in this district. I can't say I've got a tangible clue yet, but I think I'm getting warm. He's a desperate villain. I don't despair of clapping the bracelets on him yet."

"Here's to your success," said the other. "Here come the capons, and, take my advice, try a glass of champagne over a slice of this York ham. What line did you say you were going on?"

"It's really a pleasure to talk to you, Mr. Roylance, you're so appreciative. Well, I'm going on this. It's pretty clear one of Branscombe's gang means giving him away."

A servant entered, handed the Squire a slip of paper. He glanced at the name, and said:

"I will be down in a moment." Then to his guest: "I say, Rossiter, you won't mind excusing me for just a few minutes, one of my hands wants to see me on an urgent estate matter?"

"By all means, Mr. Roylance. I like it all the better you not standing on ceremony with me, puts me more at ease, sir, having regard to our respective positions; and business is business, sir, and has to be attended to whether it's my business or your business."

"You're a very kind and sensible fellow as well as a clever one, and, remember, the wine's with you."

Mr. Rossiter, settling himself down again into his seat as the door closed behind his host, beamed as one at peace with all the world, and, smacking his lips, remarked:

"Mr. Roylance, you're right, the wine is with me, likewise, I'm with the wine."

"Now, Fletcher, what's this mysterious message?" said the Squire, walking into the little ante-room of the library which he used as a sanctum. "You surely haven't brought me down from my dinner table on a trifling matter?"

"No fear, Squire," said the other. "I think thee'll say so when I've done."

"Well, cut it short; cut the cackle and get to the horses."

"Which it weren't a horse, Squire, it were a pony."

"Oh, rats! Mine's only a figure of speech. You haven't come to me at my dinner time to bother me about people's ponies. Come, man, the yarn."

"I was saying, sir, it were a pony."

"Oh!"

"Miss Dale's pony."

"Whew! What?"

"Her was driving it in the chaise along the road; t'young apprentice parson chap were walking along; he'd come from the school-house; they say he be courtin' the mistress."

Another whistle from the Squire of Fallowfield.

"Miss Doris asked him to take a seat aside her, and I trudges along t'other side o' the hedge; 'tis a way I've got, you know, Squire, born of my business, of trudgin' along under the lee of a hedge with my head down and my feet never crackin' a twig."

"Very useful habit, Fletcher, for keepers—or people who are keeping out of the way of keepers."

"Eh! t'Squire, 'ee will have his joke. I'll admit I've found useful as a keeper what I learnt afore I was a keeper. And as they talked I listened."

"And what did you learn?"

"I larnt where young Mr. Branscombe's a hidin'."

"You did! Tell me. The reward shall be yours if he's nailed."

"I weren't thinkin' about the reward, Squire, somehow reward don't come into my mind when it's a question o' servin' you, as kept me from bein' turned out on the roadside and give me honest work."

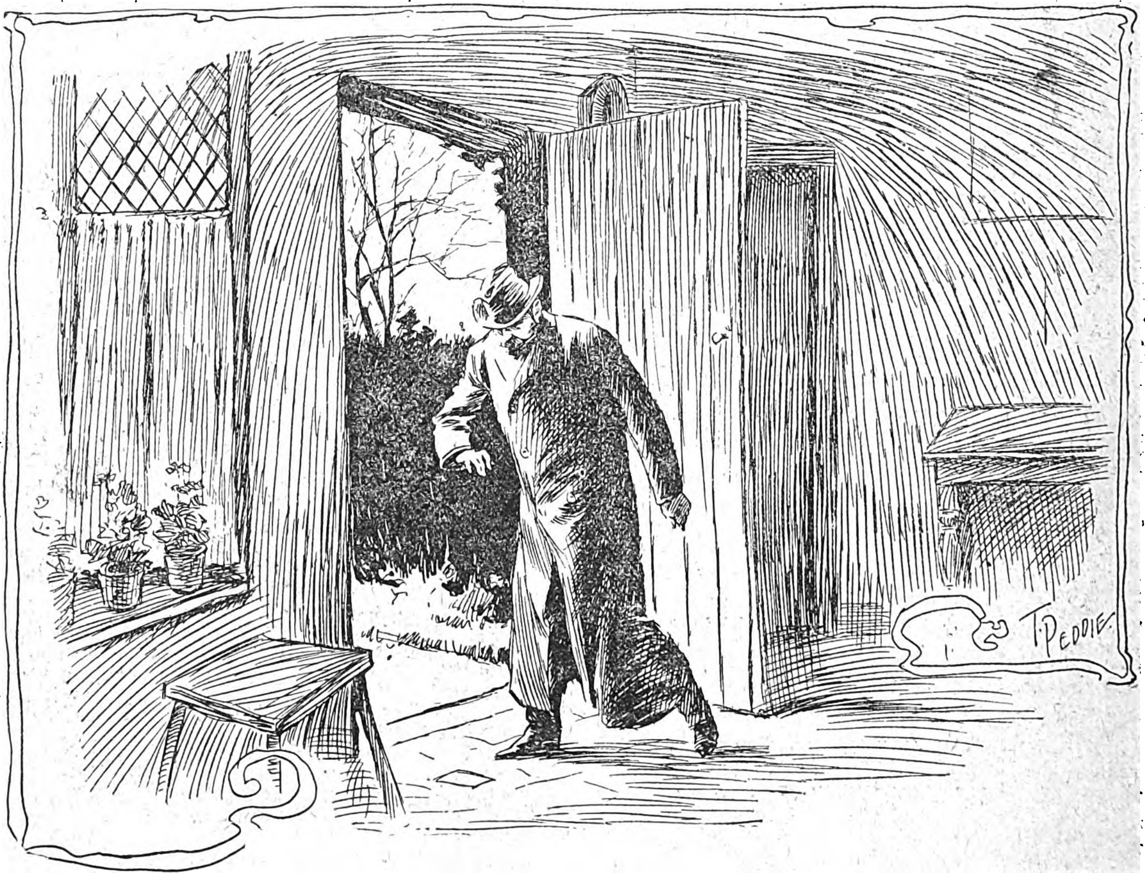
There was a strange look in the Squire of Fallowfield's face.

"By Gad!" he whispered, "if this man knew to whom he was talking! Knew me for what I am! Perhaps if I'd met more like him in other days I might have been different."

"I was thinkin', Squire, of you and young Branscombe fightin' it out for the same lady, beggin' pardon for makin' so bold, and like the mouse that helped the lion I thought I'd jump at the chance o' helpin' the gentleman that helped me. He's hidin' somewhere in Dalehurst Grange."

"Dalehurst Grange! Impossible, man!"

"Nay, sir; 'tis a queer old place, the Grange. Parties comes down from Lunnon at times to paint it and photygraph it. It's been writ about in books and in history. There's been strange things done theer in bygone times, duels fought, aye! and, years ago, I've heerd say one lot of soldiers stormed it and fought right well with another lot as held it. 'Tis honeycombed with underground passages, and they say there's strange recesses in some of the galleries, hid with sliding panels. Anyway, with her own lips I heard Miss Dale tell the parson's apprentice she had Branscombe in hiding there, and I heard him and her arrange he was to leave there at midnight by the lych gate in what they call Lone Lad's Lane, and make his way 'cross country to where the parson's apprentice lodges," and Ned Fletcher told to his now by no means impatient listener all that he



What was that white patch on the sanded red tiles?

had heard in the ambush of the hedgerow; then prepared to depart, when the other stopped him, and, seating himself at a table, took up a pen and a sheet of notepaper. Then he paused.

"No, it won't do to write on this heading, nor yet on a water mark that he can recognise," he muttered. Then he rummaged in his waste paper basket, picked out a circular, tore off the clean sheet, scribbled a few lines, and folded it into slip note form.

"Now, Fletcher," he said, "here's a sovereign for what you've done, and here's a sovereign for what you've got to do. Take this to Stonecrop Cottage, where Detective Inspector Rossiter lodges, and slip it under the door."

"But, Squire, they told me as Mr. Rossiter were here."

"Don't you know," the other exclaimed, with that black scowl for which Fletcher had so wholesome a respect settling on his face, "that I employ you to carry out my orders, not to question them."

"Beg pardon, sir," and Fletcher, with a tug at his forelock, departed to obey the bidding of the one man in the world for whom he cared two straws.

It was a beautiful moonlight night: indeed, at times it seemed to Detective Inspector Rossiter, as he spun along in the Squire's dogcart on his homeward way, that two moons or even more were shining.

"By George!" he soliloquised, "I've enjoyed my evening. Talk aboura a host! Talk aboura dinner! That sherry with the hors d'œuvres! And that Beaune! and the champagne too," and he gently carolled:

"Glorious drink is good champagne."

"But of all the wines in the world that port of his! And there a case of it gone up to my little digs. in town, that will make 'em open their eyes, some of 'em." Then gravely: "I say, coachman, you bear this in mind, you're a younger man than I am, and you may think of my words in years to come when I'm away, p'raps, far, far away; you've got a real good guv'nor, as good as they make 'em, and don't you forget it, and don't you ever leave him. Hullo, here we are, Cronestop Cottage, I mean to say Sonecrops Scottage. What do you mean, mind the step?"

"I only mean, sir, it's a bit of a way down from the cart, and it's a very little 'un. No offence, sir."

"Course not! Good night, coachman. Here's half-a-crown, and mind what I told you. Good night—mind the step indeed!" he muttered as he felt his way by the palings to the cottage door, took out his latch-key, and entered.

What was that white patch on the sanded red tiles? He picked it up and took it into the little sitting room and placed it beside the lamp, open and perused it, then swiftly he tore off his coat, waistcoat, collar, and necktie, rushed into his bedroom, filled the tin bath, plunged head and shoulders into it, rubbed himself dry quickly and vigorously.

"By George! if I'd only kept the cart waiting! No, perhaps it would be best afoot. He took from a cabinet a small phial, poured three drops into a tumbler of water, which clouded and curdled in an instant, drank it off at a draught, and in a moment was a sober man. Once again he perused these lines:

"Watch for Jack Branscombe along Lone Lads Lane from twelve to half-past, midnight."

"I've just got time to get there if I start now, but if I wait to get assistance I may miss him. I'll go now, I'll tackle him single-handed. I never saw the man yet I couldn't—except Dick Seldon, and he's dead. I knew—I knew there was a split in the camp, and that split in their camp is going to win me the battle."

CHAPTER XIX.

A Chase—And a Check!

Once again he went out into the moonlight and made his way by devious ways towards Dalehurst. At last he

REMINISCENCES OF THE CRIMEAN WAR,

Mr. Samuel Olsen, of 500 Slade Road, Stockland Green, Erdington, near Birmingham, has now reached the advanced age of 69 years. He can remember well the Crimean War, and has many very interesting reminiscences of that period, but he cannot remember any intervening time when he could say he was in good health, or even that he felt well, until Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness restored his long lost health. Speaking the other day to a *Birmingham Telegram* reporter, Mr. Olsen said:—"For the past 38 years I have suffered from constipation, and during that time have never known what it was to feel well. I could scarcely eat my food, and never had any relish for it. Then I continually had headaches, while the pains in my side and stomach were almost unbearable. At times I got very low and despondent, feeling my life to be a perfect misery. I tried a number of doctors, and took all sorts of patent medicines, but neither doctors nor medicines ever did me any permanent good until I tried Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness. I saw them advertised in the papers and decided to give them a trial. Almost immediately after beginning with them I felt a little better. That made me hopeful and I persevered with them, with the result that I can now eat my food with relish, and am better in every way. I used to always feel tired at night and thoroughly exhausted in the morning. In fact, I cannot remember the day when I did not come home and have to go to sleep. Now I can get up at five o'clock in the morning, and feel fresh and well throughout the whole day. Formerly I could scarcely walk from Newhall Street to John Bright Street (about half a mile). Last Monday I was out walking for three hours and a half and did not feel any the worse for it. I am recommending Bile Beans to all my friends. My wife has also taken them for indigestion and spasms, and has received great benefit from them."

Without doubt constipation is the source of manifold ailments. For this disorder, for blood impurities, pimples, and face sores—which are often a direct result of it—for indigestion, anæmia, liver and kidney disorders, headache, colds, chill, debility, nervousness, female ailments, pains in the chest, buzzing in the head, rheumatism, and as a restorative after influenza, Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness are unequalled. All chemists stock them, or you may obtain direct from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 and 120 London Wall, London, E.C., by sending prices, one and three halfpence or two and ninepence per box. Bile Beans are sold only in sealed boxes; never loose.

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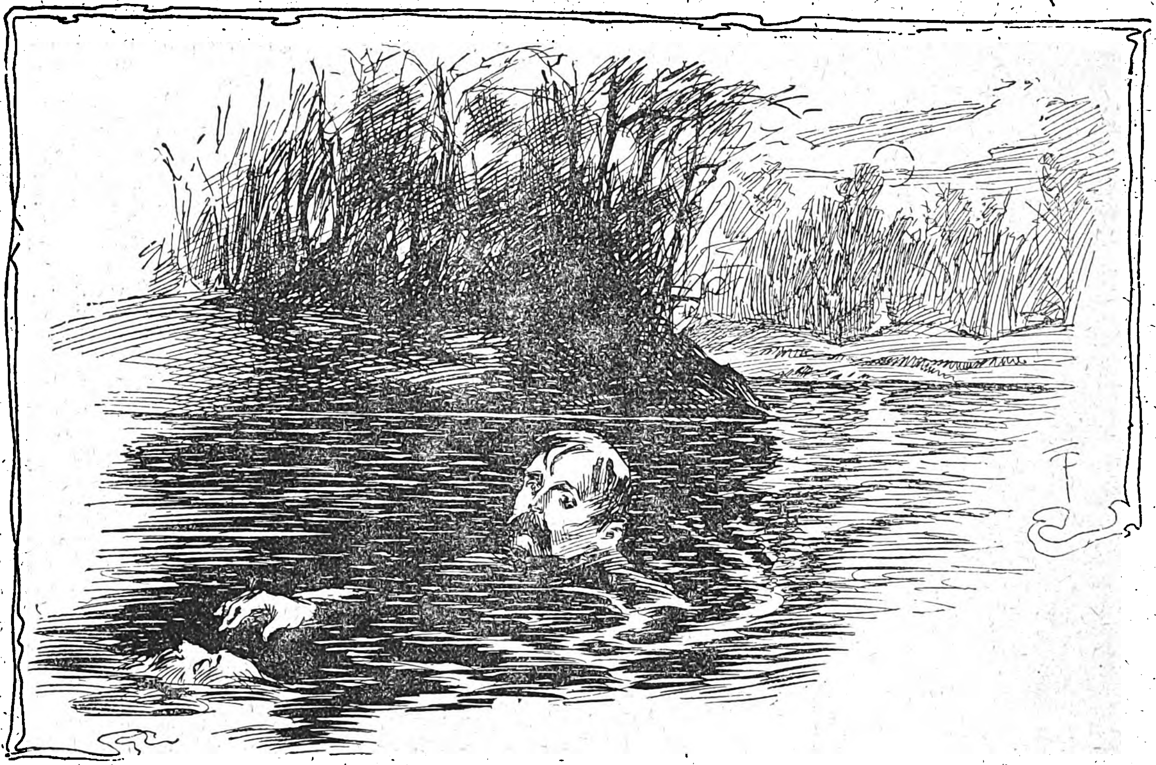
FRANCIS RAVENSCROFT, *Manager.*

reached a fir plantation bordering upon Lone Lads Lane and crept through it in spite of undergrowth and bracken, till, somewhat scratched and torn, he reached the five-barred gate leading to the road.

"To think I should have been away from the cottage to-night," he soliloquised, "of all nights in the year. Oh! I'd have given anything, I'd have missed anything, even the Squire's port, to have been at my place when that letter came. If I'd only heard a footstep along the garden, heard it being pushed under the door, I might have had two birds, and now"—he looked at his watch, "I shall have to be smart or I may not secure even one."



A few swift strokes, and just as that mass was sinking 'neath the tide he caught it.

At last he emerged out of the inky darkness of the trees and undergrowth into a clearing, and, beyond a small patch of sward, there was a five-barred gate leading into Lone Lads Lane. His heart gave a great leap, he was just in time, for there in the moonlight he saw stealing along close to the opposite bank of the road a crouching form, clad in a closely-buttoned ulster and a peak cap, pulled close down, hid his features; whoever it might be, whether it was Jack Branscombe or not, it was undoubtedly the form of the man whose description had been sent from Mattingham—it was the man he wanted. Taking a swift run, he vaulted the five-barred gate, sprang into the road, and shouted:

"Stop! I command you to stop. You are John Branscombe, and you are my prisoner!"

He made a rush towards his quarry, sprang upon him, and the man he challenged, turning swiftly round to face him, they closed.

"You are my prisoner," he repeated.

"Not yet!" exclaimed the other, and as they swung round in their struggle the light fell on the other man's face, and Rossiter, recognising the features, knew that it was indeed John Branscombe that he held.

"I tell you again, you've got to come with me."

"No, no!," the other replied. "If I come with you you've to take me. Let me go—I tell you I'm innocent, I swear I am innocent, and I will not be taken. I'll prove my innocence first, then I'll surrender."

"You'll surrender now. Cease struggling, I mean to take you!"

"No, I tell you I'll not be taken alive."

"Then, by heaven! I'll take you dead!"

The grips loosened from each other's biceps, each pressing forward, their hands met and locked behind each other's shoulders, and swiftly, suddenly, Jack Branscombe swung his would-be captor from his feet, swirled him round, doubled himself as it were beneath him, and, with a swing, sent him over his shoulders, and Rossiter crashed with all his weight into the road, while the man who had escaped him set off at full speed.

But Rossiter was a brave man and, scrambling to his feet, he set off after the other, followed him along the lane, through the gap in the hedge, across the grass

Is your photo on page 682?

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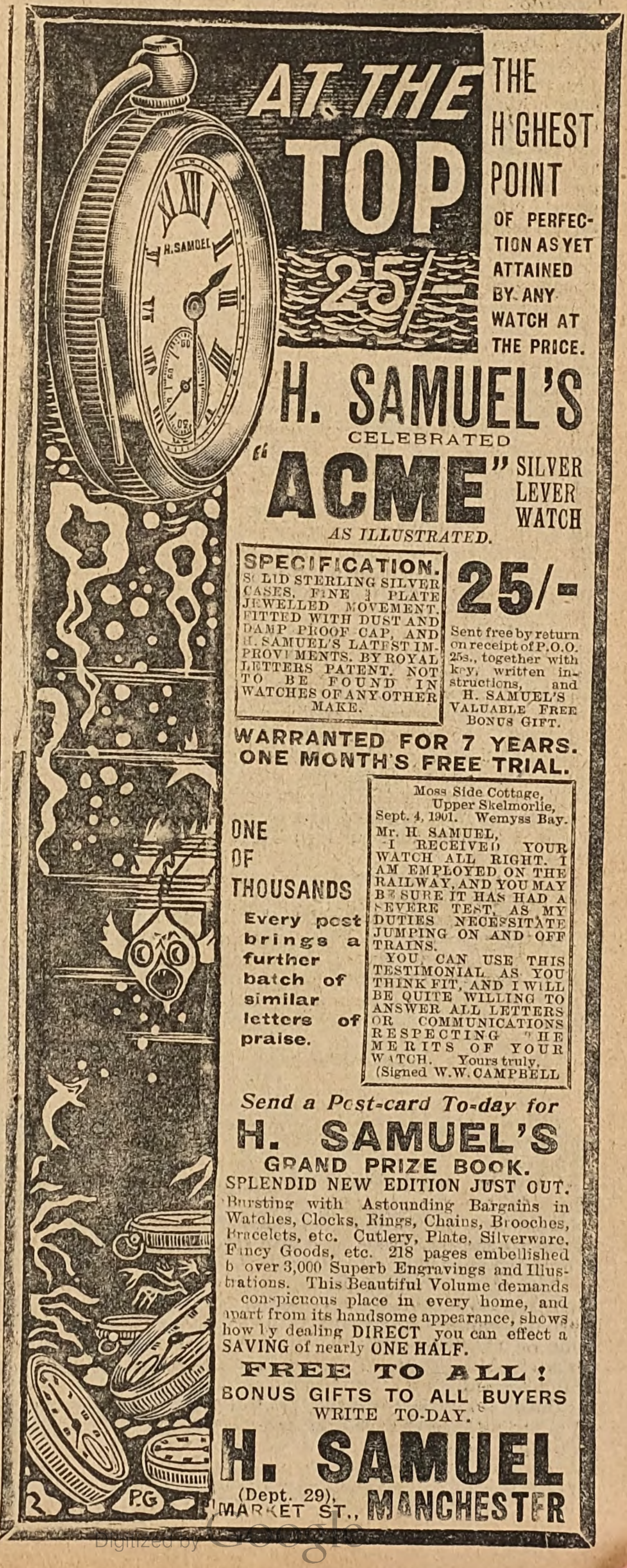

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meadows, and, breathless as he was, a great shout escaped him, a shout of exultation. Yes! he had him now, there in the moonlight, just as he reached the top of the swell in the meadow, he beheld the gleaming of the silver ribbon of river right ahead of his quarry. Surely that would stop him, for the channel was deep and the current notoriously swift and strong.

Jack Branscombe pressed on and on, reached the sedgy margin of the swirling waters, there was a splash, and he had disappeared beneath them and presently had come up again to the surface and was striking out with all his strength for the opposite bank.

But Rossiter, racing up, was not to be denied. He too plunged into the ice-cold racing stream. He too struck out, and by the time the man he chased had reached the opposite bank he had reached the centre. And then, suddenly, a cry escaped him as he felt the icy chill strike upon his heart and brain, as well as on his limbs like a knife! Cramp, like iron shackles, held his bent elbows to his side. He spun round in the swirling torrent, and his face gleamed white and deathly in the cold, blue moonlight as, ceasing swimming, he was born along by that fierce, full-flowing tide.

Jack Branscombe, hearing that cry, paused half-way up the bank and looked back at his pursuer, listened to his despairing cry. "He's done—he's drowning," he muttered. "And he's a man, he's threatened my liberty, striving to drag me to an unjust doom; but he was only doing his duty, he doesn't know, but God knows all, and in God's sight I shall be indeed a murderer if I speed hence and let him die!"

And, brave, true man as he was, forgetting all except that his fellow man was vainly struggling there in peril, he rushed along the bank till he had overtaken that helpless form born by the rushing stream, then plunged in. A few swift strokes, and just as that mass was sinking 'neath the tide, he caught it, clutched the drowning man, lifted his face above the waters, and now pushing, now dragging, striking now with this arm, now with that, but always with those legs of iron muscles, he got him to the side, dragged him out, sat him on the bank, undid his collar, and taking a flask from his pocket put it to his lips.

A little while and Rossiter's eyes opened; a big shiver ran through his frame.

"It's you—you who saved me?" he murmured. "You, I was trying to drag to prison, perhaps to the gallows."

"Yes, I saved you. I swam back and risked being taken because I wouldn't let you drown. Listen, man, you were only doing your duty, but man to man, do you think that the man who did what I did could be a murderer?"

"By heaven, I can't think it!"

"Or a liar?"

"Too big a man to be a liar."

"Well, then I'll tell you. I, who have risked what I have to save you, I tell you on my word of honour I am innocent."

"Yes, yes, but innocent or not, get you gone—get you gone before my strength comes back. Oh, man! get clear away; duty's duty, but heaven send it mayn't be mine to clap the irons on those strong wrists that held me above that ice-cold cruel tide."

And with a gulp in his voice he watched the man he had pursued plunge once again into those black and swirling waters, watched him with strained eyes clamber out on the other side, then, turning round, he threw himself full length in the grass, hiding his face in his folded arms.

"No, no!" he murmured. "I'm done—I'm done—I'm too dead beat to follow, too dead beat to even watch which way he goes."

(To be continued.)

HIS REVENGE.

"Ha! you refuse me, do you, Miss Hamtagg?"

"I do, Mr. McStab," said the young lady, coldly.

"Then listen to me, Rachel Plickergy Hamtagg!" he hissed. "I swear you shall bitterly repent it!"

Wild whistled the bleak wind. Dismally moaned the huge elm tree that rasped and scratched itself against the cruel edges of the tiles on the cornice, and gruesomely groaned Algernon Fitz-Thompson MacStab, as he stole forth in the dead of night to the ancestral smoke-house in the back yard.

"I'll show her!" he muttered between his teeth.

From beneath his coat he drew a compact bundle of letters, cut the string that bound them together, struck a match, made a bonfire of the collection, and watched them slowly consume to ashes.

He was burning letters written in happier days to Rachel Hamtagg. She had returned them to him.

* * * * *

"This is so sudden," said the widow, blushingly, "and so unexpected. I—I thought your visits to our house were for the purpose of seeing my daughter."

"She is too young," replied the visitor decidedly. "I told her so last evening. We parted in a friendly spirit but I gave her to understand as delicately as I could that I should not call to see her any more. This is sudden, it is true, but I trust none the less agreeable. May I not venture to hope?"

"Why, sir, I——"

"And now, my dear," he said, at the expiration of a happy half-hour, as he gently lifted her head from his shoulder, "I should like to see your—or perhaps I ought now to say our—daughter, to tell her of this happy event."

"Shall I call her?"

"If you please, my dear."

"Rachel," said Algernon Fitz-Thompson McStab, pleasantly, "you will be glad to know, I dare say, that I am to be your father. You may go, Rachel. Please close the door, my child, as you go out."

He: "Do you like animals?" She: "Would you feel flattered if I said yes?"

Mr. Jones: "Madame, let me tell you that facts are stubborn things." "What a fact you must be," replied his wife.

"You say that you saw that chicken killed?" "Yes sir." "Then you must be a good deal older than you look."

Tourist (to yokel): "Can you tell me if I shall pass the 'Red Lion' on my way to Ashcombe?" Yokel: "Well—er—you might, but I shouldn't."

Rev. Mr. Arlington: "You should always be particular about details, Miss Tucker. It is the little things that tell." Nellie: "I know that. I have three small sisters."

"Jimmy, my child," the fond mother exclaimed, "don't eat so much of that lobster salad. You'll be ill to-night." "Well, ma, if I am you'll know what's the matter with me, anyhow."

"What on earth are you engaged to three men for?" said Blanche to Sue. "You can't marry them all." "No," replied Sue, "but by working up a little competition among them I can probably induce one or the other to hurry up and earn enough to marry on."

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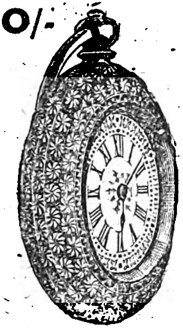

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When we send Watch subject to 7 days' trial; if approved you can complete purchase by 9 monthly payments of 3s., or one payment of 27s., when we make you a present of any article to the value of 3s. as discount.

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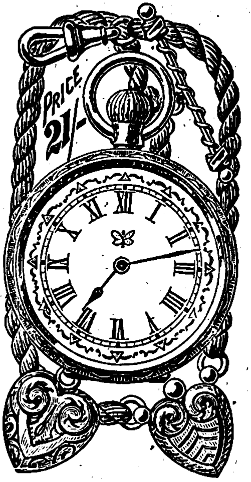

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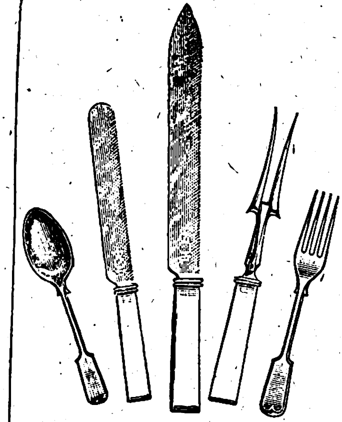

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by apparently similar parcels extensively advertised by retailers, the knives in which are of inferior workmanship and only bone-handled, and the forks and spoons common white metal. We guarantee every knife in the "Sheffield" Parcel to be of the finest hand-forged Sheffield steel, with zylonite ivory handles, which cannot discolour, and the forks and spoons are made of pure nickel.

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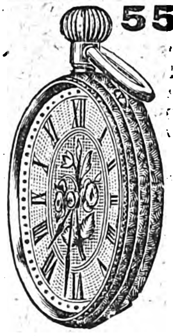

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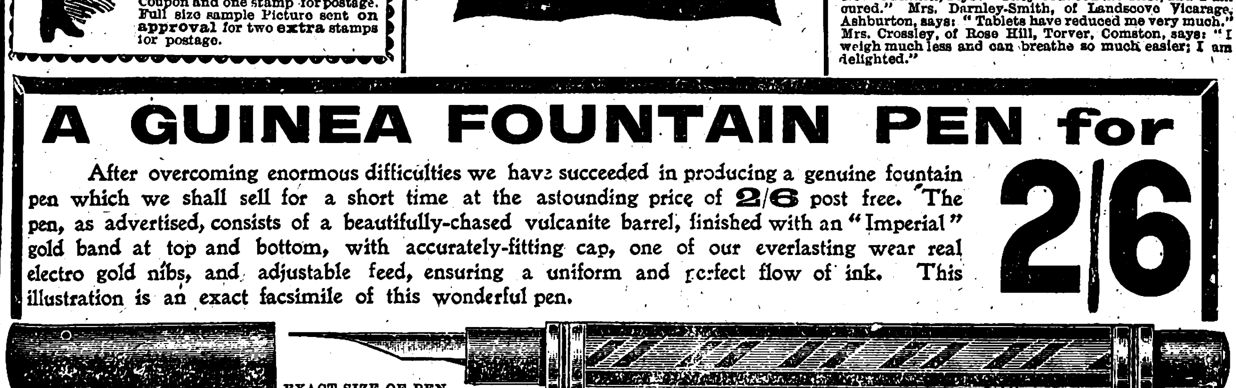

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HAIR RENEWER.

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And why, pray, is the successful poet, playwright, and journalist an eminent authority on hair restorer? Eager for an explanation, a *Daily Mail* representative sought out Mr. Sims. . . .

Now Mr. G. R. Sims, as many people know, is one of the busiest men in the kingdom, but hastily affixing his signature to a letter, he looked up and extended a characteristically cordial welcome. Then he said: "I will explain. I found that I was rapidly going bald. Not seriously, you understand, but the thinning out was sufficiently marked to set me thinking out a remedy. I went to two specialists, both of whom cheerfully assured me that I should be absolutely bald in two years.

"Then I discovered the preparation which is now placed upon the market. **I found that I had hit upon a remedy capable of working wonders. Look at my hair now, isn't that convincing evidence of the value of my preparation.**

"Ladies confirm my good opinion of it as a dressing for daily use. Mrs. Brown Potter, whose beautiful hair is the admiration of the entire lady world, writes that she uses nothing but 'Tatcho.' There is nothing to prevent every woman from making her hair silken in texture and bountiful in volume, for she can obtain a bottle of 'Tatcho' now in every town or even village."

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Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. To those readers who submit storyettes which are used, a six shilling novel will be awarded. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, December 2nd. Post-cards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. for the best storyette published this week has been won by Mr. D. O. Jenkins, of 18 Windsor Street, Trecynon, Aberdare, whose contribution is denoted by an asterisk thus.*

His Trouble was Different.

"COME, old man," said the kind friend, "cheer up, there are others." "I don't mind her breaking the engagement so very much," said the despondent young man. "But to think that I have to go on paying the instalments on the ring for a year to come yet. That is what hurts me."

He Couldn't Bring it.*

A LITTLE boy went to a school for the first time at the age of six. On entering the school the master took out a book to enter new scholars' names and addresses. When the boy was asked the number on the door of his home he didn't know, so he was told to bring it next day. On entering the next day he was asked if he had brought it. The boy replied: "No, sir, it was nailed too tight to the door."

He Missed His First.

A SPEECH which had a pathetic as well as an amusing side is said to have been made by an old "down South" farmer on the occasion of his second wedding. "Neighbours," said he to those who had witnessed the simple ceremony, "you all know this good friend that's consented to marry me is something of a stranger in our town. Now, I feel kind of insufficient, being only a man, to make her acquainted with everybody as quick as I'd like to, so I'm a-going to depend on you women folk," he added, with a confiding smile at the members of the gentle sex, "to make her feel at home among us, just as my first wife would do if she was here to-day. I miss her consid'rable all the time, but more'n usual on an occasion like this."

An Enthusiastic Engine-driver.

I HEARD the other day of an engine-driver, employed on a little out-of-the-way line, who was exceedingly fond of football. One afternoon, the signals being against him, he pulled his train up, and then found that two schools were playing a match in the field just in front of him. The engine-driver was so intent on watching the game that he forgot all about the signal, and so did not see that it had been put down. A fussy old gentleman in the train, however, noticed that the signal was down, and called to the guard to know why the train was at a standstill. The guard went to the engine-driver. "What are you up to, Bill? Can't you see the signal down?" "Is it?" said the engine-driver, without looking up; "then you go and tell the chap in the box to shove it up again. I'm going to see this match out!"

The Sailor and his Watch.

"PAPA," said a little boy to his father, "are not sailors very small men?" "No, my dear. What gave you such an idea? Some sailors are very large and powerful men. What makes you think they are small?" "Because," said the little fellow, "I read the other day of a sailor going to sleep on his watch."

He Waited for Instructions.

A FEW years ago the native station-master of an out-of-the-way railway-station in India was suddenly attacked by a fierce man-eating tiger, made bold through hunger. The startled assistant immediately rushed to the telegraph office, and wired to the European station-master at the next place on the line as follows: "Tiger on platform, eating station-master. Please wire instructions."

They Followed Precedent.

A VISITOR from another town had been invited to address the village Sunday-school. "I am reminded, children," he said, "of the career of a boy who was once no larger than some of the little fellows I see before me. He played truant when he was sent to school, went fishing every Sunday, ran away from home when he was ten years old, learnt to drink, smoke tobacco, and play cards. He went into bad company, frequented stables and low tap-rooms, finally became a pick-pocket, then a forger, and one day, in a fit of drunkenness, he committed a cowardly murder! Children," he continued, impressively, "where do you think that boy is now?" "He stands before us!" cried the children, as with one voice.

Nursing His Fame.

IN a certain skirmish an officer got a slight scratch on his leg. The wound was a matter of great glory to him, and he nursed it through after days, growing lamer with every fear that the memory of his bravery might pass out of mind. One day, late in life, as he sat nursing his leg and pondering the glorious past, a young man, visiting the family for the first time, approached and sympathetically remarked, "Lame, Colonel?" "Yes, sir," after a pause, and with inexpressible solemnity; "I am lame." "Been riding, sir?" "No,"—with rebuking sternness—"I have not been riding." "Ah, slipped down on the pavement?" "No, sir," with actual ferocity. "Perhaps, then, you have sprained your ankle, sir?" With painful slowness the old man lifted his pet leg in both hands, set it carefully on the floor, rose slowly from his chair, and, looking down upon the unfortunate youth with mingled pity and wrath, burst forth in the sublimity of rage, "Go and read the history of your country, you confounded young puppy!"

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A YARD OF BABIES,

in fact, if you secure

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Is your photo on page 682?

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

A Half-guinea Fountain Pen will each week be awarded to the reader who is the sender of the most interesting query answered on this page.

THIS is the first week since the Photo Competition started that not a single £5 note has been claimed, in consequence of which five persons are the poorer by £5 each. Evidently my readers did not take the advice I gave them on this page of the issue dated November 9th about telling their friends of the competition. Five portraits appear again this week on page 582.

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ADVICE TO READERS ON VARIOUS MATTERS.

(*Replies to Correspondents.*)

"J. R." has been told that there is a dandy fish, so-called because it dresses itself up in some peculiar fashion in seaweed, and he wishes to know if this is so.

I do not find that there is any fish of that name. What "J. R." is probably thinking of is the "swell fish," so named, not because of the manner in which it entwines itself in seaweed, but because it is capable of inflating itself like a ball by swallowing air. Numerous specimens are to be found in the seas of most parts of the world.

"M. S." asks: "What is the steepest incline a man can walk up unaided by his hands?"

This depends entirely upon the surface of the incline, and upon the fact whether the man is barefooted or wearing boots. Under ordinary circumstances, however—that is to say, a man fully clothed, going up a macadam road—an angle of about fifty degrees is about as much as he can manage.

"Y. O."—The largest combs built by bees are to be found in India; they are as large as the door of an ordinary house. They hang from the branches of trees and from projecting ledges of rock. Bee-hunting is a profession in India, and the hunters are very clever. The usual method is to ascend the tree and get above the comb, then lower a stick, with a bunch of ignited leaves at the end, under the busy creatures, who are soon driven away by the smoke. The hunters pass ropes round the comb, cut it away from the limb from which it depends, and lower the comb to the ground. Vast quantities of honey and wax are obtained in this way.

"H. L. U." asks: "Will the hide of a cow or the hide of a horse yield the most leather?"

To the uninitiated it would certainly appear that the horse, being the larger animal, would produce the most leather, but this is not the case. From an average cow's hide thirty-five pounds of leather can be obtained, while the hide of a horse is only good for half as much. Comparatively speaking, the horse is exceedingly thin-skinned, while a cow is as tough in its natural outer covering as it is in its restaurant steaks, if such a thing be possible.

"SECOND."—Your question is one which is received very often at this office, and should anything happen to prevent its arriving on any day, the members of the staff are almost as much depressed as if they had lost a dear relative. Here is the answer again, and really for the last time. Two balls, one of wood and one of lead, and of unequal weight, dropped from the top of a tower at the same time, will reach the ground at the same instant. The reason for this is that the resistance offered by the air to all solid bodies is the same, whatever their nature may be.

"GRACE" is in sore trouble. She has recently had bequeathed to her, among other things, a number of beautiful pearls. Several of these have no lustre whatever, and are of a dull grey colour, and the local jeweller tells "Grace" that these particular ones have lost most of their value. She adds: "I have tried polishing them, but it is of no use. What is the matter with them?"

Your pearls are what is called "sick." In all probability they have been locked up in some strong box for years past without getting a glimpse of daylight or breath of air. If this is the case you should expose them every day for some time to the sun, and moisten them occasionally. They are "dead" if at the end of a month there is no perceptible change in their tinge. If this happens they have no intrinsic value worth speaking of. Odd as it sounds, pearls, like mortals, require plenty of air and sunshine to keep them in good health, and the more perfect the pearl the more likely it is to be attacked by mortal illness.

"LADDIE."—The most useful household commodity is undoubtedly salt. Besides being employed to season eatables, it is a simple remedy for earache, toothache, and headache; it will make cream freeze and butter come, it will take ink-stains out of cloth of any kind, it may be applied to cuts and wounds, to counteract frost and snow, to manure the ground, to ease the itching pain caused by irritable skin diseases, to produce vomiting or stop it as you please; in fact, it seems to be in every way indispensable.

"NELLIE" has broken off her engagement with a young gentleman after they have been corresponding for five years. She is anxious to know how his letters ought to be returned.

Why not employ a furniture removal van, and get the whole thing over in one journey?

"HOUSEWIFE" has been reading a paper in which the fact is mentioned that allowing the sun to shine on mirrors is injurious to them. "Can this really be true?" she asks.

Most decidedly it can. The action of the rays of light on the quicksilver which backs a looking-glass has the effect of finally rendering it incapable of reflecting an image. Therefore, "Housewife," keep your looking-glass away from the sun—and from the daughters also, if you are able.

"JENNY P." writes: "Will you please be kind enough to tell me if bread can be made with sea-water, and if so, are there any benefits to be derived from eating a loaf of the kind?"

My first impulse was to smile at your query, "Jenny P.," but the smile soon died out, for on inquiry I find that bread made in the fashion you describe is exceedingly nourishing, and especially so for those persons who suffer from wasting diseases. The bread is not at all salt, but, oddly enough, has a sweetish taste. Of course, the sea-water is allowed to stand undisturbed for a long time before being mixed with the flour, so that all impurities may have an opportunity of sinking.

"T. E. R." asks: "In which European country is the largest proportion of the population married?"

From the published statistics it appears that Hungary leads the way with 407 out of every 1,000. France comes next on the list, whilst the smallest proportion is found in Portugal, where only 310 out of every 1,000 of the population taste the bliss of wedded life.

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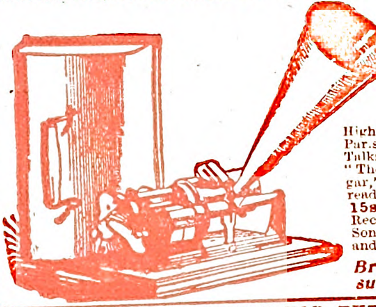

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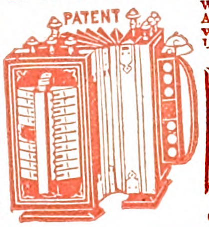

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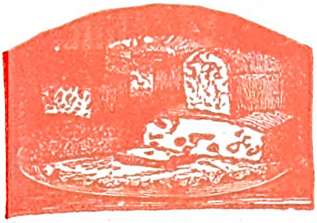

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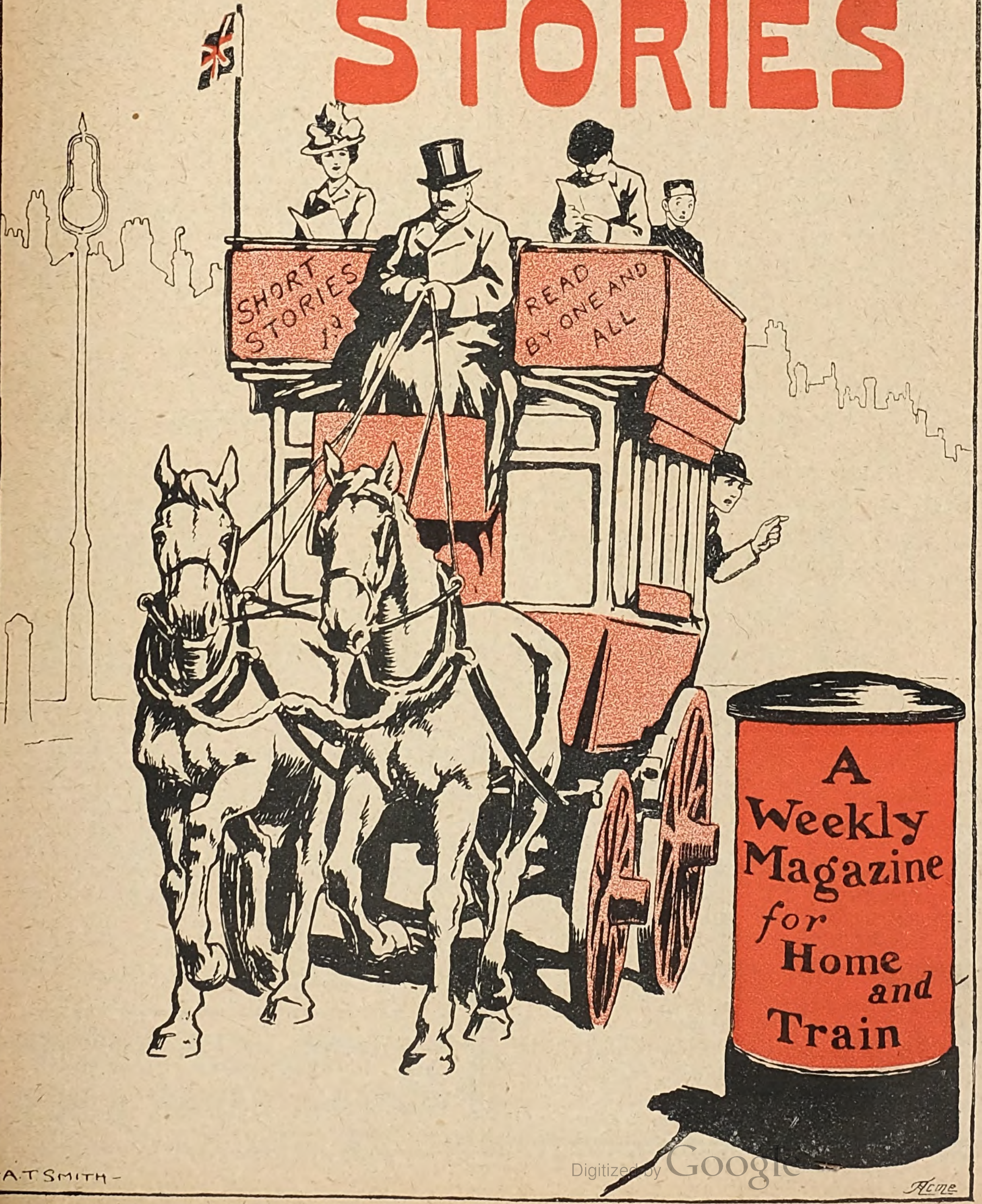
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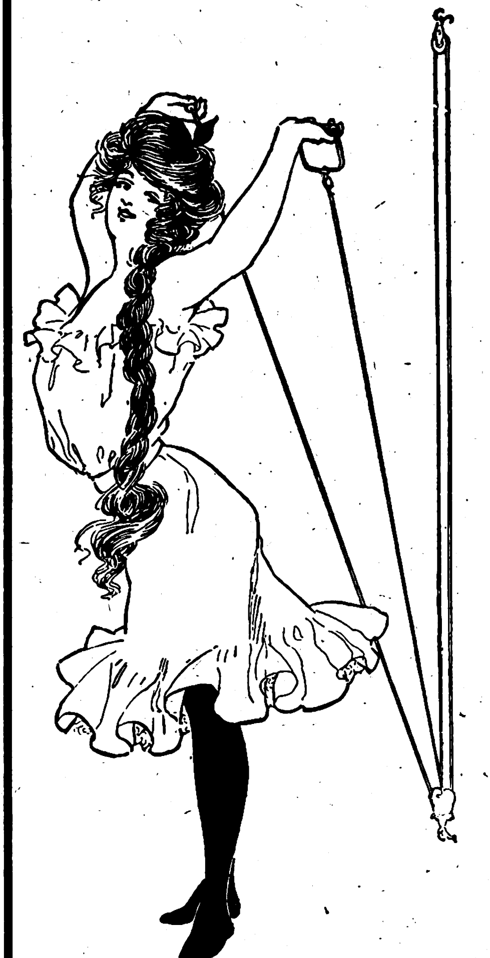

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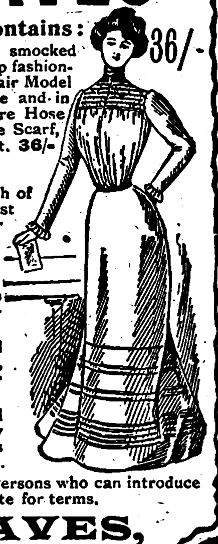

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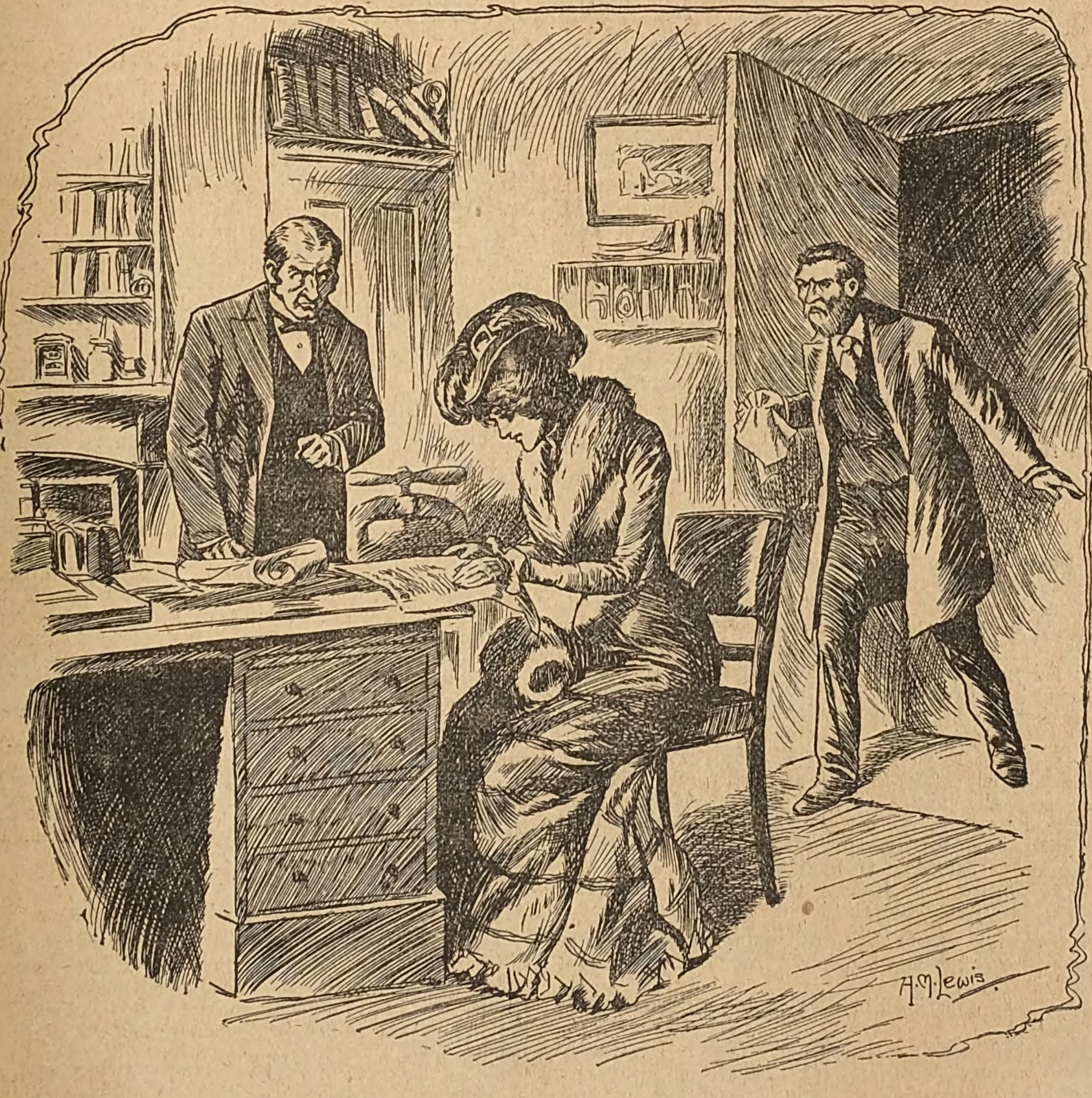

Not by the faintest sign or gesture did Murdoch betray the fact that he had heard his confederate enter.

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THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

XVIII.—THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

"A TELEGRAM for you, sir; three letters for Miss Harlow."

Such was the greeting that met Eric Monteith, Hazel Harlow, and Jenny Lovelace, as they entered the Theatre Royal, Cardiff, on the first morning of their arrival in the Welsh town.

Eric tore open the orange envelope with the feeling of misgiving that an unexpected telegram always brings with it to the recipient.

"Come to me at once," he read, "am very ill—Alice."

An expression of consternation left his lips. The telegram bore the London postmark so it was evidently his sister who had wired for him.

"I must go at once," he said, half-aloud.

In the meanwhile Hazel had listlessly torn open her own correspondence.

One of the letters ran as follows:

"Chancery Lane, London, W.C.,
"November 19th.

"DEAR MADAM,—My client, Mr. Edward Harlow, has requested me to write and inform you of the fact that he is seriously ill, and, indeed, desires to put his affairs in order in case of the untoward event of his early demise. Mr. Harlow has acquainted me with the affair that led to your leaving his roof and taking up the theatrical profession, and under the circumstances he is anxious to bring about a speedy reconciliation. I should, therefore, esteem it a very great favour if you would, as soon as your duties will permit of such a step, come with all speed to London, and confer with me here upon the subject. It would be exceedingly inadvisable for you to proceed to Honeycote without first consulting me, for reasons which it is much better to express verbally than in writing.

"Trusting to hear from you soon, believe me, dear madam, very faithfully yours, "JAMES MURDOCH."

Hardly had Hazel finished reading this somewhat extraordinary epistle when Eric turned to her and said in a low voice.

"My sister Alice is ill, I shall have to return to London at once."

And then noticing that Hazel's face had suddenly become imbued with a strange pallor, he continued: "But what is the matter, Hazel? Have you had bad news, too?"

In answer Hazel put the letter she had just read into his hand. He read it through carefully, and then said quickly, "This is indeed serious. Do you know Mr. James Murdoch?"

"Yes," replied the girl, "he is my father's lawyer, and one of the few friends with whom he has remained on terms of intimacy."

"Then that settles it," said Eric.

And after arranging with Venables as to their absence, they prepared for their journey to the metropolis, and as it would be evening before they could arrive at Paddington and Eric had begged Hazel to accept the hospitality of his sister's house. To this she had of course thankfully acceded. As the train whirled them out of Cardiff Hazel drew out the letter she had received from Murdoch, and re-read it carefully.

"It is rather an extraordinary letter," Eric said looking thoughtfully into her face, "I suppose there is no possible chance that it is still another vile plot to entrap you. But one thing, it cannot be the blackguard Caldecott's hand and brain that inspired it, for we know that he was in Brighton last week, and fully occupied with the mystery of poor old Gideon Lee."

"And besides," broke in Hazel, "Murdoch and Caldecott are sworn enemies. Mr. Murdoch hated the Squire, and I remember that they had a big scene some years ago at Honeycote. No, I can't help thinking that it is genuine, because Murdoch and my father have always been great friends, and I know that in a case like this the first man to whom my father would go would be Murdoch himself."

"Still, for safety," said Eric, "I think that if possible I'll come round with you to Chancery Lane to-morrow morning, and see if I can't get a word with Mr. James Murdoch. Of course it all depends upon my poor sister. I do hope and trust that she is really not so bad as the telegram would have me believe."

CHAPTER II.

JAMES MURDOCH was sitting alone in his private office in Chancery Lane. He was a grey-haired, hard-featured man, with keen grey eyes, and sparse, though vigorous frame, the beau ideal of an acute London solicitor. He was sitting at his desk, upon which was a pile of papers, holding in his hand a document that was in fact, the last will and testament of Edward Harlow, of Honeycote. Stripped of its legal phraseology, the will was as follows:

"I, Edward Harlow, do hereby leave my farm and all my money to my daughter Hazel Harlow under the following conditions. If, at the expiration of six months from this date she be still unmarried, the whole of my property shall go to her with the exception of two hundred and fifty pounds that I leave to my friend and legal adviser, James Murdoch. If, on the other hand, my daughter marries she is only to receive one half of my fortune and the farm, the rest to go to the aforesaid James Murdoch, but if, before the expiration of the six months she should marry or demise, the whole of my property is to go to James Murdoch."

The lawyer threw the paper down upon his desk.

"A most extraordinary will," he muttered, "and on the face of it a foolish one. Now there is one thing that Harlow doesn't know. He doesn't know that James Murdoch is on his last legs, and that if something doesn't happen before the expiration of six months there will be nothing for it but the Bankruptcy Court. But if Edward Harlow has made a fool of himself, there is no reason that Jim Murdoch should do the same. Why, just think of it. There is only a girl's life, my boy, between you and a very respectable little fortune. To-day is Monday; the girl would have got my letter in Cardiff this morning. Ten to one she will be here early to morrow. Is there any hitch in my plan? I don't think there can be. She comes here, disappears, and, well, I, of course, know nothing about her disappearance. It's a big risk, but there's a big stake in view."

At that moment there came a knock at the door. Murdoch thrust the papers away into the desk and cried curtly, "Come in." A clerk entered.

"A gentleman to see you, Mr. Murdoch, Dr. Vanstone."

"Show him in."

The clerk retired, and the next moment Dr. Vanstone entered. He was a small, insignificant looking little man, with a white pinched face adorned with a fair beard and moustache, and with a pronounced cast in his right eye. Altogether a most unprepossessing specimen of humanity.

"Ah, Vanstone," said the lawyer pleasantly, "charmed to see you. I hope you have good news for me."

Vanstone sidled up to the lawyer's desk, and drawing up a chair, sat down at his elbow.

"It's all right," he whispered. "I've got all the papers and the certificates. It's merely a question now of getting the bird into the snare."

"Good," answered Murdoch. "Let's have the details of the business."

"Well," went on the other, still in a whisper, "from this moment there is no more Miss Hazel Harlow, but the lady's name is Miss Cynthia Fallowfield. Here is a copy of her birth certificate," and he drew a paper from his pocket, "and a deposition from her guardian that her parents are dead, and that she is who she is. She has been living for the past twenty years quietly abroad with her guardian; a month or so ago she had a serious illness, with the result that when she recovered she was found to have lost her reason, and to believe that she was a Miss Hazel Harlow, an actress who had been forced to leave her home by the persecutions of a stranger. The hallucination grew on the girl so strongly that at last her guardian had her examined and procured medical affidavits to the effect that she was insane. I have all the certificates, and masterpieces they are, all executed by a little man in Shoreditch who makes a speciality of such matters. The legal part of the business is of course in your hands, and as regards my remuneration, well, I need not remind you of the adage, my dear Murdoch, honour among——professional gentlemen."

Murdoch took the papers and examined them carefully.

"These seem all right," he said briefly, "but you have not yet told me where the hospital is that is to harbour Miss Cynthia Fallowfield?"

"At the villlage of Whitton, near Hounslow. The proprietor of the—er, establishment is a personal friend of mine, a Dr. Whitaker Johnson, whom you can perfectly trust as being a reliable man."

"If he is a friend of yours, my dear Vanstone," broke in the lawyer with a harsh sneer, "the recommendation speaks for itself. As regards you remuneration, as soon as Miss Har——, Miss Fallowfield, I mean, is safely under lock and key, you shall have your thousand pounds. And of course I need not impress on you the fact that if you get talking about this business you will probably find a trip to Portland, and a sojourn with His Majesty for a good many years will be your only rewards. We are both in the same boat, my dear Vanstone, and it's sink or swim with the pair of us. Of course, if Miss Fallowfield should happen to—er—succumb to her disorder while at Whitton, well, so much the better for us."

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Eric and Hazel arrived at the former's house in Bayswater, it was to find that Alice Monteith had been prostrated by a sudden attack of brain fever, and that her condition, although not absolutely hopeless, was still alarming enough to convince the doctor that her life was seriously in danger. And when Tuesday morning came and the doctors plainly told Eric that his sister's life might flicker out at any moment he realised that it would be impossible for him to accompanyHazel to the office of James Murdoch. He impressed upon her most urgently the necessity for caution and advised her not to go down to Honeycote until she had returned and consulted him upon what the lawyer had told her.

This injunction Hazel promised to carry out and shortly after breakfast called a hansom and drove away to Chancery Lane.

As she mounted the stairs that led to Murdoch's office, a closed vehicle pulled up against the kerb outside, and remained there as though waiting for some one inside the building.

Murdoch's offices were on the first floor, occupying three rooms, communicating the one with the other, though there was a private door opening out of the rearmost one, the lawyer's sanctum, that allowed him to leave the building without going out by means of the clerks' ante-room.

Hazel was evidently expected and was at once conducted to Murdoch's room. He rose as the actress entered, and advancing, shook her warmly by the hand.

"It is a long time since I had the pleasure of seeing you, Miss Harlow," he said suavely. "I can only regret the cause that brings you here to-day, notwithstanding the fact that the same reason gives me the pleasure of renewing your acquaintance."

Hazel bowed. She never liked the man, and his bland words rang falsely in her ears.

"How is my father, Mr. Murdoch?" she asked coldly. "And why have you asked me here to-day?"

The lawyer motioned her to take a seat facing him. She sat down, with the result that her back was turned towards the private door mentioned above.

"I am afraid that my poor old friend, your father, is sinking fast," replied Murdoch throwing as much gentleness as he could into his hard unsympathetic voice. "It would be false kindness to deceive you on this point, Miss Harlow. Indeed, so bad is he that I felt it would be best for me to ask you here first before proceeding to Honeycote."

"But if he is as ill as you say, surely it would have been best for me to proceed there before coming to you. I take it that you only wish to discuss business with me. Could not that have kept a day or so? If my father is dying, common humanity demands my presence by his bedside."

"Not altogether," came the cold answer. "Will you be so good as to draw your chair up to my desk and give your very earnest attention to a document that I must show you," and opening a drawer the lawyer drew forth a bundle of legal-looking papers, carefully bound round with pink tape, and upon the outside of which Hazel could read, "*Re* Harlow Settlements."

Hazel complied with the request. The drawing forward of her chair drowned the faint sound made by the cautious opening of the door behind her. As Murdoch unbound the papers and selected one from amongst them, which he laid down before his unsuspecting victim, a man slipped inside the room. It was Vanstone, the rascally accomplice of the foul plot already in progress.

Not by the faintest sign or gesture did Murdoch betray the fact that he had heard his confederate enter.

"I want you to study this paper very attentively, Miss Harlow" he said decidedly.

Hardly had the words left his lips before Vanstone had sprung forward with the agility of a panther. He flung his left arm round Hazel's throat from behind, checking the scream of terror that rose to her lips with all the diabolical cunning of a professional garroter.

With his other hand he pressed a white cloth to her nostrils. The pungent smell of ether filled the dingy apartment. Her incipient struggles against this unknown terrible adversary were doomed to die at birth.

"Neatly done," muttered Murdoch, rising as he spoke, "Is the carriage below?"

"Yes. I must ask you to support Miss Fallowfield, as she must now be called, upon the other side. We can then help her down the stairs, and if we meet any one, you can say that your client has been taken with a sudden fainting fit."

As Vanstone spoke he drew a veil of thick net from his pocket, and fastened it securely across the unconscious girl's face. Then, as directed, Murdoch took hold of her under one arm. With Vanstone on the other side she was half-carried, half-dragged to the door, and out into the passage that led to the head of the stairs.

CHAPTER IV.

As luck would have it, towards mid-day Alice Monteith's fever took a turn for the better. The doctor was able to assure Eric that she was now really out of danger.

As can be well imagined, his relief was unbounded.

His thoughts turned towards Hazel. To his ill-concealed uneasiness he had heard nothing from the girl since her departure after breakfast, and, as the report about Alice was now so favourable, he determined to set out himself for Chancery Lane and learn from Murdoch where she was.

It was two o'clock when he reached the lawyer's office, to find to his chagrin that Murdoch had not yet returned from lunch. To his inquiry of the clerk as to whether a lady had interviewed the solicitor this morning, he was politely informed that such had been the case. Miss Harlow had been the name of the visitor. She had remained closeted with the lawyer for perhaps half-an-hour, and had then departed in a cab—whither the man was not able to say. Mr. Murdoch would doubtless return shortly. Would Mr. Monteith wait for his return?

Concealing his annoyance and general uneasiness at what he heard, Eric decided to wait. There was an unpleasant atmosphere of uncertainty about the matter that gave the young man pardonable ground for alarm. For had not Hazel promised to return to Bayswater before taking any further steps in the matter? And if she had only been half-an-hour with the lawyer, she would have had time to return twice over in the time that had elapsed. At about half-past two Murdoch returned. Eric at once took an instinctive dislike to the man, notwithstanding the fact that he was received with almost elaborate politeness. Murdoch was urbanity personified.

"I will be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Monteith," he said. "The reason I asked Miss Harlow to come and see me before first going to her father's bedside was because there was a legal flaw in Mr. Harlow's will that required adjustment, and that could only be done by a personal interview between Miss Harlow and myself. I would take you still further into my confidence, but you must know as well as I do that such a thing would be perfectly out of the question. A lawyer may not discuss his clients' affairs with strangers, no matter who they be. All I can say then is that Miss Harlow came here, discussed the affair under consideration with me entirely to my satisfaction, and left."

"And she did not confide in you where she was going?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders expressively. "I should not presume so much," he answered suavely, "as to counsel so eminently haughty a young lady as Miss Harlow as to what she should do, outside the immediate requirements made necessary by the fact that I am her father's oldest friend and legal adviser. And as you are probably aware the relations between father and daughter were not of the most cordial—are not, I should say."

"Then you did not advise her to proceed at once to her father's bedside? If he is your oldest friend, surely the least you could do would be to endeavour to bring about a reconciliation between him and his only child?"

The lawyer's crafty eyes narrowed vindictively.

"I might take exception to your tone, sir," he said icily, "were it not for the fact that I am convinced that it is nothing less than real personal interest in Miss Harlow that makes you cross-examine me so closely. The best advice I can give you is that you yourself travel down to Honeycote—there is a train at four o'clock this afternoon from Paddington—and find out by personal investigation whether Miss Harlow has gone to her father's side."

Smarting under a sense of ignominious defeat Eric drove rapidly back to Bayswater, faintly hoping that Hazel might have returned in his absence. But as we can well understand, there was no trace of her there, and as his sister was still on the mend, he determined to

Is your photo on page 719?

take Murdoch's sneering advice and take the four o'clock train to Honeycote. It was after all probable that if old Harlow was dying his daughter had thrown every other consideration to the wind, and had hurried to his side.

The train seemed to crawl to the little wayside station, and it was half-past six when Eric leapt out of the train upon the deserted platform, and inquired of a lugubrious porter if there was any chance of obtaining a vehicle to drive him to Harlow Farm.

As luck would have it, a countryman from an outlying farmstead beyond Harlow's place had driven in to meet the train, and offered to convey Monteith to his destination, an offer that it is needless to say, was accepted with alacrity.

The man was plainly interested to hear that so well-dressed and obviously gentlemanly a personage as Monteith was bound for Harlow's Farm.

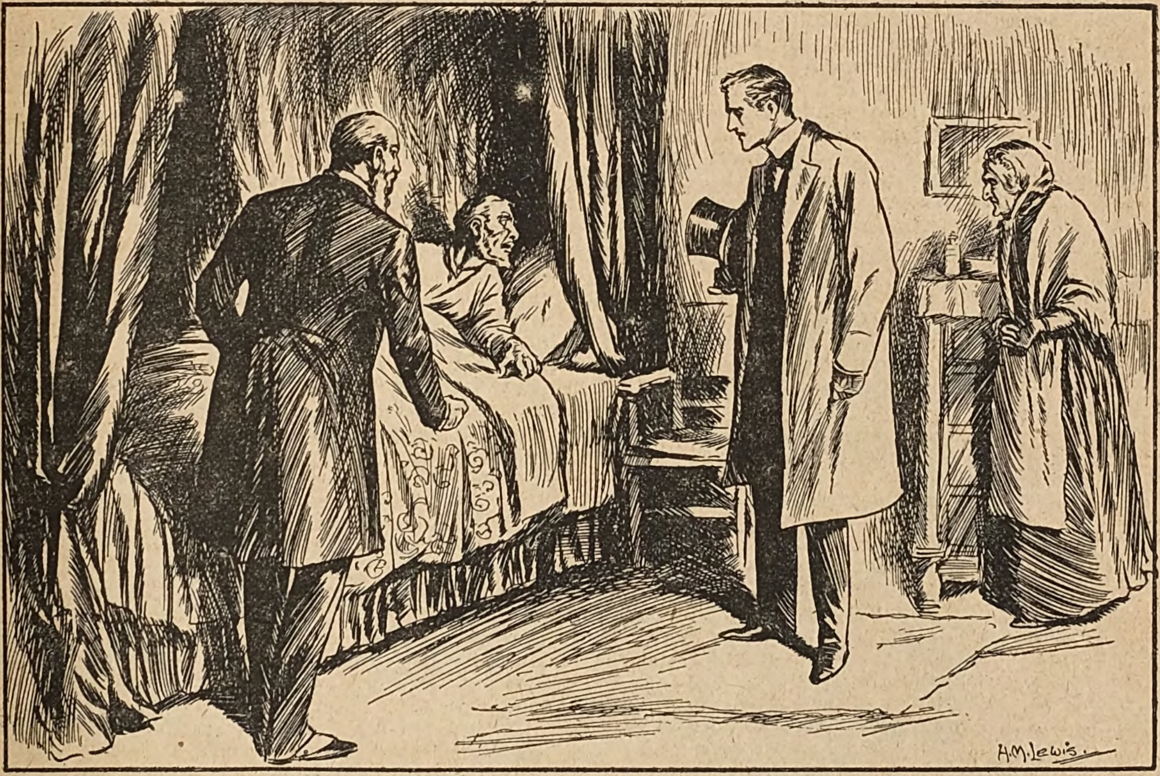
"I suppose you know he's dying, sir?" the fellow said, as they drove onward along the lonely country road.

"Yes," came the quiet answer. "It is that fact that brings me here to-night. Can you tell me what he's suffering from?"

"Well, sir, to tell you the truth, 'e's allus been a 'ard liver 'as 'Arlow. It's the effect of drink 'e's dyin' from as much as possible. Ever since 'is daughter left 'im, tho' it was 'is own fault that she ran away, e's taken to the bottle more than ever. And then 'e 'ad a rumpus with Squire Caldecott. And then the Squire disappeared, and we've 'eard all sorts of wild tales about 'im. They say 'e'll never dare show 'is face about 'ere again, though I never heard the rights of the story. But it seems rather a wonder that Miss Hazel 'asn't come down here now that she knows, as she must, that her father lies dying."

"Then she's not down here?" Eric tried to keep his voice calm, and to stifle the dread that caught suddenly at his heart.

"No, sir. But there's Harlow's Farm up there yonder to the left. My way lies straight ahead. Good night, sir, and thank you," for Eric had slipped a piece of money into his expectant hand.



"I'll! my little Hazel ill! Then I shan't see her again this side of the grave."

The young man followed the directions, and speedily drew up outside the old farmhouse.

So this was where Hazel had been born. Here she had passed her childhood's days, to fly away before the cruelty of the parent who from all accounts lay dying within. Where could she be now? Mechanically Eric advanced to the front door of the farmhouse and knocked gently at the weatherbeaten portal.

The door was immediately opened by an old woman upon whose face were traces of recent tears. There was no hall, and Eric found himself gazing into the old farm kitchen.

"Yes, sir?" said the old woman inquiringly. "What might you be pleased to want?"

Monteith hesitated, somewhat at a losst ok now how to begin.

Then he said, "How is Mr. Harlow?"

"Sinkin', sir! Sinkin' fast," came the reply, with a sudden burst of tears. "The doctor's within. It's piteous to hear him. He keeps asking for Miss Hazel. Why don't she come? Why don't she come?"

"I come from Miss Harlow," broke in Eric, not altogether truthfully, yet actuated to make the statement by a sudden resolve to shield Hazel from the heartlessness he knew her to be incapable of, and that he knew would be imputed to her unless he were to say something on her behalf. "She is ill, and cannot come. She asked me to come here for her. Believe me, she would be here if it were possible."

"I knew it! I knew it!" wailed the old dame, her tears breaking out anew. "I knew my sweet Miss Hazel was not capable of such conduct without a cause. Come inside, sir, come inside. Master must hear this from your lips."

Eric followed her inside the house, and up a steep flight of oak stairs devoid of carpet, and so into a long, low chamber.

At one end of the room was a huge four-poster bed, by the side of which was the local doctor. Upon the bed itself Eric saw the picture of a man, an elderly, grizzled haired, red-faced being, who lay moaning upon the couch, his gnarled hands gripping the sheets with convulsive grip.

The doctor looked up, and a puzzled expression came into his face as he saw this tall, well-dressed stranger enter the death-chamber.

"I come from his daughter," Eric said, in a low voice. Faint as the words were, the dying man heard them.

"Who are you?" he said faintly, "her husband, or what? Why hasn't she come herself?"

A dull wave of colour reddened Monteith's face.

"Your daughter is exceedingly ill herself, Mr. Harlow," he said gently, though it cost him an effort to utter the lie that he felt he must voice.

"Ill, my little Hazel ill! Then I shan't see her again this side of the grave." Harlow's voice had grown strangely gentle. The approach of death had chased away the roughness of his habitual tone. "Draw ye nigh, doctor, and you, sir, whoever ye be. I'm going fast now, and before I go I want to put everything straight. The last will I made ain't a straight one. I want to make another, and to get you two to witness it. Paper and a pen, quick, before it is too late. Write just what I say: 'I leave all my property unconditionally to my daughter Hazel Harlow, except two hundred pounds for Martha Jelfs, my housekeeper.' Have you written that, doctor?

"Then let me sign it quick. So! Now do you two gentlemen put your names. I reckon that will be legal enough. I've been a bad lot. Put down your head, closer, doctor. It's gettin' dark. Give my love to Hazel, and tell James Murdoch from me——" But the message to the lawyer was never completed. Before he could finish his sentence Harlow was dead.

CHAPTER V.

When Hazel Harlow recovered consciousness, it was to find herself in a small barely furnished room, with a window covered with frosted glass set up high on the wall. She was lying upon a couch, while over her bent a woman little more than a girl.

"How do you feel now, Miss Fallowfield?" asked the stranger, who was dressed, it is worthy of mention, in a kind of uniform similar in certain respects to the garb adopted by hospital nurses.

Hazel gazed at her in amazement. "Why do you address me by that name?" she asked wonderingly. "My name is Harlow, Hazel Harlow Do you mind telling me where I am?"

The other laughed. "Oh, of course," she said somewhat mockingly, "I forgot. You are Miss Hazel Harlow, an actress, and you are continually being persecuted by a man who wants to marry you!"

"You seem to know all about me," continued Hazel, her wonderment deepening. "Why then did you call me Miss Fallowfield a moment or so ago? And you have not yet told me where I am." Her gaze swept the bare little apartment. "Am I in a hospital? If so, why? Ah!" She gave vent to the cry because the memory of what she had gone through in the office of Murdoch came back to her with overwhelming distinctiveness.

The other looked at her curiously.

"Yes, you're in hospital," she said slowly, with a faint intonation on the last word. "And you're to stay here until you know that you're Miss Fallowfield, and have forgotten all about the rich lover."

The colour ebbed away from Hazel's face. While the other had been talking her thoughts had been busy. She was rapidly piecing together the links in the chain that had bound her so suddenly to the horrible truth. At that moment a horrid scream, the cry of a wild beast it almost seemed, rang out from a room near to hers.

She put her hands to her ears and uttered a moan of agony. "It is no dream, then," she muttered hoarsely. "I see it all now. I am in a mad-house. But why? Why? Why?" Then she turned to the girl, whom she now realised was her keeper, and flinging herself upon the ground, wailed out: "Save me, oh, save me, I implore you! I am not mad, I swear it! I have friends who will pay you well if only you will aid me to escape. I am Hazel Harlow, I swear it"—but the other put up her hand.

"It is not a bit of use your exciting yourself, Miss Fallowfield," she interposed quietly, "why there is a lady here who has offered me millions of pounds if I will help her to escape. Another said she would make me Queen of England. You know you are sent here for your good, to try and cure you from all the foolish hallucinations that torment you. So take my advice and keep your mouth shut about Hazel Harlow." With which she went to the door and left the room abruptly.

For a few moments after her departure Hazel sat motionless, staring before her with wide-open vacant eyes.

Could it be true? Could this be the real explanation of Murdoch's wicked attack? For what reason could he have committed so dastardly a crime?

Then her poor overtaxed brain broke down beneath the strain of attempting to solve the horrid enigma. She flung herself down upon the couch and burst into a paroxysm of wild tears.

Suddenly the door of the room opened for the second time. She did not trouble to raise her head, thinking it was only her keeper who had returned. Then a soft voice fell on her ears. "Don't give way like that, Miss Fallowfield," it said; "No one wishes to do you any harm."

At the speech Hazel sprang up anew with blazing eyes. "It is all a horrible conspiracy," she cried, "a conspiracy to drive me out of my mind."

The new-comer was clad as the other attendant had been. Her face, though pale and worn, had a sweet expression. There were faint tinges of grey in her dark hair.

She looked at Hazel intently for a few moments. Then a slight cry left her lips. "Listen," she said in a low voice, "can you tell me what happened at Newcastle some time ago in connection with the theatre there?"

There was something in the woman's voice that brought the colour back to Hazel's face.

She made a swift movement across the room, and laid her hand upon the arm of the other.

"Your question tells me that you know who I am," she said in her low sweet voice. "The Newcastle theatre was burnt to the ground, and it was only by a miracle that my life was saved. Your face tells me I am right. You know that my name is not Fallowfield, that a vile conspiracy has taken away my name, and thrust me into this terrible place!"

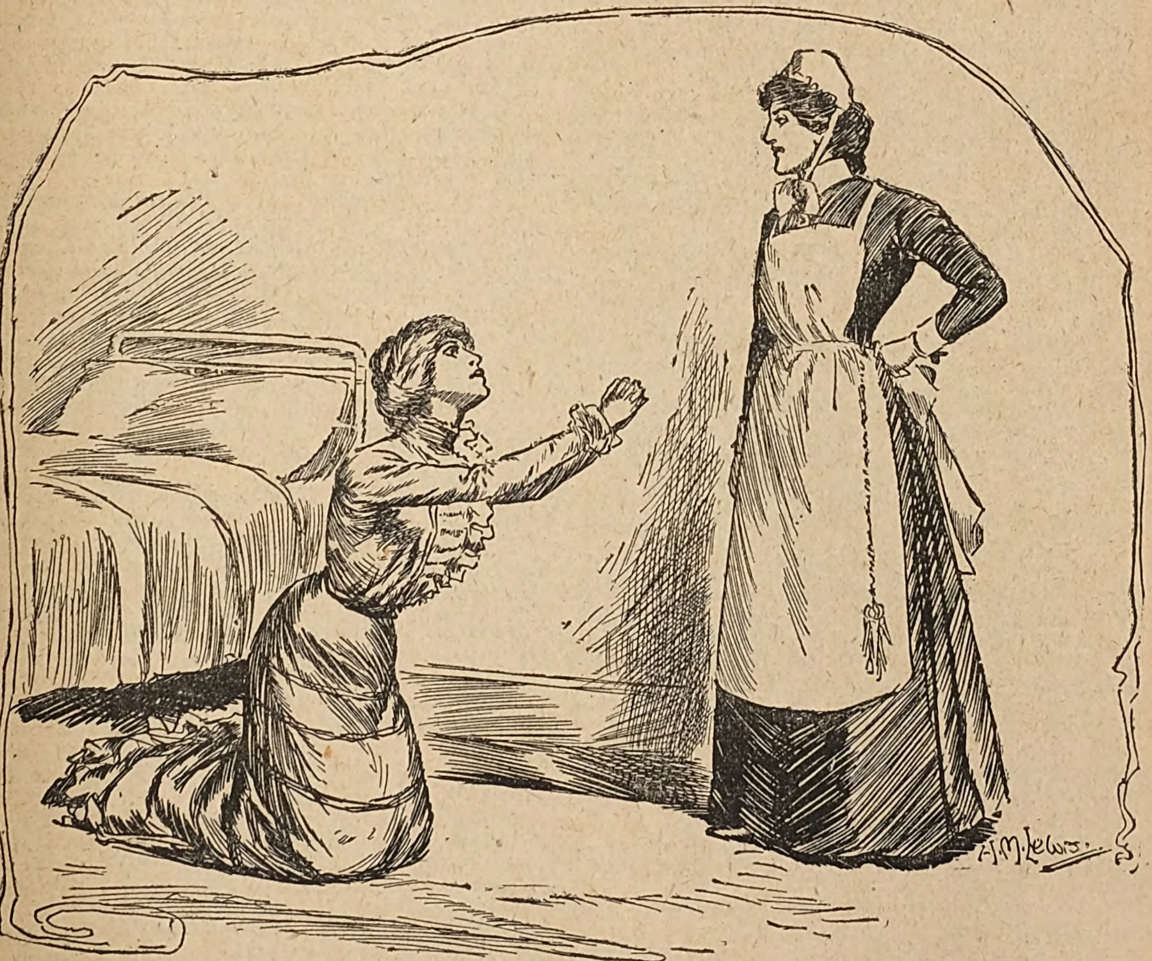
"For the love of Heaven do not speak so loud," came the answer, in a terrified whisper. "Yet it is as you say. I was in Newcastle that week, and I saw you act. I know there cannot be two such faces as yours in England. Yes, you are, you must be, Hazel Harlow. What does it all mean? What does it all mean?"

"It means that I am for some reason or other the victim of some horrible conspiracy. But thank God that at last I have found a friend. And you are my friend. I know it. Listen, and I can tell you how you can help me. Write to Mr. Eric Monteith, at 36, Chester Place, Bayswater. Tell him I am here He will save me and reward you for your goodness."

"I will, I will," answered the woman brokenly. "For I know that you are indeed Hazel Harlow."

CHAPTER VI.

It was quite out of the question for Eric to return to London on the night that had witnessed the death of Edward Harlow. A shakedown was found for him in the farmhouse kitchen, but, as can be well imagined,



"Save me! Oh, save me, I implore you. I am not mad, I swear it!"

there was little sleep for him that night. When morning came he departed to London by the first train, the same that had conveyed Hazel to London on her flight from the farm a few months ago, and in his pocket was the last will and testament of the man whose death bed he had attended. As can be well imagined he was all anxiety to get home for two reasons. Firstly there was his sister Alice still ill. Secondly, he was in hopes of hearing news of Hazel. It was eleven o'clock before he reached London; he found to his relief that his sister was still on the mend, and that there was no word from Hazel, neither had anything been heard of her.

Monteith was almost at his wits' end to know what to do, that there had been foul play somewhere there could be no doubt, but whether it was the hand of the villain Caldecott that was traceable in the affair, or James Murdoch, had yet to be proved. The finger of circumstance pointed very strongly to the latter. Accordingly Eric made a fair copy of the will that bore Harlow's signature, and stowed the original carefully away in his strong box with his other private papers, and then determined to seek out Murdoch and confront him with the document, for he had now strong suspicions that it was Murdoch who had somehow done away with Hazel, in connection with the will that the dead farmer had revoked in his last moments. And had not Harlow's last words had reference to the lawyer? As he had expected, Murdoch refused to see him, but Eric was not to be put off thus. Before the clerk in the outer office could prevent him he had swung open the inner door that led into the ante-room that had in its turn access to Murdoch's own sanctum, to enter the lawyer's own office without the least ceremony.

Murdoch was seated at his desk. As Eric swung into the room he rose to his feet with an evil scowl.

"May I ask the meaning of this unwarrantable intrusion?" he snarled.

"Certainly," came the cool answer, "read that." And the young man flung the copy of the will upon the lawyer's writing-table.

Almost against his will, and impelled by an overpowering curiosity, the lawyer picked up the paper and read the document carefully through. His face showed but little surprise.

"Well," he snarled, "what does this play-acting mean? Anybody can write out a few sentences upon a piece of note paper."

Eric gave vent to a grim laugh. "Not so fast," he said. "That piece of note paper is a true copy of Edward Harlow's last will and testament. As you will doubtless see it post-dates all others, and is witnessed by Dr. Jeffreys and myself, who were both present at your late client's death-bed."

"It's a lie," almost howled the solicitor, springing to his feet and throwing off the last rag of self-control in his rage. "It's a lie! A put-up job to try and bounce me, but you needn't think to deceive me with your flimsy pretexts." And with an oath he tore the document through and through.

Eric watched him with a face of iron.

"I'll make you eat those words before you are much older, Mr. Murdoch," he said icily, "and I don't leave this office until you have told me what you have done with Miss Harlow."

His coolness recalled the other to his senses. With an effort he sank down into his seat again, though his face was deadly pale, and there were hard lines upon his forehead, and round his cruel mouth.

"You must excuse my outburst, Mr. Monteith," he said, in a changed voice, striving to appear once more the calm cold man of business. "The fact is I have had a lot of trouble lately in connection with Miss Harlow and her affairs, and, indeed, I was just on the point of writing to you to tell you that I thought I had a clue to the whereabouts of the young lady in whom you seem to be so strongly interested. The fact of the matter is that when she let my office yesterday (I have ascertained this from inquiries) she did not drive away in a cab as I supposed, but was seen to walk away with a gentleman in the direction of Holborn. That is all the clue I have to what became of her. I am indeed sorry, because if the will that you have in your possession is really a genuine one, it will be but little good unless Miss Harlow can be found. Of course I shall do all in my power to discover her whereabouts. I have already communicated with the police and with your aid we shall no doubt hear something of her before long."

During this speech Eric's eyes had never left the man's face. He knew that the lawyer was lying; he felt convinced he was wilfully deceiving him as regards the true explanation of Hazel's disappearance. It was as much as he could do to restrain himself from flying at the lying rascal's throat and endeavouring to shake the truth out of him by main force.

At that moment, fortunately for Murdoch, a client was announced. Eric was quite averse to making a scene under the circumstances, especially as he had such little data to go upon.

In the outer office was a District Messenger boy with a note for Monteith. Eric tore it open. It was an urgent appeal from the doctor to return at once, as his sister Alice had developed symptoms of a serious relapse. Eric ground his teeth in silent impotence. In the face of such an appeal there was no help for it. He must return at once to Chester Place. He arrived back to find Alice unconscious, a condition in which she remained for some hours, hovering precariously between life and death. One of the most famous specialists in London was summoned, and towards three o'clock the sick girl rallied; for the present her life had been saved.

A letter came for Monteith by the afternoon's post, written in an evidently feminine hand, and with the postmark of Whitton on the envelope. Listlessly he tore it open, but the moment his eyes glanced down the page at the written matter it contained, his heart leapt up within him. This is what he read: "Mr. Eric Monteith is urgently wanted at Pelham House, Whitton, as soon as possible after receiving this. He will there hear news of Miss Hazel Harlow."

That was all, but it was enough. Waiting to reassure himself that his sister was indeed better again, he dashed out into the street and hailing a passing hansom, directed the driver to Pelham House, Whitton.

"Why, that's beyond Hounslow," said the man sullenly, "I ain't going to drive right out into the country." But Eric leapt into the cab.

"Five pounds if you are there before five o'clock," he said. The cabman's demeanour changed. His eyes brightened at the prospect of such a bait, and he lashed up his horse, which was soon careering away in the direction of Hounslow. At the village of Whitton it was necessary to make inquiries for Pelham House.

"Oh, that's an asylum," answered the policeman they asked. "First turning to the right at the end of the street, and then the first big iron gates on the right again."

An asylum! Eric's blood boiled at the words. In a few minutes the panting horse was pulled up outside the gate, just as a distant clock chimed the hour of five. Eric pulled a couple of sovereigns out of his pocket.

"Wait here," he said to the man, "I hope to be back again before long."

He tugged furiously at the wrought-iron bell pull dangling at the side of the grim cast-iron gateway. A porter in uniform came out of the lodge just inside the gates and peering through the gate, asked Eric his business. A half-sovereign was thrust into his hand.

"Let me in," said Eric, "It's a matter of life and death." The palm oil worked wonders; the gates were flung open, and Eric stormed inside and dashed headlong down the drive towards the house, a severe red-brick mansion that must in Georgian times have been the abode of some court gentleman.

Again Eric pealed at the bell, another attendant threw open the door and looked in some surprise at the well-dressed breathless young man who confronted him.

"I must see the superintendent of this place at once," said Eric. Hardly were the words out of his mouth than a frock-coated, venerable-looking gentleman issued from a room at the back. "Yes," he said blandly, "What can I do for you?"

"Give me a word in private."

"Certainly, pray come this way." And the superintendent of the establishment, for such he was, ushered his unknown visitor into a comfortable ante-room leading out of the hall.

"First of all," began Eric, "do you know Mr. James Murdoch?"

"Perfectly," answered the other, "I presume you mean the solicitor in Chancery Lane."

"I do. Have you had any communication with him lately?"

The doctor knit his brow. "Really, my dear sir," he answered blandly, "I do not feel at liberty to discuss my private affairs with a perfect stranger."

"Then let me speak," came the hot answer. "My name is Monteith, and I have just come from the office of James Murdoch. I am personally acquainted with the young lady named Miss Hazel Harlow, whom I have reason to believe is incarcerated in this establishment under another name. You must know ever since the publication of Charles Reade's famous novel how strenuous the Government of this country were to revise the lunacy laws, and you must know, better than I do, what the penalties are for the false detention of persons who are absolutely sane. If you refuse to comply with my request and allow me to see Miss Harlow, I will set such a nest of hornets buzzing about your ears that will spell ruin to you, and the carrying on of this establishment."

The other man went pale to the lips at Eric's outburst.

"But my dear sir," he cried deprecatingly, "I am an honourable man, and I assure you that this establishment is carried on under the most careful lines. After what you have said I will be frank with you. Some time ago I had a letter from this Mr. Murdoch asking me if I would undertake the guardianship of a young lady whose trustee he was, and whose name was Miss Cynthia Fallowfield. He sent me papers fully attested by a medical man to the fact that this young lady was insane, and that she was suffering from delusions that she was a Miss Hazel Harlow, who was being continually persecuted by a rich lover. Miss Fallowfield had been educated abroad, and her parents were dead. The matter was investigated, and no flaw could be found and yesterday morning Miss Fallowfield was brought here by Dr. Vanstone, who is a man with a large practice in London."

"The black-hearted brute," broke in Eric, "I see it all now. Will you let me see Miss Harlow, who I assure you is an actress who has won great renown for herself in the provinces."

The doctor touched an electric bell at his side. An attendant appeared.

"Bring Miss Fallowfield here at once," said the superintendent curtly, giving of course the name by which Hazel was known in the establishment. The man retired, and in a few moments the door opened again and the same woman whose hand it was that had written the note to Eric, and who had so providentially recognised Hazel from seeing her in Newcastle, entered the room, preceded by the much ill-used actress herself. Hazel was very pale, but as she caught sight of Eric's face, the colour came back to her cheeks. She darted forward and flung herself unrestrainedly into her saviour's arms.

"Thank God," she muttered brokenly, "Thank God you have found me at last."

* * * *

When, early on the morning after Hazel's deliverance from the asylum the police were sent round, at Eric's instigation, to James Murdoch's office, it was only to find that the ruffian had given them the slip and had fled away never to be heard of again. Vanstone was apprehended and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment, while the superintendent of the asylum was severely reprimanded and mulcted in a heavy fine for his carelessness in not having more fully investigated the antecedents of the girl whom he had received into his establishment.

Alice Monteith recovered, thanks to the untiring devotion of Hazel, who gave up the remainder of the week to nursing her lover's sister back to life. And in Hazel herself a great change had taken place. Eric's unswerving devotion and knightly loyalty to herself had at last borne fruit, the seeds of love had taken root in her heart and were blossoming forth into full fruition, though the time was not yet come when she felt that she could unveil her feelings, and give Eric the reward he so ardently longed for.

Next week the *Good Samaritan* Company visits Bradford, and Hazel is the indirect means of the discovery of a fearful tragedy, details of which will appear in next week's *Short Stories*.

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THE WHITE JASMINE.

The "Imperial Bagdad," the city of the powerful Caliphs of the East, was in mourning. The shops were closed, and the bazaars with their thousand curiosities brought from far-off regions, did not gladden the eyes of the passers-by. At the mosques, men and women, prostrated on the stone floor, prayed fervently to Allah; for the flower and pride of Bagdad, the morning star, Leila-Radyah, the beautiful, the daughter of the Caliph, was dying—dying slowly of an unknown disease, and all the science contained in the vast Caliphate of Bagdad, or the gold spent by her frantic father, had been powerless to bring back to her cheeks the beautiful roses of health.

All the men skilled in medical science in Bagdad, magi from Persia, sages from Egypt, who had acquired in a wonderful way the secrets of medicine possessed by the ancient Egyptian priests, learned physicians from the Greek Empire; all had tried their knowledge and skill on the princess, and endeavoured to bring her back from the shadowy world she was soon to enter; but after awhile they gave up in despair, and declared that only Allah, the great Allah, could restore her to health; then the Caliph, to whom Leila-Radyah was as the light of Heaven is to the soul, bowed his head in mute grief, and with Eastern humility exclaimed, "Allah-il-Allah, it is fate."

One day, when the sun was sinking in the far West a traveller entered Bagdad through one of the gates which looked towards the side of the rising sun; a man advanced in years, his swarthy skin, and bright youthful eyes contrasting oddly with the snowy whiteness of his beard and hair. His dress, travel-worn and stained, and made in a different way from the prevailing way in Bagdad, indicated that he came from a long distance. The man approached an Arab standing at a street corner and said with quiet dignity:

"Take me to the palace of thy master, the Caliph."

The Arab answered simply.

"Come with me," and the stranger followed in his footsteps.

When at the door of the palace the traveller dismissed his guide, and said to the guard:

"I wish to see the Great Caliph; tell him that a 'Wise Man' from far-away India has come to cure the Princess."

The soldier took him to the Caliph, for he had orders to immediately introduce into the royal presence anyone coming on such an errand as this.

With great majesty and solemn countenance, the "wise man" advanced towards the Caliph. When at the foot of the throne he stopped, crossed his hands on his breast, and without kneeling, bowed profoundly three times, then waited for the sovereign to speak.

"What dost thou want?" asked the Caliph.

"Mirror of the faithful! Defender of the true faith, the fame of thy might and power hath reached even to the banks of our sacred river—the purifying Ganges; also of how thy daughter, the flower of Moslem, was ill and dying, and earthly science was powerless to save her from crossing the dreadful bridge; but I, O King! can save her."

"How can that be?" asked the Caliph in wonder. "Thou hast not even seen her."

"Thou hast said it, but the stars have revealed to me their secret, and I can save her from death. Take me to her."

On a couch, surrounded by her female slaves, amid cushions and silks of damask, lay Leila-Radyah, pale as moonlight; the two midnight stars which in health lighted her face were heavily veiled by her eyelids. She was supremely beautiful, even at her dying hour.

The Hindoo approached her couch, and with his hand touched lightly her forehead. She opened her eyes and closed them again, sinking immediately into the usual stupor.

Then the "Wise Man" walked towards the exit of the room and the Caliph went with him. The Hindoo walked by the side of the monarch, silent and thoughtful, and when they entered the throne-room, asked from the sovereign a secret audience.

Hastily dismissing everyone, the Caliph prepared himself to hear what the stranger had to say.

The Hindoo began to speak in a low impressive voice carrying conviction and hope to the heart of the poor father.

"It is decreed by Fate, that the Princess, thy daughter, leave this world for the one promised to the faithful, when four times the moon shall have shone full in the midnight sky; but Allah has left thee one hope. Only one thing can save her; and the remedy is as difficult to obtain as her illness is mysterious. Art thou ready to make every sacrifice?"

"Yes; if thou canst do aught for her, speak, and if she lives I will give thee gold, and land, and slaves; I will make thee wealthy; more, even her hand in marriage thou shalt have."

"No, King, I ask nothing, and only wish to return to my country when the Princess is cured. Gold has no charms for me, nor woman any allurements. Her hand must be the reward of her saviour; for I will only indicate what will cure her, and a young, vigorous man must go in search of it. Listen to me, O great Caliph!

"Far away in the West, in the region of the setting sun, is a land; the fairest land in this mortal world. Its name is Hispania. In this country the sky is always blue and pure. Its mountains shine like precious stone when stricken by the morning sun; soft breezes from the sea fan the leaves of tall, stately trees, and amid their foliage sings the bird with the flute-like voice, a song of love to the stars above. The ground is covered with a carpet of moss and flowers, with here and there a tiny rivulet, crystalline as a diamond, descending from the mountains and making its way towards the sea.

"In this paradise of earth cultivated by the hands of an houri, grows a beautiful white flower, exhaling a fragrance like unto that of the breezes of Heaven; if any one can go to that far-off land, and bring this

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heavenly flower to Bagdad before thy daughter dies, then she will live; for its perfume means life and health to her. Have this fact proclaimed through all thy kingdom and let those who wish to undertake the perilous journey go, and may Allah grant that they return in time."

Through all the kingdom the criers proclaimed the news, that if any man, however humble or poor he might be, could obtain and bring the wonderful flower from the Occident, he would have as a reward the hand of the beautiful Leila-Radyah.

Three powerful princes who loved Leila-Radyah started on the long journey in quest of the life-giving blossom.

The first, young and handsome Prince Ali, perished in the burning sands when crossing the Arabian desert.

The second, a nephew of the Caliph, Hassan, decided to make the voyage by water; so, on reaching the Mediterranean shore, embarked, and a few days later fell captive into the hands of pirates. He was set at liberty after paying a heavy ransom, and, tired of suffering misfortunes, returned to his native land.

The third, Ab-de-Rhaman, was a prince of the royal house of the Omnyades, a dynasty which had been overthrown by the grandfather to the present Caliph. Ab-de-Rhaman was young and handsome; Princess Leila-Radyah was the soul of his soul, and she also loved him, but the Caliph had sworn never to give his daughter to the young prince; but now, should he go and bring the magic flower, when the beautiful Leila rose from her couch she would belong to him, for the Caliph had promised her hand to her saviour, and a Caliph never breaks his word once given to his subjects. So he started from Bagdad toward Hispania with his heart full of love for his Princess. Well he knew the perils and difficulties that he would encounter on the way; but what cared he for all the hardships he would have to suffer, if only he could come back to Bagdad in time and with the beautiful blossom in his hand.

He crossed the desert of Mesopotamia and reached the seashore. He engaged passage in a Greek vessel bound for Gallia and Hispania, but a tempest threw him on the coast of Africa. Nothing daunted Ab-de-Rhaman continued his way on foot. He suffered hunger and thirst; he was taken prisoner but he escaped, and at last, leaving behind the burning sands and barren rocks of the African soil, he crossed the narrow sea between the African continent and Hispania. That night the moon shone full in the midnight sky for the second time. He stood on the rock of Jabel-Tarik, and gave thanks to Allah.

Beautiful beyond description was Hispania. The sky was bluer than the Indian sapphires, and the ground was carpeted with bright-hued flowers.

The kingdom of the Goths was established in Hispania, and Ab-de-Rhaman saw that the women wore their faces uncovered, Their eyes were of the colour of the sky, and their hair like sunbeams. Yet he saw no woman as beautiful as his Leila-Radyah.

The people spoke in a strange language and could not understand him, so they took him to a wizard, who passed his time collecting flowers of the field during the day, and at night looking at the stars from the top of an old turret.

The astrologer spoke to Ab-de-Rhaman in his own language, and it was like sweetest music to the ears of the exiled prince. He told the wizard his story, and received from his hands a beautiful pure white blossom with petals as white and soft as the silks of damask, and a perfume like unto that of Paradise.

The magician gave him a box of sandal-wood, of curious workmanship, inside of which the flower should be placed that it could reach the Eastern city fragrant and fresh.

How the Prince treasures his little casket, containing the life-giving flower. He thanks Allah, and then saying farewell to the astrologer, starts on his eastward journey.

Hardships, misfortunes are nothing to Ab-de-Rhaman; he has only one thought, to reach the Queen of the East, Bagdad the beautiful, before the moon has shone full for the fourth time in the midnight sky.

Night and day he presses to his heart his treasure, the sandal-wood box, with the health-giving flower inside; and at last one day, Ab-de-Rhaman sees, with the first rays of the morning sun, the minarets crowned by the crescent of the queenly city of Bagdad.

He hears the imam, who from the tall minarets calls the people to their morning prayer, and sees that the gates of the city are thrown open, then, taking off his tattered shoes, the Prince falls on his face, and gives thanks to the mighty Allah; for to-day is the last day of grace, and in the night the moon will shine full for the fourth time in the midnight sky.

He enters the city. No one knows him, so soiled and torn are his garments, and his hair and beard long and unkempt. He goes to the presence of the Caliph, and kneeling before him, says:

"Behold, oh great king! mirror of the faithful, son of our great prophet! Behold I bring here the flower that will cure the Princess Leila-Radyah," and the Caliph asks in wonder, for he had lost all hope of ever having the flower:

"Who art thou?"

"I am the Prince Ab-de-Rhaman," and the Caliph bows again his head, and says "It is fate," then, "Follow me."

Together they go to the bower of Leila-Radyah, and see her beautiful pale face. Now she hardly breathes but the "Wise Man" from India approaches her couch, gives utterance to some mysterious words, then places the white blossom beneath her nostrils, and calls her spirit from the shadows.

She opens her eyes, and the blood comes back to her cheeks and lips; then they know that she will live; but the beautiful white blossom, fresh and fragrant a minute before, is withered and yellow.

There was great rejoicing at the wedding of Leila-Radyah and Ab-de-Rhaman; but after awhile the Prince yearned again for a sight of that beautiful far-off land, which was the image of Paradise; and so it came to pass that he, at the head of a great army, crossed Africa, conquering everything on his way, and crossed again the straits of "Jabel-Tarik," and defeated the effeminate Gothic King Rodrigo.

Beautiful Hispania was conquered and submitted to the Saracen rulers, and Ab-de-Rhaman was the first Caliph, the founder of the great Caliphate of Cordova, reigning many years in glory with his beautiful Sultana Leila-Radyah.

The wonderful sandal-wood box was preserved to the last of the Saracenic rule in the mosque of Cordova, then it was lost, but the jasmine was always considered by the Moslems, in Spain, a sacred flower.

H. Clifford.

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A Mother's Agony.

I was sixteen yeares i' that yeare o' th' flood at Hampton, whereby my father, Robert Moody, came to 's end—his boat and he being lifted inland, they sayd, almost in sight of our home, and then drawn down to death by th' mighty arm o' th' deep seas. Well I mind our home. 'Tis a small place where three littel pines stand in a row, the length of a meadow from th' common field and oure next naybur—a solid, low house under big trees, and well set about with palisadoes—the Garrison House they began to call it that yeare.

My mother, Mistress Betty Moody, could scarce abide in oure house before my father's dreadfull daye—so fearsome was she of redskins. For alle th' world doth know that in that yeare—'twas ten yeares before King Charles died—th' red men harried all New England. After th' flood she grew so passionatelie afeared that if a hen did but cackle on a stone step th' cloud would grow upon her features like a sea turned upon th' land, and she would catch up th' babe, glancing fearfullie at my brother cutting wood or hoeing the patch, and me upon th' dye-tub knitting. And of moonlit nights she would stare from our lattice upon the deepe woods.

"Child," she had said to my brother often, as we all peered together, ready dressed for a flight, "does that bush move? 'Tis th' color of th' pale ground."

The Indians forayed in white, to shimmer along in th' silence of the moon like vapors lying next the ground."

"Deare my mother," my brother would say, looking bigge as he could, but trembling, too, though he sayd 'twas because the April night was chill, and the woodpile too small for a brave heat, "hast thou not me? And the Garrison-House so near!" Robert alwaies added this last, though he was a brave dark boy, like our father in 's face, straight-browed and looking with level eyes. He would cry when he fondled the babe such nights—'twas a sweet girl babe and white like our mother. And finally, when one night came a man riding hard to tell that Watohantowet—who had long disputed boundaries—was on the war-path with manie braves, my brother was fain for alle his serious talk to lay hold of as many trenchers as he could carry, and order me to bring the bed, our mother following with her babe.

There came no Indians, and we went back i' th' home next day. But the spring was hard to bear. Robert did well; but one day i' th' last o' spring he came and did throw himself on th' floor in a sweat.

"Rose!" saith he, "there is but one hen with a whole suit of feathers," saith he. Indeed, a murrain had settled upon our poor fowls, giving them naked crops and backs which blistered i' th' sun. "And all th' maize be yellow," saith he. "There is no hill that is good and greene; and thou knowest how I have watered it!"

It was a hot afternoon, with a shore wind. Our mother's hair clung to her pretty temples in littel damp rings, as she sewed at th' bed valence, sweet with lavender—our mother was e'er dainty in bedding.

"Lie, rest, my good lad," saith she. "When th' sun's down Rose and I will help carry water. I know how to dig about th' roots. Thou shalt not lose thy maize!" And she smiled tremulously as one's still civil to acquaintance on th' day of one's distress.

When that it was coole, our mother was as good as a' word, carrying full piggins from th' spring with haste for fear o' th' babe's awakening. After shoes were bad and they did tear upon the stony dirt, th' skin reddening i' th' slits; but so she only flew the faster, her arms straining with her loads. Then would she fall to and dig, while th' damp settled, and th' frogs i' th' pools clamoured. And then in, when we could see a blade no more, with hand at her back, bedraggled and footsore, but with kinde white looks at Robert and me as we raked th' ashes off th' stick and warmed th' bread.

But our maize was ne'er to be harvested. Another fell story came to Hampton of more Indians coming from inland. Anell I wot how my mother paled and screeched "Robert! Robert!" when the naybur body told it, smoothing her pinners by oure hearthe. My brother rushed in from th' patch; but he saw, and I did, 'twas our father she was calling.

I sat me down to spin next day, my stint being marked for me. 'Twas a fayre morning, and Robert, outside, went back and forth like th' shuttle i' th' web i' our field. And mother she put on th' crape shawl—'twas foreign, and flowered most beautifully—and taking th' babe in her arms, she starts for th' beach for an airing. I can see her yet when I close my eyes—slender, of a willowy shape, hurrying across th' fields i' th' salt ayre—th' little white bundle in her arms.

Now, she did go to a hairy captain of a great smack i' the harbour, and says she with a curtsey—our mother was aye mannerlie:

"I am Robert Moody's wife and I have in mind to live at th' shoals. Wilt carry out my gear?"

But he looked with a weary face at my littel mother.

"Best stay on th' mainland, good wife! Thou dost not know what is life on th' Shoals! Thou canst not help pull in a trawl!" said the man.

"No, but my son can," said our mother quickly, and lifting her timid eyes. "He is fifteen, and brawny."

"Oh, if thy son can work!" said th' captain. And th' bargain was clinched by th' crape shawl for 's dame.

Oure mother did plan this flitting because those seven islands, nine miles from land, had been a sure refuge from red men. Dreadful folke of th' seas went there, but Indians never.

In another weeke we were far from our hollyoaks and our dear rustical porch. The Toppans o' th' Garrison House helped us off, even running with a

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flitch of bacon when we were upon th' load, Mr. Toppan seeming in a browne studdy over my mother's glittering eyes; but he said nothing. Our gear was woefullie broken in th' handling, Robert breaking the green beaker as we crowded upon th' smack—he having th' glass in 's hands for safety. Oh, th' intolerable smells of our craft as we went rockin' and dipping over th' green waves! We could say but naught and cover our heads close as th' sailors advised for sickness, till at length, when Robert and I came up for breath like fishes, lo! great and small fields before and round us set upon the sea like th' stones i' th' splendid ring upon Lady Pickering's finger. But, alas! Hampton was now a littel rimme of a wurld of water.

Our home on th' Shoals was a close chamber of a miserable hut, our bed with its hangings occupying half th' space. Onlie one pane i' the casement, and that upon a prospect, oh, dolefulle! of th' deep seas. We all thinned for th' swete fresh ayre of Hampton, and th' cleanliness and th' quiet and th' pleasant smells, sights and sounds. Our mother satte alle day at her wheel, and I at her feet, hetchelling flax and tow. And th' puny babe between us, minded too little sometimes. Then would come in Robert, with a great fish perchance, or a kettle of clams, and would take up th' precious mite into his leathern jerkin, not o'er clean to touch, and kiss and hug her till th' tiny maid's frocks were alle rumpled. 'Twas plain to see this wild life suited Robert. He liked th' sea. But tho' th' life pleased him, it harmed him, foul words beginning to stick in 's memory and fall from 's tongue.

The end came. One night we were stirred from sleep by a horrible face at our casement. 'Twas of a foul man, drunk ever, and sprawled upon th' rocks continuallie—'twas sayd he was to have been hanged on the land, and did never dare step off the Shoals.

"Wake, woman!" bellowed th' harsh voice. "Look, all of ye."

And as we huddled at th' casement he pointed o'er th' heaving waters, reflecting a full moon to a flock of canoes like swimming birds. We could see dark forms i' them, steering with arrowy paddles.

"Oh, what shall I do?" shrieked our mother. "Oh, what shall I do?"

"Do?" yelled th' man; "hide thee! Hark ye! Hark ye! There's no time for boats, but there's a clift i' th' rocks back o' th' fish house. Thou'll know it by th' big balanced rock where th' babes play with kickshaws; 'tis below." And th' face was withdrawn.

"And thou?" I screamed after him.

"God a mercy, wench!" cried he, as he ran to other houses; "there be forty lurking places on Star."

How ghost-like were th' rocks; and th' booming sea was frightfullie neare this crevice to which we crept upon oure knees, letting each th' other down painfullie therein. Our mother drew herself in as far as she could, lying flat and face down upon th' slimy floor. I next, pressed close, and Robert valiantlie near th' mouthe of th' poor rift; 'twas soe small we were scarcely out of th' moonlight. So we crouched and quivered together till awful sounds began to rise, somewhat dulled by th' dashing waves anext us. Then Robert did creep in more, and our mother pushed us both to th' farthest and she, with th' babe, did lie upon us, guarding us.

But now th' poore babe unable to move its legs, and half-smothered in our mother's kirtle, began to roar lustilie. Oh, th' horror o' th' time! Again and again our mother tried to feed it, but it would not eat, and its cries were shriller and more shrill. We both turned in an agonie to look toward the unconscious little thing that was calling death our way; but our mother writhed herself out o' th' cave, went headlong forth into th' pit at 's mouth; then back anew upon us, trying with more than mortal endeavour, to still th' child; then forth again. Then a sharp wail, like a cat's cry when it is grasped by th' legs for killing, a thud, a shower of warm drops and flinty bits in oure faces, and oure mother drew herself in alone.

I cannot tell how terrible that night was! By times th' redskin went scampering and yelling o'er the rocks, smells of smoke drifting down e'en to us. Robert would put up a cold hand, touching us for companionship. But our mother replied naught in kind, as she lay upon us her whole length, making no sound, whether a sigh or a groan; but drawing long breath ever and anon, like one that is coming back to life.

'Twas light enow to see each th' other's face when she did draw herself out o' th' cave. All noise had long ceased. We children following, stiff, sore, and appalled, came upon her wordless, with a blood-stained bundle i' her lap.

Then up started she and darted out o' th' rift like a flame to th' smoking town. Alack! Our kind heralde had found no lurking place. Robert stumbled o'er him in th' ashes. Shoalers were landing from other islands, and to them our sad mother went straightwaie with her story, sparing herself not at all. I have seen death, but never have I seen anie sight so woefull as her drawn, tortured mouth and th' tale coming from lips that refused to close over her teeth.

There was silence; but 'twas dreadfull to see how all fell awaie from our deare littel mother.

When the tiny body was wrapped i' my kirtle waiting with th' other dead for th' trench to be deep enow, he did look fearfullie upon it with a long, shuddering "How could I?" and then clasping us wildly, "How could I not?"

A great armed dame from Smutty Nose opened wide her arms to our mother's littel figure, drawing her into them from our clinging hands and kisses.

"Thou poore soule!" saith she. "'Twas human nature," saith she. "By Heaven!" swore she, slapping a thigh roundly with her mighty hand. "There be not a mother on th' islands who would not have done th' same were she valiant enow; and yet—thou poor mouse!" and th' big mannish dame cried over my mother's hidden pretty head. And when all's o'er, 'tis she who leads my mother to a boat.

'Twas pitifull, oure mother's meekenesse amid universal blame; for when they did rebuild on Star nobody bade us return—day by day th' dames paddled over from Smutty Nose to watch th' progress of their new huts, and never a word to us—to our red-faced dame's high and loud displeasure.

Soe, as 'twas plain my mother was thought a piece of ill-luck and dreaded upon th' Shoals, we came again into the white curve of Hampton Bay, this time gearless as well as houseless, but by favour of th' Toppans, getting into our small home again in th' calm inland. Methinks I never knew how sweete a picture is th' country till I saw it then, after soe much paine. Th' sun shown with yellow light on th' mown grass and men were threshing th' nut trees and children and women were putting the nuts in baskets. And Mistress Toppan sent in honey i' the comb and bread hot o' th' oven to our supper. She sent it. Good-wife nor maiden came much to us then nor thereafter.

"Sis," saith Robert one day, stretched out like a wild beast along th' limb of our apple-tree, "dost know that th' court 'n Portsmouth are to find a true bill aga'nst mother?"

"What true bill?" I cried, feeling frozen.

"For th'—th' baby," stammered my brother. "And oh! to think I am strong; and my poore mother soe littel and weak, to hang!" and he stopped, choking.

"Thee need'st not fear that, lad," said Mr. Toppan's mellow, friendly voice behind us. We started, and Robert tried to hide 's tears. "I saw to a verity thy poore mother was distracted before she left us," saith he; "and I am much to blame that e'er I allowed her out o' my wife's sight."

Robert looked at him with a glance of his dark eyes like a caress. Sweet words were seldom on Robert's lips—they were hidden treasures for our mother alwaies—but the darting glance was thanks.

"I know, lad! I know!" saith Mr. Toppan, sighing. And again softly, "I know!"

People did not gossip of us long neither, leaving us to our shrinking selves by reason of a grand new arrival in Hampton—an officer from South, with a band of black footmen, and beginning the finest wooden house o' th' land around, set on a hill, and visible white and statelie from th' sea. 'Twas painted a white; the onlie painted house inne New England. General Moulton loitered about Hampton as his house built, spending doubloons. He never bargained, 'twas said. Did he have a need of aniething, 'twas bought, and no questions of price. These things would Robert and I heare when at work in barn and kitchen, soe few came to sit by mother on oure settle, where she sat all day long ailing. Not forty, and yet with streaks in her hair, and a looke in her eyes not to be worded.

A day in May, while mother and I were sprinkling th' darke, ill-smelling linen on our bleach-ground, there rides up th' general, in black velvet. His lips were thick, and his nostrils wide, but he was comely.

"Art thou th' dame who maketh linen sheeting?" saith he; "I do desire a web."

My mother was overjoyed at so greate an order—we had none too much i' the cupboard—and she hurried around her web on th' grass, patting and praising it and babbling with more liveliness than for a yeare, of its merits and its defects. But th' gentleman was silent, looking at me instead o' th' linen.

As we sat in the gloaming, came a black with curds and creams neatlie layd upon a silver dish "for Mistress Rose Moody." I cared more for the fayre dish than th' curds, and even mother liked to trye a littel off th' embossed side o' th' platter, Robert finishing all, with a boy's greediness.

'Twas thus th' next daye and next. And by th' next th' old wives i' all Hampton grew nayburly, but th' maids did seem thrice distant and cold to me.

Th' next was wild weather; th' rain that th' wind drove aslant our lattice freezing i' th' falling. Robert had been forth, and did sit steaming on th' hearth, mending's fork as he dried. And our mother upon th' settle in a thick coverlet. 'Twas dull i' th' room and, not over-warm neither. And I at th' loom.

There came th' sound of horse's feet and a knock, and General Moulton in our porch bowing low, cobwebby, soaked lace falling down over 's strong white hands as he doffed his hat to me. But Robert was soure and looked not from th' fork-teeth.

"Sweetheart," saith the general, following me to th' loom across th' uneven floor, "wilt wed with me? Thou must go with thy linen."

My dry tongue let me talke not, but love and loyaltie to our mother stirred Robert.

"General Moulton," saith he, with a flaming face, "dost know who thou'rt asking? Hampton doth set us apart," saith he bitterlie.

"And why?" saith the general fiercely. "Thy mother could not hurt a flea commonlie. Who can say what he will doe in a fearfull peril? She will be my mother, and she will come and see us happy; it may tend to make her soe. Ay," saith he, "sweet Rose, wilt come upon th' hill, thou, and th' mother, and Robert?"

Robert looked at me jealouslie. "I shall earn a man's wage i' th' year," he muttered tremulouslie. 'Twas not a moment! and yet we did read each th' other i' that glance. He dropped his eyes.

"Rose is good," came quietlie, yet to start one, from th' settle, where my mother sat in a strange unmannerlie silence. "And thou art good to love our poore Rose—my girl that hath no gear but a mother's shame!"

And she hid her thin face, trembling and tearlesse.

* * * * *

'Tis nine years I have been General Moulton's dame. From my great room I look off o'er the breathlesslie quiet countrie to the banks o' sunsmitten clouds sailing landwards. 'Tis th' same landskip.

Am I happy? I should be; for Robert by General Moulton's favor hath an education and a shippe.

Methinks, at times, old Cæsar knoweth th' general better than his wife doth. My husband goeth awaie yearlie for weekes, and on's return seemeth to adapt himself to a new life. I have found there be spaces of his mind where he chooses to be alone. I make no comment. He hath raised me to a fair station—as high as of anie private gentlewoman of th' colonies.

But once, a wild-looking man came for entertainment. He was a practiser of th' black art—it was soe sayd—and as I handed him a cup of amber drink in th' porch I did beg him for my fortune.

"Thou hast had a strange one," saith he, viewing me strangelie. "Thou art here i' the warm world. Ask nothing further."

But I pestered, and would not be gainsayed. But, at last, up waves he his empty cup.

"Look, an' thou must!" saith he. "Thy will must be my law in thine own house."

Alack! th' rim of th' cup expanded and parted, and there was my husband sitting in my fayre room, but wrinkled; and a handsome girl hung about him. Then all became blurred like an image i' a stirred pool, and I was but staring into th' cup.

"Thy husband is to be twice matched," said th' man grimlie, and with a mocking reverence.

I wish I had not looked i' th' cup. And yet th' black art is fiends' pleasure. God rules. And still, would I had not this to think of; for I love th' day and my house, and th' ordering o' my maids.

Down i' th' graveyard mother's mound is greene. Mayhap she did feel this once, in her turne.

The fashion of this wurld passeth awaie.

M. MOULTON.

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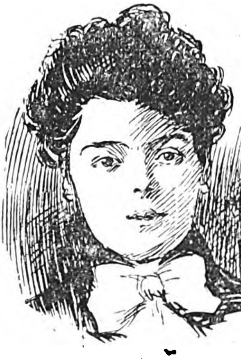

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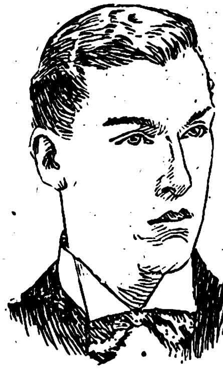

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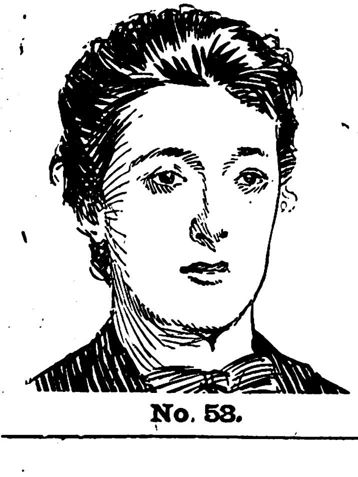

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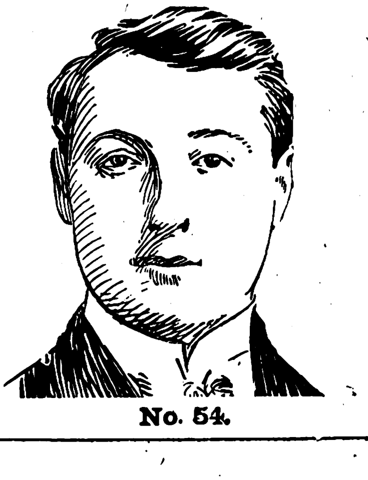

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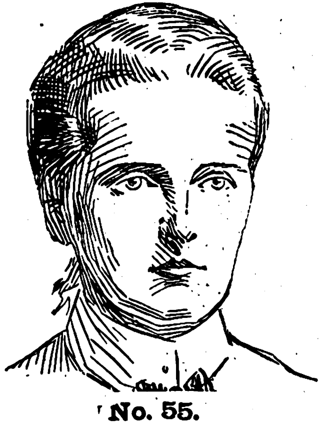

No. 55.

THE OWNER OF "VARNHAGEN."

HAVING seen the vanity of most earthly things, Sir Peveril Wynter, diplomatist and sportsman, had the idea that other people might like to see it too, and to that end set about writing his reminiscences. Fate directed that I, Rosalys Brown, of Miss Wiggins' Typewriting Bureau, in Cockspur Street, should be selected as his amanuensis, and so, from ten to four each day for some time, I "took down" the aged baronet at the gloomy old family mansion in Brook Street.

That is to say, I dutifully sat, pencil and note-book in hand, prepared to perform my part of the contract, for a certain number of hours each day; but my temporary employer preferred the excitement of quarrelling with his two sons, Mr. Arthur and Mr. Guy, abusing his doctor, storming at his man, and generally providing a little wholesome fillip for the household, to proceeding with the task in hand.

In this way I had ample time to look about me, and being a young person of some observation, I quickly came to some interesting conclusions.

First, I discovered that I disliked Mr. Guy, and liked Mr. Arthur. (Mind, I merely said "liked.") Their estimable parent, be it noted, disliked them both with impartial thoroughness. Lady Wynter was a pale-haired nonentity with a perpetual cold, who did not count in the house, and merely put in a perfunctory "Oh, Peveril!" when the old man was particularly violent in his denunciation of the rest of the *menage*.

I could not quite make out Dr. O'Connor, the baronet's medical attendant. He was quite young, rather handsome in a dark, Celtic way, and his manner was boisterous out of Sir Peveril's room, and flippant inside it. He used to come every day, for the old man was possessed with the idea that he was fast sinking into the grave, and that nothing but the most assiduous care would keep him out of it for very long. He seemed to look forward to the doctor's visits, though he very often abused him thoroughly while they lasted.

"Thank goodness you've come, O'Connor," he would growl. "My two dutiful sons have been in, with faces as long as from here to Pall Mall, boring me to death. Come on; say something to make me laugh, or you won't come here again." This was when he was in a particularly good humour.

One thing that struck me as strange about this peculiar household was that Dr. O'Connor and Mr. Guy were always—in common phrase—as "thick as thieves," behind Sir Peveril's back, while the doctor, wth true Celtic pliability, did not hesitate to cordially concur in anything derogatory which his interesting patient might utter against the young man. I set myself to pierce the meaning of this odd friendship between the youthful doctor and his patient's son. Mr. Arthur, I discovered, treated O'Connor as a mere piece of furniture; which did not enhance his popularity in that direction. One thing united father, son, and medico—and that was a passionate love of sport, especially racing. "Varnhagen," the pick and pride of Sir Peveril's stables, was entered for the forthcoming Derby; and I never heard so much horse-talk in my life as I did during the days I spent at the Brook Street house. Nor was Sir Peverli the least eager and animated of the party when the conversation veered round to the inevitable subject.

The social barometer at Sir Peveril's generally pointed to "unsettled," but the great storm burst soon after my arrival. Dr. O'Connor, lounging in his usual free-and-easy manner at the side of Sir Peveril's couch, was entertaining him with some spiteful gossip from the clubs, the old man, huddled among his pillows, looking, as usual, as if nothing about him were living but his scornful and piercing black eyes. The doctor, gliding without a change of tone, from one subject to another, dropped a brief remark, which made Sir Peveril's withered face work convulsively.

"Is that so?" he asked, in a harsh whisper.

"I'm told so on very good authority," laughed the doctor carelessly, while his eyes glittered with malice.

"We'll see," growled the baronet. "Send Mr. Arthur to me, will you," he said to the man who answered his bell.

He took no notice of his son's greeting.

"What d'ye fancy for the Derby?" he asked abruptly, fixing his eagle's gaze on the young man's face.

The latter looked somewhat embarrassed.

"Well," he blurted out at last, "I rather think Quickstep has a chance."

"Ugh!" grunted his parent. "And you're backing it, I suppose?"

"Not exactly," said Mr. Arthur.

"Not exactly!" roared Sir Peveril, in a terrible voice. "What fool's talk is this? Why aren't you backing our own horse, ye unnatural young hound? What d'ye mean by it? Isn't a horse from your own father's stables good enough? Why don't you fancy Varnhagen? Will you be so good as to tell me?"

"I can't help it," said the young man desperately, while a troubled look came into his clear blue eyes. "I simply don't think Varnhagen can win. But all the same, I wouldn't think of backing anything else—much as I need money."

"That's a lie!" shouted his venerable sire. "Get out of my sight, will you? Young monster, trying to spoil the market for your own father! Pretty pair of son's I've got! Guy's a brute, and you're a fool, and worse!"

Exhausted with passion, the baronet sank down among his pillows, while his son, pallid to the lips, turned without a word and left the room. I never admired Mr. Arthur so much as at that moment. He quivered under his terrible old father's reiterated insults as if they were blows, but controlled himself sufficiently to refrain from reply. The doctor had discreetly strolled to the window during the brief scene between father and son, and I could see his shoulders shaking with ill-suppressed mirth. Once more I puzzled over the obvious dislike he bore for Mr. Arthur. After this interview he and the other brother appeared more intimate than ever, and one would frequently find them in earnest converse. They were an ill-assorted pair;

Is your photo on page 719?

Dr. O'Connor clever, sardonic, witty, the other heavy, dull, and silent.

I only remember one remark with which he honoured me.

"I say, you're lookin' rippin' to-day," he was pleased to observe, after a prolonged inspection of my appearance. After which he proceeded to demonstrate his approval in a practical manner, for which he got his face severely slapped.

"Serve you right, young man," said O'Connor, coming out of Sir Peveril's room at the moment when I administered the chastisement. They called each other by their christian names these two. "Come on, don't be a fool, Guy," the doctor went on, taking his interesting friend's arm, and leading him away.

Derby Day came in the usual order of things. Shall I ever forget it? I turned up at Brook Street at ten o'clock, having received no instructions to the contrary.

As I anticipated, there was not much work to do. Sir Peveril was in a state of nervous excitement, which made him peculiarly cantankerous; and if all the wishes he uttered concerning the Brook Street household had been promptly attended to, the end of all parties concerned would have been more dramatic than pleasing. I met Mr. Arthur on the steps. His usually sunny face was somewhat clouded, but he greeted me with no lack of cheer.

"Well," said he, "I'm off to Epsom to see poor old Varnhagen beaten." This in the most flippant manner.

"I do hope it won't be," said I.

"Sure to be," answered my employer's son. "I'm sorry because the governor will be in such a bait about it. The poor old chap's set his heart on winning a Derby. Good-bye, Miss Brown," as the hansom jingled up.

To my surprise I found Mr. Guy at home. He and Dr. O'Connor lingered affectionately round the invalid baronet, bearing the avalanche of abuse which descended upon them with the constancy of martyrs. Gradually the old man grew weaker, his voice failed him as the morning wore on, and he could only rave in a husky whisper, and shake a waxen fist at his son and his medical man.

"Why do you excite yourself so, Peveril?" whispered his lady-wife in her feeble way. "You only tire yourself out, you know, and that's so bad for you."

It was about twelve o'clock when I went to fetch a book from the library. Shall I ever forget what I saw when I returned to Sir Peveril's room? The old man was lying back among his pillows motionless. O'Connor and Mr. Guy bent over him. Soon the former raised a pallid, awestricken face to Guy as I stood in the doorway, and I saw him form one word with his lips.

The son shuddered convulsively, and the two men walked towards the centre of the room.

"It's—it's fearfully sudden," muttered the son.

"I always knew that it would come like this, Sir Guy," the doctor whispered back, with an emphasis on the prefix.

"Shut up about that now," hissed the new baronet shuddering anew. "Let us tell them."

The doctor's face grew hard as granite.

"Not yet," he said, placing an hand on his friend's shoulder. "You forget."

"What? Speak out, man," replied Guy in his heavy way, searching the other's face with his dull eyes.

I felt sick with horror and excitement, my heart thumped as if it would burst my ribs.

But I looked and listened—listened and looked, with tense attention.

"If the nominator of a horse dies before the race is run—" began O'Connor, as if he were impressing a lesson on a child—"the nomination is void, and—"

"I know all that," interrupted the other. "But—"

"Look here," said the doctor sharply. "If Varnhagen does not win this Derby, I am ruined. It may matter little to you, but I am a poor medical man, and I have invested my all in this horse. I fancy you see why I cannot afford to let this be known till after the race is run. You will help me, of course?"

"I won't," snapped Guy sullenly.

"I tell you you will," hissed O'Connor, with a savagery in look and tone that froze the blood round my heart. They were blind and deaf to everything, so I slipped softly as a cat into a curtained window-seat, whence I could see and hear.

This is what I saw. The door was locked. Then the doctor and the other villain lifted the inanimate body of the baronet into a large easy-chair, which they wheeled to the window. The drooping head was supported by pillows, and the hand folded in as natural a manner as might be on the lap. The windows stood wide open, and any passenger in the street might easily see Sir Peveril Wynter calmly enjoying the balmy noon-tide air, and looking remarkably well, considering his great age, and invalid condition.

The son was moaning and shivering with horror as he went about his hideous task, but the other ghoul was perfectly calm. His breath came somewhat thickly, and one drop of moisture glittered on his pallid forehead, but that was all.

"Bah! How white he is!" muttered the doctor, as he contemplated the still figure in the chair. There were geraniums in the window-boxes. O'Connor took some of the vivid petals and crushed them in his hands. Then, as his accomplice turned away with a sob of horror and covered his face, the doctor coolly smeared the marble cheeks with the colour thus obtained. I with difficulty repressed a desire to scream aloud at the utter brutal callousness of the villain.

Then, taking chairs as far away from the window as possible, this precious pair began their watch, fortified with a decanter of brandy.

How those hours of horror dragged away I cannot tell. I thought I was going mad. Fearful of attracting the attention of the two men, I was forced to remain well-nigh as motionless as the figure at the window. The physical agony of cramp was added to the mental torture I was undergoing.

It seemed endless days before an excited newspaper-boy dashed down the quiet street, waving a contents bill like a banner.

"Derby winner! Speshul!" he shouted.

"What's won, boy?" cried the doctor, tossing him a coin.

"Varnhagen, Quickstep, Salerno—one, two, free, sir."

A loud gasp of relief burst from Guy.

The doctor wiped his pale forehead.

Old General Brent came stamping along the pavement.

"Afternoon, Sir Peveril!" cried the old warrior, waving a buckskin glove at the window. "Glad to see you looking so well."

"That's one outside witness," muttered O'Connor, with a sinister smile.

Is your photo on page 719?

"Don't," whimpered his accomplice, feebly. "Who'll tell 'em now?"

"Leave it to me," said the doctor, striding from the room. Then everything reeled about me, darkness fell, and I fainted.

* * * * *

My bewildered senses could hardly grasp the meaning of the strange scene I found being enacted when I recovered from my silly fainting-fit.

The room was filled with people—or so it seemed to me, in my dazed state.

"Better now?" whispered a voice in my ear. It was Mr. Arthur, who, with the tenderness of a woman was bending over me.

I pushed him away.

"Don't," I said ungratefully, though I felt extremely weak, and greatly inclined to burst into tears. "Poor Sir Peveril——"

"Hush, it's all right," said Mr. Arthur soothingly.

And then a well-known voice fell on my ears.

It was Sir Peveril's.

The old man was sitting in his accustomed place, his eyes bright and piercing as ever, were fixed on the tall, defiant figure of O'Connor, who stood with folded arms in the centre of the room, looking his patient steadily in the face. He was deadly pale, but his lips wore their own habitual sneer, while such malignity burnt in his eyes as made one's blood run cold.

"Fool," said Sir Peveril, in a harsh whisper, "you, who pretend to medical knowledge, cannot tell catalepsy from—the other thing! Gone, was I? Dead, eh? And I heard every word you pair of blackguards were saying. Move, or speak, I could not, but I could hear—ha! I could hear, and much too plainly for some people's convenience. Now get out of my sight, you carrion crow!"

I did not hear the rest of the baronet's little oration for here I quietly fainted again.

I believe, however, that those interested in such subjects will find a more detailed account of the case in Professor Haydon's very learned and exhaustive work on "Catalepsy and Apparent Death," published a few years back, in two portly octavo volumes. I have told all that I know about it, just exactly as it occurred

V. Dryden.

A DUSKY HEROINE.

Whenever I hear a man say that he would like to have the experience of a ride by the side of the driver of a railway locomotive, a little shiver passes through me as I remember my own. It is a long time since that adventure, but the recollection of it is still vivid; and this is not to be wondered at, considering the exceptional character of the ride.

It is scarcely necessary to say that I was a young man, for older men rarely have the energy that takes them into such circumstances. My love of adventure had made me ship before the mast, and it made me leave the ship and try a cruise ashore in the company of a young French sailor; then it came about that we found ourselves in Algeria at a time when the French were having trouble with the natives, and the services of two likely young fellows were accepted at once.

Like a genuine British tar, I soon made friends with my comrades, who just as quickly forgot their prejudice against Albion, so far as I was concerned, and taught me a little of their own tongue and a little of the native lingo which they had picked up.

I was sent up country a bit to take part in the scrimmages with the Kabyles, and very soon had all I wanted in the way of fighting.

It was not very entertaining work after the novelty had worn off; we had chiefly to protect the lines of communication as best we could—the railway lines and telegraph wires, and so on—with no fight of a bigger sort than a skirmish. I had a great contempt for the savages, when I began, but I was compelled to admire their bravery and certain other good qualities; and, although they were not angels, I asked myself why I had mixed in the quarrel between them and the French. It certainly did not concern me.

This train of thought led me to side with the Kabyles to some extent; that is, I did what I could to soften the harshness of the treatment meted out to them by my comrades on occasions. As for myself, I have let a man off with a hiding instead of a piece of lead or a few inches of steel, after having explained to him in a mixed lingo that he had better let others do railway and telegraph engineering work in future.

One day a small party of six, including myself, came upon a man who seemed to be tampering with the rails round a bend, and of course he was seized and interrogated. He insisted that he was not guilty of the charge, that he was doing something very innocent—I didn't understand enough to know what he was saying exactly—and that he was not a warrior, owing to a slight lameness.

My comrades laughed, saying that lameness did not prevent a man from doing harm in other ways than fighting; they were incensed by the murder of a soldier on the previous day, and were determined to wreak vengeance upon all who fell into their hands. In spite of the protests of the native, they tied him to a tree and made ready to shoot him.

Now I believed the fellow's story; I felt certain that he had not been tampering with the rails on that occasion; there was something about the man's face that took my fancy and made me accept his denial. He had a noble mien. I was convinced that he would have scorned to deny the act had he really committed it, or about to do so. A cursory examination of the rails showed me that nothing had actually been done. I made up my mind to intercede.

But I became angry when I found that they intended to have some sport; they intended to fire separately at him, not to kill him, but to wound or to terrify him by firing at points close to his body. That made my blood hot and I stepped deliberately in front of the human target and dared them to fire.

I had my own rifle against my shoulder in a twinkling, and the men knew enough of my character to understand that it would not be safe to defy me. So we had a parley, and in the end the native was allowed to go free. He thanked me with stately dignity, and limped away.

I imagined that I should be court-martialled, but my comrades did not report the incident, probably fearing that they might be punished for cruelty—for that sort of thing was not permitted officially, although it may have been winked at sometimes, when it was done quietly.

That act of kindness was repaid to me not long afterwards, as I will explain.

I was one of a small detachment sent farther inland, some six days later, to quell an outbreak in a part that had been quiet till then. We found the task a much tougher one than was anticipated, and had to ask for more men. We found ourselves split up and continually fighting.

About a score of us were fairly cornered in a hastily constructed "fort," without provisions, and with precious little ammunition. We held the Kabyles at bay till they managed to fire the woodwork of which our "walls" were chiefly composed, and then we had to make a sortie and fight for it.

I do not know what became of my comrades, but I fear that they were all killed. I fought like a demon and forced a passage through the enemy, but just as I thought I had got clear, I fancied that something went wrong with my head, and I did not remember any more till I found myself bound and in an upright position.

It did not take long for full consciousness to come back, although my head throbbed and ached, and there was a crowd of Kabyles round me, making a most awful row.

Judge of my surprise on discovering that I was standing in the cab of a locomotive, bound to the side by a strong rope that must have been of European manufacture. No trucks were attached to the engine, but the driver was at his post, ready to move the lever and set it going. What did it mean?

Seeing that I had recovered my senses, the natives became more merry than ever, and began to bustle about in a manner that suggested preparation for a festival. My first notion was that they intended to make the driver go slowly while they took pot shots at me; then it occurred to me that they would send us both along the line to a spot where the rails had been taken up, and so bring about our death. The driver would have more chance than I, but I supposed that the Kabyles would take care that he did not escape. Still, it would be more agreeable to be dispatched by a spear or a ball than to lie helpless in the cab of an overturned engine and be scalded to death, for instance. I looked towards the driver again, hoping that he would glance round at me and so give me an idea of what was to happen, but he remained motionless.

Presently a native clambered on the engine and gave some orders in a low tone to the driver. The latter moved the lever and the native made haste to jump off, falling in a heap on the ground. Notwithstanding my terrible position I laughed, which drew a howl of rage from the mob.

The engine moved slowly forward, and the driver turned for the first time and came towards me. But he did not look at me as he walked to the edge.

"What does it all mean?" I inquired in French.

"It means that the engine will gather speed every second and take you to that bridge," he replied, without turning his head. "I could not help it; they forced me and would have killed me as well as you if I had not agreed to work the lever."

Then he jumped off the moving engine and I was left to conjecture concerning my fate when the bridge was reached.

In such moments as those, how rapidly do one's thoughts chase each other through the mind. I saw, mentally, that the train had been captured and its protectors killed or driven to flight; the man who was needed to set the engine in motion had been caught and his life spared for some purpose; then I had fallen into their hands—the one whom they evidently remembered as having been responsible for the deaths of several of their number, the only one of the little band who had cut through their lines, and they had devised a horrible death for me.

I knew what he meant by the bridge. The metals had been laid across a chasm by means of wooden supports in the form of high trees, further supports had been provided by using other trees as crutches, sloping from a lower level in the sides of the rock to the trees on which the metals rested. It was a rough affair, but it served the purpose, and care had been taken that the strain should not be too heavy. There were no cross pieces so you looked down between the lines, and outside them, into the depths of the chasm.

This bridge had been weakened or destroyed, then, and I was to be dashed into the abyss! As I realised this horrible fact, I returned to my immediate surroundings; all these reflections had passed through my brain very rapidly and the engine had only carried me a few yards from the natives. It was getting up speed, however, and I should soon be at the bridge. I tried to think how far off it was, but I could not recall the distance.

What was that? For a second a thrill of fear shot through me, and my heart seemed to stop beating. Something had scrambled along the floor of the cab, or had clambered on to it. The natives raised a shout, and the next instant there arose from the floor a form that stood before me as a Kabyle girl, panting from excitement and want of breath. I forgot all in my amazement and stared at her.

I had not rescued any lovely native maiden, and knew nothing of this one. I must be dreaming or mad.

A cry came from the girl's lips as she felt in her belt.

"I have dropped it! I have lost my knife!" she moaned, and sank on her knees in despair.

I understood some of the words, and they were sufficient to make the meaning clear to me. I shall give her remarks in intellectual language, but I will state here that they were made in a mixture of language which it would be futile to reproduce.

The engine had now gained momentum and was rattling along. I comprehended that she had clambered on to the floor of the cab at the risk of her life in order to save mine. The natives were not attempting to follow, possibly because they regarded our deaths as certain in any case.

"Turn the lever!" I commanded, seeing a chance of safety. I spoke in English, forgetting myself in the excitement of the situation. Of course she shook her head. I tried to tell her what to do in the medley of tongues generally used by me, but this command required more precision of speech than the mere asking of food, especially as I could not back it up by gestures.

"The bridge is burning—you will die!"

I understood *that*, but the thought of death was lost in the admiration I felt at the fact that she did not mention herself. What had I done to merit such devotion?

"Jump off!" I cried, shaking my head violently to emphasise my meaning.

She made a negative sign. I tried to tell her what to do with the lever, using copious details, and at length I succeeded. She went closer and pointed to it, then moved her finger in different directions till I nodded affirmatively. I heaved a sigh; there was yet hope of life.

But she could not turn it. The engine was an old thing, and either the lever had got wedged or the driver had done it on purpose. She flung herself on her knees in front of me and began to gnaw at the cords that bound me.

I had no knife about me which she could find and use. I strained at the cords in vain. I knew that at the rate we were going we must soon reach the bridge; it was all over with me.

"Jump off while you can!" I cried once more, even though I recognised that it meant death or mutilation to do so.

"You saved my father! I asked them to let you go; they refused. I save you!"

So she was his daughter! But she could not save me.

She was tugging at the knot now with her lovely white teeth and her slim fingers alternately. They had been well tied, those cords! I turned my head to look ahead and my heart throbbed more quickly as I caught sight of a thin column of smoke. That was the bridge—and there was death!

"Pull!" I shouted frantically. Now that the end was so near I clung to life.

She tugged with teeth, fingers, and nails till the blood came, and all the time we were rushing to destruction. Heavens! a knot was giving! A piece of stick lay on the floor, and this she used instead of her fingers as soon as there was space to insert the end. One knot undone, but the engine getting nearer and nearer the bridge. She worked frantically and I writhed in agony at my helplessness; we were rushing to destruction, yet I could do nothing.

Another knot, but we were close to the bridge, and there was yet a third knot to untie. The girl tore at it with her teeth, while I kept my eyes fixed on the rapidly nearing bridge and my senses on the tension of the cord. Was there yet a chance? I felt the cord give a little, and I shrivelled myself, as it were, to gain space to withdraw my arm. Hurrah! I shouted as I dragged an arm free, tearing the sleeve from the shoulder.

Only a short distance from the chasm now. I could see that the metals were still in position, but the supports were burning, and I could not expect that the engine would go over safely. The natives must have smeared those huge trunks with some substance that would enable the flames to get a firm hold.

Both arms free! It was the work of an instant to get out of the cord, but that instant had brought us to the bridge and the engine rushed on to the single line that spanned the chasm amid the flames. I freed myself from my bonds as we left the solid ground, and at the same moment the girl gave a terrified cry and jumped. I could not stop her, and she disappeared from my sight—for ever!

Crack! I took my only chance and sprang from the falling engine with the object of clutching at one length of line that still remained in position between the land and the upper end of its first crutch. Down, down, down! Oh, the horror of that second which seemed like eternity. I can recollect that I made a frantic clutch—and missed!

Down! But only for a yard, and then I gripped the sloping crutch, which was charred in places, but no longer burning. My desperate plight gave me strength, and I clambered up the support to the line and crawled along that to land.

I lost consciousness after that, and, as I discovered later, had an attack of brain fever. I was found by a company of soldiers and well cared for, and finally sent to a hospital near the coast. When I was well again I was conveyed to Marseilles with other invalids, and it was not long before I journeyed home, with the intention of settling down.

I often regret that I do not even know the name of the girl who gave her life out of gratitude for my having saved her father's. Perhaps he had been a helpless spectator of the preparations for sending me to destruction, and had seen his daughter go with me. Oh, yes, there is a good deal of heroism and nobility of character among such races!

A ride on a locomotive? Ugh! *Don't!*

George Day.

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Uncle Horace and the Baby.

With the callousness of a bachelor, Horace declared that all babies looked alike to him—but that was before his sister Lill came home for a visit and brought her baby. The day she was to arrive Horace was even unkind enough to say that he would be glad to see Lill, but that he wished she would leave the baby behind. "A baby always keeps a house all stirred up," he complained; "they are either crying or hungry or sleepy or in some abnormal state, and you are expected to sympathise with all their woes." His mother only remarked severely, in reply, that he had once been a baby himself, and one of the very worst she had ever "brought up."

When the triumphant procession arrived, bringing Lill and the baby from the station, Horace kissed his sister and then stared at the white bundle in her arms.

"Now, I know you are simply dying to see the baby," she said, and began removing layers of gauze veiling from the face of the infant. When the little pink face was uncovered Horace nerved himself to look and think of some flattering remark that would satisfy the mother. He went up gingerly.

"By Jove! It's really pretty, isn't it?" he cried, in untactful surprise.

Lill and the other members of his family, from his father down, all looked at him resentfully:

"Of course it's pretty—it's a beautiful child!"

Horace tried to retrieve himself.

"I mean that it's nice to look at—not red and squashy-looking. It can open its eyes too, and it's all fuzzy on top of its head."

These unhappy observations only dragged him lower in the esteem of the family.

"Please call my baby 'she' and not 'it'!" Lill said resentfully. "You needn't be so surprised, either, because she is pretty!"

Horace tried to explain anew that he really admired the baby, but he was in disgrace. The family elbowed him away from the baby, and left him out of the conversation with ostentatious neglect.

But the baby—with the perversity of its sex—took a great fancy to uncle Horace. It soon preferred him to any other member of the family, and would even leave its mother's arms for his. When she saw him or heard his voice she smiled ecstatically and gurgled like a little brook. This sort of thing won Horace. From a stately indifference to his niece he came to be her wildest champion. He gave her all sorts of gifts, from a rattle to a tiny ruby ring; he learnt to talk the goo-goo language and he became a perfect nuisance in his whist club, where he would stop the lead while he told stories of the beauty and cleverness of the baby.

One evening Lill put the baby to sleep, turned the gas low in the room and went downstairs to join the family in the library. She stole upstairs again in about half an-hour to see if the child were covered and still sleeping. The family were startled by a shrill scream. Lill came flying downstairs to say that the baby was gone. Everybody said this could not be so, and they went upstairs with her to search for the baby, who couldn't walk and could only crawl across the room at about a snail's rate of locomotion. But the baby was gone, nevertheless. The family were quite sure no one had come in at the front door since Horace went out to his whist club, just after his sister had left the baby. Some kidnapper had stolen in by the back stairs or climbed over the porch—none of the family was really surprised that the baby had been stolen, for they believed so firmly in its beauty and cleverness that they were sure that everybody must covet it.

The grandfather hurried to the police-station, the aunts went out to give the alarm to the neighbours. Lill and her mother sat down alone by the empty cradle and gave themselves up to their grief. There was the sound of an opening door and footsteps on the stairs. Horace came into the room carrying the baby in his arms. It was wrapped in its cloak and a blanket.

"Oh, you've found my baby!" Lill cried. She and her mother implored him to tell how he had got it away from the kidnappers. They begged to know the story.

Horace was bewildered.

"Why," he said, "I just wrapped the baby up and slipped over to the whist club with her. I wanted to show her to the fellows. I was afraid you wouldn't let me take her if I asked, you are in such a fright about her. They thought her a little darling, too!"

"And so you were the one that took the baby?" Lill cried. "And you took her to the whist club in her nightgown? And I was nearly wild."

The other members of the family were sent for. The police were told they weren't wanted after all; and the neighbours were assured that the baby was safe.

Lill held the baby in her arms. Her mother and sisters stood on guard round her.

"To think, Horace," she said mournfully, "that you could take the baby over to your whist club in her nightgown, when she has a lovely real lace dress! How could you?"

Herbert Maxstead.

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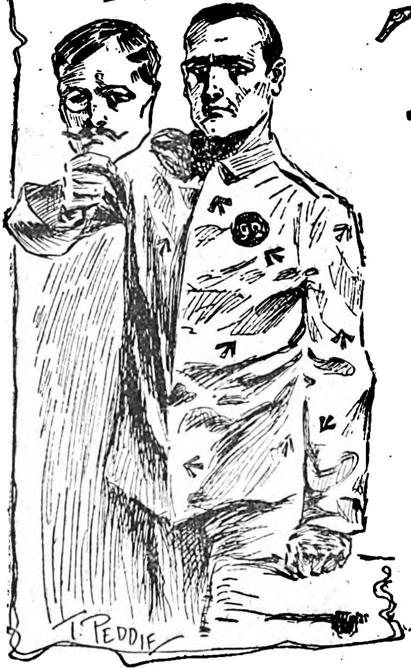
DEAD TO THE WORLD



By Henry T. Johnson.

Author of "Cruce Vincit," "The Pride of the Ring," etc., etc.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

- **Richard Seldon** (Tiger Dick), an escaped convict who murders and then impersonates Cyril Roylance, of Fallowfield Hall.
- **Harcourt Dale**, a near neighbour of Roylance.
- **Doris Dale**, his daughter.
- **Jack Branscombe**, a young farmer, in love with Doris.
- **Inspector Rossiter**, a detective from Scotland Yard.
- **Rev. Gerald Hastie**, curate of Fallowfield.
- **James** and **Joseph Nubbley**, two brothers living in a cottage near the school at Fallowfield; they are known to Seldon.
- **Miss Morrison**, the schoolmistress.
- **Morgan Chandler**, the steward at Fallowfield Hall.

CHAPTER XX.

An Early Morning Find.

Young, strong, hale, and alert as Jack Branscombe was the stress of the struggle, the chase, the three successive immersions in the ice-cold river, and the desperate battle with its tide had begun to tell terribly plainly. His saturated garments hung and clung heavy as lead, close and dank as river weeds, his joints began to stiffen, his teeth chattered, his breath came and went in painful, fitful gasps, and something at his heart seemed strained almost to snapping point. But he pressed on almost mechanically, feeling rather than reasoning that there was danger in yielding to the impulse to fling himself to earth, and, lying there, let Fate work its will with him. It would never do to seek Gerry Hastie now, he vaguely reasoned. To do so would be to risk not only capture, but needless trouble for a true friend, embarrassment, perhaps serious trouble to Gerry. He must get clear of the district before he approached a railway station; yes, even before he bought clothes to replace the cold, soaking garments hanging and clinging to his limbs.

Therefore he pressed on doggedly, until at last Mother Nature, thwarting his plan as she often thwarts schemes less vague and more possible, had her say in the matter. She said little, but what she said was to the purpose. Simply, "Stop! Sink to earth! Lie there!" And Jack Branscombe, utterly exhausted, overwrought, dead beat, resistlessly obeyed. Down he crashed in the long lush grass of a pleasant meadow, his limbs giving way. He vaguely meant to lie there just a few minutes till strength and wind came back to him, only Nature said one more word, "Sleep!" and strive as he might, being mortal man he could not disobey. So slumber locked him fast until eastward the darkness began to lift, the grey softened to purple, the purple faded into lilac and great beams of gold and crimson came up and touched and tinged the clouds, and by-and-by the eastern sky was ablaze with gold and saffron glory. And the birds that had begun to twitter had left off twittering and had burst into joyous song. The dews were glittering in the strengthening sunlight, jewels innumerable adorning Nature's garb of greens, and browns, and golds, and from far off cottage chimneys, tiny red dots on the landscape, came tiny twirls of blue-white smoke and scent of burning wood.

Mary Morrison, wearing her stoutest laced boots and gathering her skirts, freely displaying, because no one was there to revel in the view of them, her exquisitely turned ankles, a big rush basket on her arm, set across the fields in quest of mushrooms and blackberries just as the sun began to rise. And before the sun was well above the skyline her dimpled hands were black, blue, and crimson, and her basket was a quarter filled with rich, glistening big berries of that black which is richest of all, whether in art or Nature, because of the red which it conceals, and another quarter with drab and creamy-coloured mushrooms, some stem uppermost, displaying recesses of rich red brown. As the schoolmistress rambled through the fields she caught the contagion of Nature's own waking gladness, the sun shone in her eyes and in her heart, and she sang blithely as if in answer to the morning carol of the birds.

And then all at once the song died on her lips, the light in her eyes, the bonnie pink in her comely cheeks.

"Merciful heavens!" she exclaimed. "What can this mean?"

There, right at her feet in the long grasses a man was lying, his face upturned to the sky, lying there so still that for a moment she deemed that he was dead. Instantly terrible events of recent occurrence in the district flashed across her mind. Had she happened on the result of some new crime? But for all her gentleness, Mary Morrison, nerveless shadow of womanhood, her courage had been proved in many a crisis wherein her charges had been threatened by danger by infectious fever and other danger. In a moment she was on her knees beside the man lying there, raising his head in her hands.

"What has happened? Has there been an accident. Are you ill? Rouse yourself!" she cried. Then a colder chill clenched her heart as, gazing closer into the features, she recognised—

Jack Branscombe!

Yes! it was he, the suspected murderer for whom the hue and cry was rampant throughout the land. What should she do? Hasten back to the village and give the alarm? That seemed the first step dictated by human law, perhaps by justice. But another voice was speaking to the heart of Mary Morrison, humanity was whispering to womanhood.

"Speak, speak! Are you ill? Your forehead's like fire white as you are. You mustn't stay here, you'll die!"

Opening his eyes he cast a dazed look round.

"I won't be taken—I'm innocent!" he cried with a convulsive effort to struggle, then fell back with a groan, and his eyes dimly recognising her he said: "Am I dreaming? Through the whirling mist I see a face, a kind, sweet face that I seem to know."

"I'm Mary Morrison the schoolmistress."

"Oh, yes, yes; and you think I'm a thief and a murderer. You're sure of it; I read it in your eyes."

"No, no, law and justice insist those not proved to be guilty are innocent. Tell me, can I help you?"

"No, no, nobody can help me. All the world's against me."

"Don't think that; there is One Who rules all the world."

"And at times it has seemed to me that even He has forsaken me."

"No, no, you must never think anything so wicked as that. Tell me, can I help you? You are in a fever, your limbs are shivering with ague. What can I do?"

"Best leave me here to die. I don't want to bring trouble on others. I'm weary of it all, innocent though I am of what I'm charged with, let them take me, do what they will."

"You are innocent? I am glad to hear you say that. John Branscombe, because I've known and thought of you as a type of what was good and true in manhood."

"I swear it by all that is sacred, I swear that I am innocent."

"And I believe you. Come, let me help you. Do you think that leaning on my shoulder you could walk a little way. The school-house isn't far, I'll take you there."

Slowly, painfully, with her aid, he struggled to his feet and she helped him along the meadows, until at last they reached the little house adjoining the village school. By happy chance, no one was stirring, and unseen he entered the little sitting-room, fell heavily upon the couch, and fell into a stupor which lasted for many hours.

The schoolmistress had won for herself, in that quiet little old world village, renown as a capable and experienced nurse, and all that skill, care, and tenderness could suggest she did for him: but for many hours not even these could rouse him from that death-like torpor. For Nature was demanding the overdraft he had made on her.

And Mary Morrison's mind that day wandered from lessons to the patient locked in her little sitting-room, and when the day's work was done she bethought herself as to her duty. She needed counsel, the advice of a man, clear headed and capable, and she bethought herself of Gerald Hastie. Yes, she would tell him the whole story that night after evensong, and she set out for the little village church with that intent.

And the brothers Nubbley watched her leave the school-house with interest.

"Brother Joseph," said James, "what a remarkable good-looking young woman that is; how regular she goes to church. I should think, Joseph, that young woman had got a nice little bit of savings."

"Now James," said the invalid, looking up from his wheel chair, "don't you think of entangling yourself in matrimonial ventures, not as I think you'd stand a hundred to one chance in that quarter."

"No, brother Joseph," said the other in a tone of pensive reflection, "only I was a thinkin' as 'ow if anybody was to drop into the school-house while that little lady was going to church, like the well regulated young woman she is, it wouldn't be surprising if they was to find a cash-box or something in her writing-desk, and a substantial little nest egg in it. Ah, me, my brother, what a pity it is as you're so afflicted and that in these 'ere little villages there's such a lot of busybodies about as having such a little business of their own to see arter has such a lot of time to poke their noses into other people's."

And brother Joseph from the wheel chair sighed softly and sympathetically.

CHAPTER XXI.

A Recognition.

Dim patches in the night gloom the oriel windows of the village church gleamed, from within came at times the floating swell and dying wail of the organ, ever and anon clear voices in unison chanted prayer or praise.

And once, from where he watched in the shadow of the yews, a man standing there alone heard from within a voice declaring:

"The wages of sin is death," and he muttered with an evil sneer: "That's why everybody dies!"

Clear through the evening gloom a childish treble voice soared heavenwards alone, followed by a burst of harmony as other voices joining, took up the anthem strain. And then the voices died away.

And the man who listened there in the gloom of the night and in the darkness of his sin hardened his heart, and yet some secret spell retained him there to listen.

"Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay the innocent."

"Amen."

In rebellious thought he was scoffing there at all he listened to, and yet he stayed and listened until one final burst of sound from the organ and one last lingering "Amen" floated through the open porch, then was followed by the feet of returning worshippers. Then he slunk away—to wait further away in other shadows.

Gerald Hastie, striding after the service through the little God's Acre, was wondering why his plan had miscarried. What had happened to Jack Branscombe? All through the night he had remained awake and on the look-out at the window of his cottage, but he had waited and watched in vain. Had Doris Dale failed to persuade Jack to escape like a wily fox at midnight from cover to cover? Had some mischance occurred? His vicar had detained him throughout the day on parochial duties, but now that the evening service was over he determined to set out straight for Dalehurst Grange and ascertain the true state of affairs.

Is your photo on page 719?

And all at once through the gloom of the branching yews of the churchyard Doris Dale approached him.

She might have been a ghost wandering there amid the grassy mounds and mossy stones, she was so white and wan. But even the wraith of Doris Dale would be charming. He took her hands.

"Where is Jack?" he asked. "Why has he not come to me?"

"What!" Doris gave a little terrified cry. "Has he not been to you, have you not seen him?"

Hastie shook his head.

"Then something terrible has happened," Doris went on. And she told how at midnight she had dispatched Jack from Dalehurst Grange.

He strove to cheer her, suggesting all manner of possibilities. Doubtless Jack had valid reason for departing from the programme they had arranged for him. He might have done so to avoid encountering someone, friend or foe, likely to recognise him, or for a hundred other reasons. One thing was certain, he had not fallen into the hands of those on the look-out for him, or the news would have been ringing through the land.

They hushed their voices, someone was approaching. It was the schoolmistress.

"Miss Dale," she said, "can I speak with you?"

"Is it imperatively immediate?" asked Doris, imagining Mary's mission to be in connection with the school, of which she was a very active patroness.

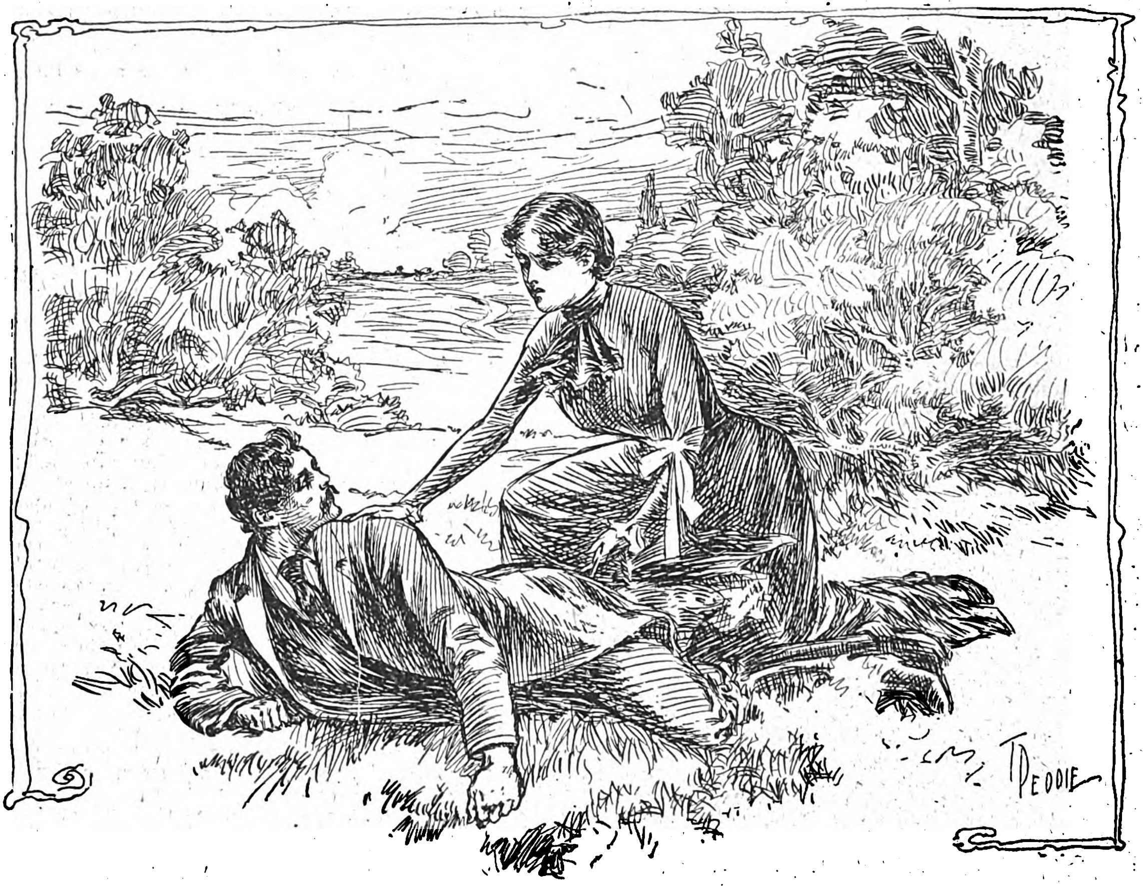
"It is indeed imperatively immediate," said Mary Morrison. "Come with me to the school-house, for your own sake." Then she whispered: "And for the sake of someone dear to you."

Still under the impression that Mary was referring probably to some pet girl pupil, Doris left Gerald at the churchyard wicket and accompanied the schoolmistress to her rooms in the school-house.

Opening the door of the little sitting-room, the latter whispered: "One moment. I want you to prepare yourself for a very great surprise."

Still wondering, Doris entered, and the door was closed behind her. She gazed round the room, and her eyes fell on the haggard face of a man lying still asleep upon a couch.

"Jack!" she cried, and in a moment she was on her knees beside him.



"Oh! yes, yes; and you think I'm a thief and a murderer. You're sure of it—I read it in your eyes."

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"Doris, Doris!" Awakening from troubled dreams to the bliss of her sweet presence, he sprang up and clasped her in his arms.

An hour or so later she left the school-house to seek Gerald Hastie, tell him of Jack's whereabouts, and ask and consult with him as to the next steps to be taken. Mary Morrison walked with her a portion of the way. Then said, with a smile:

"Now I must get to my patient."

"Mary," said Doris, "heaven will bless you for your goodness to him. Tell me one thing, say you believe him innocent; I want you to believe him innocent. Let the world think what it will of him, I want those who are good and true themselves to believe that he is good and true."

"I will try to believe it for your sake," said Mary. "Yes, though so many circumstances appear black against him, till he is found guilty everyone——"

"Is to be presumed to be innocent. Oh, yes! I know—I know, that is the platitude of stereotyped, conventional tolerance. That isn't the believe I mean. Oh, Mary! you knew his nature before all this terrible business happened. Do you think a man's nature could so have changed?"

"Alas!" replied the other, speaking rather to herself than to her companion, "so many men, and, perhaps, women too, have two sides to their nature. Ah, you are younger than I; you cannot understand a man seeming a Sir Galahad and being Mordred."

"My Jack," cried the girl passionately, "is more than Galahad, more than Lancelot; oh, yes! far truer than Lancelot. He is my Arthur, my perfect knight, my king! Oh! I can read not so much in, as between your words, something of a story. You have loved, and love has turned to pain. You have loved someone who should have been what you believed him, all truth and honour, and your idol has been broken, crushed. Ah! you are crying. Mary, dearest Mary, forgive me. No, dear, it was not the idol that was broken, it was your heart broken and crushed by the man you worshipped."

The girls were weeping on each other's shoulders now—sisters in tears.

"But you must not judge all men by him, dear Mary," said Doris. "Oh! what a shame that a love like yours should have gathered tears for its requital. If Fate had only thrown your ways and his apart, and earlier yours and someone else's together."

"Doris, Doris!" cried Mary pleadingly, her tears shining on cheeks now scarlet.

"Mary," whispered the other, "tell me, won't there ever be a chance for dear, true, brave, loyal Gerald?"

"No, no!" cried Mary hastily.

"Why should your life be always lonely?"

"It is not lonely, dear, nor yet quite sorrowful, for if love and happiness and love's delight have flown, Fate has left the memory of days that were. Good-night."

Each went her way, Mary returning alone to the school-house.

Out of the gloom of the overhanging trees there crept a figure that followed Mary Morrison—like a shadow. Very like a shadow, the shadow that had darkened her life. For a while it followed in her track, then suddenly stopped, turned back, lit a cigar, and soliloquised:

"What's the little game? What have she and Doris been discussing—the school and the kids? No, women don't cry about other people's kids as a rule, they save up most of that for their own. Surely they weren't discussing me? No! she wouldn't give me away—wouldn't dare? Oh, yes, she'd dare, she's got nerve enough, only she isn't built that way."

"Good-night, Squire."

A deferential voice, broken by a hiccough gave the greeting.

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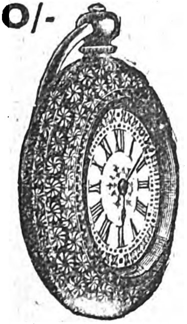

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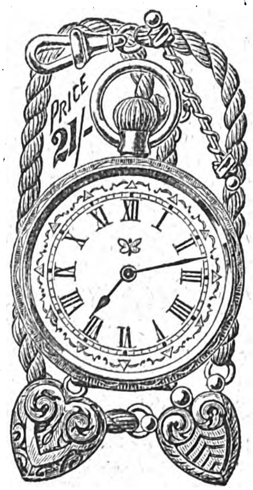

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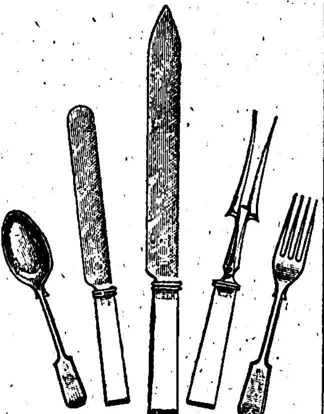

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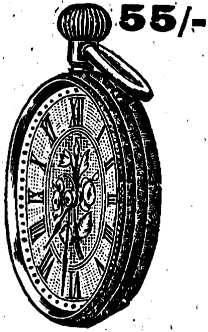

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"Good-night, Bingle," was the reply. Then he went on, sotto voce:

"I wonder if she does suspect? Her eyes gave almost a start of recognition. I must find out, but I must be careful how I go to work."

As Mary approached the school-house she heard a long, low whistle, and a man who had been standing by the gate walked quickly away. To this incident alone she attached little importance, and she was hastening down the narrow path of the little garden when, in the darkness, she caught sight of the vague outline of a moving form.

"Who is that?" she shouted, and it sprang up and made for the gate. "Who are you, what do you want here?" she went on, bravely turning back to the gate.

But the figure had now reached a low stone wall, and was scrambling over it. Swiftly as she now turned she was not in time to effect her bold purpose, for she was as brave as she was gentle, to seize him.

He had leapt into the road and was gone, disappearing in the night.

But she had caught one glimpse of his face, and she knew that the intruder was one of the brothers who lived at the cottage along the road.

And, strange to say, it was the one who was wheeled about in the invalid chair.

What—what did it mean? What could he have been doing there? Innumerable questions, suggestions, fancies, ideas, flashed through her brain. Were those two strange men, they whose occupation consisted of smoking and gossiping, in reality detectives on the track of Jack Branscombe?

Entering the school-house she sought the sitting-room, her guest was sitting up.

"Ah," he said with a smile, "you've come in at last. Was that you at the door just now?"

"No," she said. "Tell me, what do you mean?"

"Some five or ten minutes ago I heard someone as I thought fumbling at the door for the latchkey, surely that was you?"

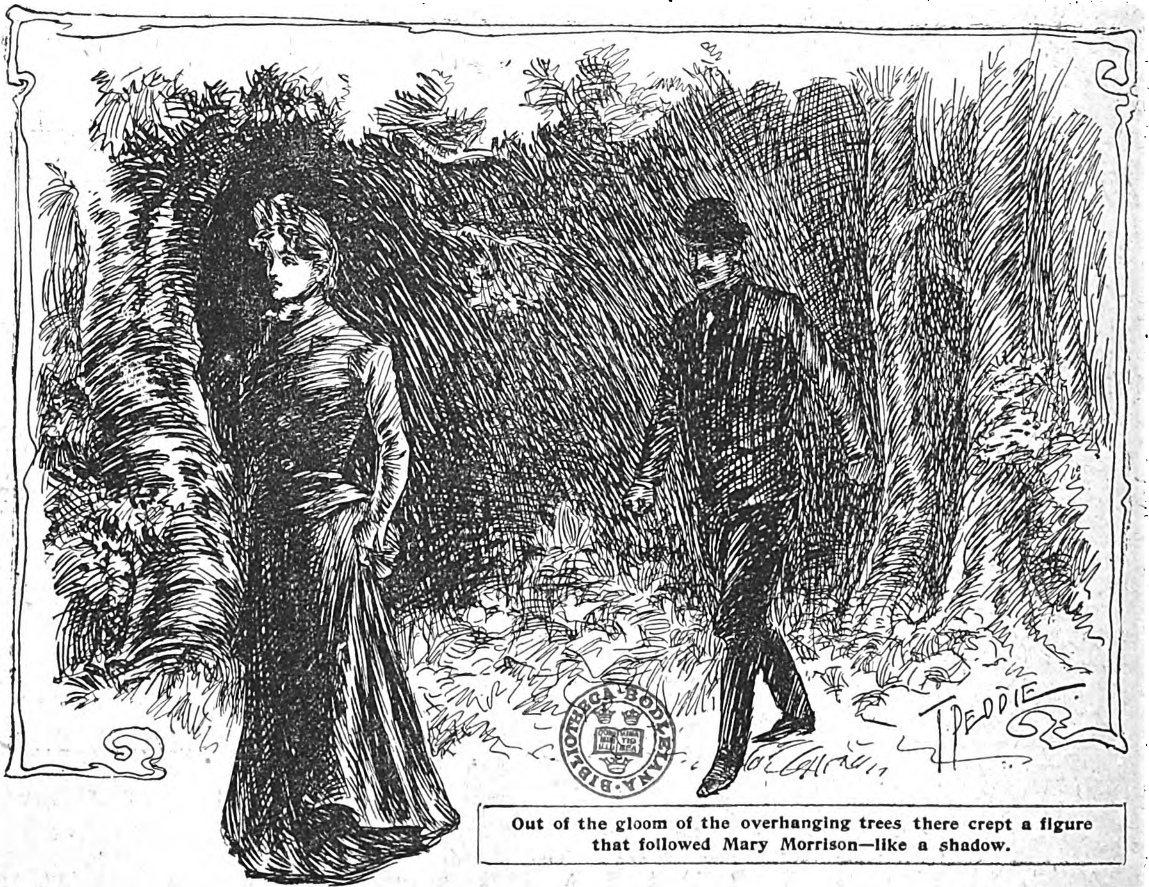
"No, no!" she answered, more amazed than ever.

"Mary," said Jack Branscombe, "while you've been gone I've been thinking, forming my plans. I must leave here."

"But where are you to go?" she asked. "Surely at least you will wait till Doris and Mr. Hastie have discussed what is best for you to do?"

"No!" he answered. "There is one thing I cannot endure; the thought that I am, even for a while, for my own safety exposing a girl to danger. It oppressed me when hiding at Dalehurst Grange. Every hour that I am remaining here, innocent man though I am, I am risking your being charged with harbouring a fugitive from justice. I am now recovered from my exhaustion, and I will pursue my journey, let it lead where it may, and when the time is ripe for me to prove my innocence I will surrender to arrest."

And she could not dissuade him. All he would do was to agree to communicate with Doris through her, if, and when he got clear. But at midnight, come what might, he would leave the school-house.



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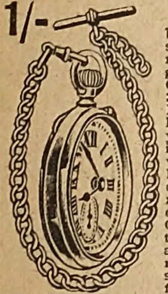

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Made in 3 sizes, ebony and gold case. With 6 metal tunes. Full organ tone. Plays songs, hymns, dance music. Sent on receipt of 4s. P.O., if desired. Write for terms to pay 4s. monthly. Price list and tunes. **ATLAS CO.,** 1848 High St., Camden Town, London; 63 Seven Sisters Rd. 14 High Rd., Kilburn.

Old False Teeth Bought.

Many people have old or disused false teeth. Messrs. R. D. & J. B. Fraser Ltd., of Princes Street, Ipswich (established 1833), buy old false teeth. If you send your teeth to them they will remit you by return of post the utmost value; or if preferred, they will make you the best offer, and hold the teeth over for your reply. The largest and oldest buyers of old false teeth in the world.

The night crept on and the beautiful silver moon sailed up, flooding the earth with a soft light, clear almost as noon. Jack, rested, invigorated, gripped Mary's hand gratefully ere bidding her good-night.

"I shall never forget what you have risked for me, Mary Morrison," he said, "and one other gracious kindness I will ask you."

"If it is in my power I will grant it," she said.

"Believe me innocent."

"I do—I do!"

"I know my own acts, my own very folly, helped to condemn me, but I am an honest man, I swear that I am innocent; and now—good-bye."

"I will believe you and I will pray for you. But stay one moment, let me just make sure that the coast is clear."

She tripped upstairs, went to her window, gazed out on the moonlit landscape. Why, what was that? A horse and trap were standing in the road beyond, just under the elm tree. A man was at the horse's head, gazing intently along the road. And now he was ascending into the cart. Yes, yes; those for whom he was looking were arriving. Two others hastened up, climbed, one on to the tailboard, the other up alongside the man who held the reins, and this last set the horse going and for a moment lifted the fur cap to wipe his brow.

So that just as, with muffled hoofs and pneumatic tyre, muted wheels, that strange trap drove past the school-house, in the cold blue moonlight, Mary Morrison saw clearly as a moon the face of the man who held the reins.

And recognised that face, and recognising it, went down on her knees and, wringing her clasped hands, uttered a bitter cry.

"Oh, God in heaven! Now I see it all—what shall I do—what shall I do?"

CHAPTER XXII.

The Humiliation of Mr. Rossiter.

Detective Inspector Rossiter had kept his own counsel regarding that futile cross-country man hunt. In the first place a miss, even by a hair's breadth, in matters of capture, as in others, is as good, or as bad, as a mile. Secondly, his belief in Jack Branscombe's guilt was considerably shaken by Jack Branscombe's behaviour.

"I've known 'em game," he reasoned to himself, "game as pebbles, and I've known 'em generous in a way, that not being difficult seeing that what they have generally belongs to somebody else, and staunch to their pals, but no, they're not quite that sort. There's many a man would have thought twice; yes, would have thought till it was too late to do anything else but think, if he saw even his friend or brother struggling at night in the middle of that cruel, cold, dark, swift river. But with a drowning man in pursuit of him, to bring him to trial for his life, it's only a grand man could do that; too grand a man to go sneaking into people's houses while they're asleep, the man who came back after me just in time," and he shuddered as he thought of those dark, icy waters so nearly closing over him. "He couldn't have served that old man at Dalehurst Grange like that. Yes, sir?"

He started, conscious of the shadow of something towering over him, and, looking up, addressed this last remark aloud to possibly the tallest man he had ever set eyes on, or, rather, up to.

"I beg your pardon, but do you happen to know Gerry Hastie?"

"Well," said Rossiter, "I'm a comparative stranger down here——"

"If you don't know Gerry you must be," said the other, "because, being British, you're bound to be a sportsman of some sort, whether your line is cricket, croquet, football, billiards or boats, steeple-chasing or skittles, and being British born you'll know the game. You'll play it or you'll look at it, or read about it, or talk about it; but, being British, you've got cricket in your blood, and you'll know Gerry Hastie."

"Of course," said Rossiter, his face lighting up, "you mean the Rev. Gerald Hastie who plays for the county and the M.C.C. He's the curate down here."

"That's the chap," said the other, his face lighting up, "and is he as smart as ever at the wicket?"

"Just as smart as ever," Rossiter replied enthusiastically: "Follow this road till you come to the Fallowfield Arms, then right across the green, past the church on the left and the school-house on the right, further on take the lane to the left, and you'll find his cottage, for, real gentleman and grand cricketer that he is, he lives very quietly.

"You've sized up the man," said the other, "I thank you very much. I suppose you couldn't spare time to accompany me as far as the Fallowfield Arms?"

"Not this morning, sir, thank you," said Mr. Rossiter, placing his hand in a grip which enveloped it. "I'm just now engaged on rather pressing business." And he went on his way.

Arrived at Fallowfield Hall, he found the Squire still in his dressing gown, pacing the morning room, pulling at the inevitable cigar and occasionally the big tumbler of brandy and soda.

"Any news, Rossiter?"

"Nothing in particular, sir."

"What!" And the tone of apparent unconcern changed to one of intense surprise. "You haven't caught—I mean," hastily, "no news of Branscombe yet?"

"Not a shadow, sir."

"It's a very serious matter, a desperate man like that being at large. Have a cigar, Rossiter?"

"Thank you, sir," said the other, selecting one from the cabinet. "By the bye, Mr. Roylance, are you quite certain in your own mind that John Branscombe is the man I want?"

A deep red flush for a moment came to the other's cheeks, then died away.

"I don't understand," he said, fixing just a glance on the detective as a fighting man might on an antagonist. Then, after a pause, "Is there any reason to doubt your own original theory?"

"Yes, sir," said the other.

"What is that reason?"

"I'm not quite prepared at present to say. The object of my call was, if possible, to have a little chat with Mr. Chandler."

"Very well," said the other, "you'll find him in the steward's room. By the bye, have you found any clue to *his* assailant?" There was a slight tinge of sarcasm in the tone which nettled the detective.

"I don't know, sir," he said. "I may be strong on the right trail yet, but I think I've got away from the red herring."

"Now what the dickens did he mean?" said the Squire of Fallowfield, his teeth biting deep into his cigar. "What's he going to pump Chandler about? As for him, it would have been best to have settled him then and there; I thought I pretty well had when I left him there, perhaps it's as well not, my hands are quite red enough. Besides, he's a wrong 'un, I know he's a wrong 'un, and he half knows I know it, and that gives me the pull. I might find a straight man in his place awkward, a straight man might have asked more questions and mightn't have been so glad to leave me quite alone. Richard, my friend, beware. Is Rossiter quite such a fool as you take him for? I wonder—I wonder if she's seen through the game, if she's been talking. Come what may, I must know."

(To be continued.)

Is your photo on page 719?

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THE BEST XMAS GIFT.

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The "ORCHESTRAL" requires no teaching. A CHILD CAN PLAY IT.

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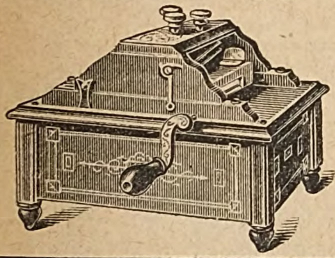

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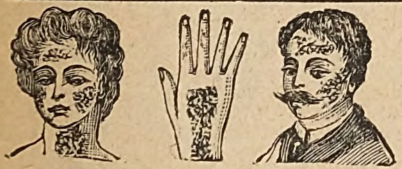

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CURED. This can be done with or without patient's knowledge. Send me a stamp and I will tell you how. (Send no money.) Address, in confidence, Mrs. C. H. (Room 8), 195 Oxford Street, London, W.

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Legible as print, **5d.** page; transposed correctly, **6d.** page. Mrs. Conyers, Morchard Bishop, Devon. Recommended by the Marchioness of Waterford, Lady Arthur Hill, Miss Ellen Terry, etc.

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To get rid of any form of eczema or skin disease as quickly as you can be cured of an ordinary cold, merely write to the **ANTEXEMA CO.**, 83 CASTLE ROAD, LONDON, N.W. They will post to you per return, in plain wrapper, an interesting treatise on the skin and a **FREE TRIAL SAMPLE OF "ANTEXEMA."** This will convince you of the wonderful power of "Antexema" in giving immediate relief from itching and burning. "Antexema" is sold by chemists and stores. Price **1s. 1½d.**, or post free from us for **1s. 3d.**

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Cures Goitre.

Remarkable Discovery That Cures This Dangerous and Disfiguring Disease Without Pain, Operation or Inconvenience.

TRIAL PACKAGE SENT FREE.

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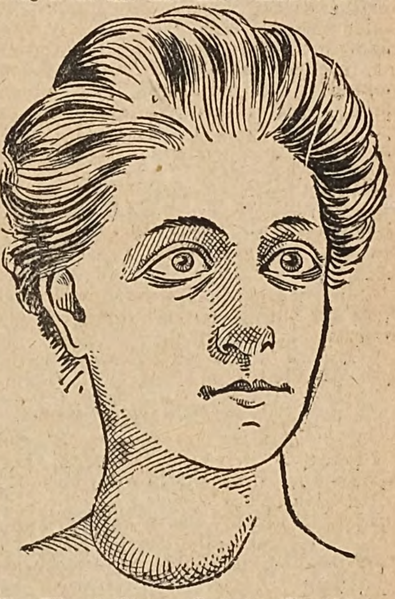

Mrs. Ellen A. Glaynor, Covington, Ky., U.S.A. was cured after suffering for 12 years; if you wish you are at liberty to write her.

Send your name and address to Dr. John P. Haig, 2827 Glenn Building, Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A., and he will forward the trial package postpaid. Do not fail to get this wonderful remedy.

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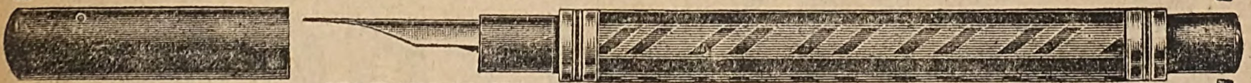
Remember a letter to America requires 2½d postage. Write your name very plain and be sure to give your full address so there can be no mistake in delivery.

A GUINEA FOUNTAIN PEN FOR 2/6.

This Pen, post free 2/6, consists of a beautifully-chased vulcanite barrel, finished with an "Imperial" gold band at top and bottom, with accurately-fitting cap, one of our everlasting wear real electro gold nibs, and adjustable feed.



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30 YEARS OF AGONY FROM INDIGESTION ENDED.

ANOTHER BILE BEAN TRIUMPH.

"Your Bile Beans have done me more good than anything I have ever tried before," wrote Mrs. H. McNair, of 11 Eliza Street, Patricroft, Lancashire, to the proprietors of Bile Beans for Biliousness.

The real weight of this simple testimony lies in the fact that the lady has spent half her life—she is now 66—in experimenting with useless preparations to find relief from the terrible agonies of indigestion, and when a "Warrington Examiner" reporter called at her home the other day to hear her story he was shown a cupboard full of every imaginable medicine and pill which had in turn been proved worthless. Bile Beans alone were equal to the task of curing her of a disease of such long standing.

"Mine was a painful case," she said to the reporter; "my stomach was so weak that I was afraid to touch food, and I began to waste away. I had no strength or energy left in me, and housework was entirely out of the question. I continued to grow weaker, and lost hope of ever being better. This distressing condition lasted up to a few months ago, when I received a booklet telling of some cases as bad as my own which Bile Beans had completely cured. Why should I not try them, too? I had a few Beans given, and they relieved me so perceptibly that I underwent a course. I began to be more able to get about, without feeling depressed or exhausted; and after giving the Beans a fair trial they entirely cured me.

"My appetite is now as healthy as it could be, and I do not fear the pain and uncomfortable feeling I always experienced before and after eating. The Bile Beans have now cured me of the indigestion completely. They have been a veritable God-send, nothing would persuade me to be without them in the house. I have strongly advised my neighbours to take them, for they have noticed the good Bile Beans have done me."

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Have been found an undoubted cure for HEADACHE, INFLUENZA, COSTIVENESS, PILES, LIVER TROUBLE, BAD BREATH, RHEUMATISM, LIVER CHILL, INDIGESTION, DIZZINESS, BUZZING IN THE HEAD, FULNESS AFTER EATING, CONSTIPATION, LACK OF AMBITION, DEBILITY, ANÆMIA, FEMALE AILMENTS, PIMPLES, and a host of other ailments that owe their origin to defective bile flow, assimilation, and digestion. They will also be of great service in Nervous Disorders, Loss of Appetite, Shortness of Breath, Blotches on the Skin, Liver Chills, Scrofula, Insomnia, and Troubled Sleep. They act quickly in restoring females to health, and for a general aperient and tonic remedy they are almost unequalled.

IMPORTANT WARNING.

Bile Beans are NOT sold LOOSE, being put up in sealed boxes only.
All others are fraudulent imitations, and you are warned not to accept any but the genuine.

A FREE SAMPLE.

The proprietors have so much faith in the efficacy of Bile Beans that they will forward a SAMPLE FREE and a book on liver and digestive ailments, if you send your name and address, and a penny stamp (to cover return postage), along with the accompanying coupon. Address: The Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., Central Distributing Dept., Greek Street, Leeds.

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BILE BEANS.
Short Stories. Dec. 1901.

Bile Beans for Biliousness.

Short Stories That . . .
. . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. To those readers who submit storyettes which are used, a six shilling novel will be awarded. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, December 9th. Postcards only, please.

The Greatest Vice.

MISTRESS (to servant, who is about to throw away an old lamp): "What is the matter with that lamp, Bridget? Does it smoke?" Bridget: "I don't know nothin' 'bout whither it smokes or drinks; but it goes out noights, mum!"

He Knew.

A BEFOGGED individual was groping his way down one of the side streets leading off the Strand when he suddenly bumped up against a man coming from the opposite direction and of him he asked: "Can you tell me where this street leads to?" "Yes," replied the other, "it leads into the river. I have just come out of it."

Why He Wanted the Soap.

MOTHER: "Mercy! What dirty hands!" Little Boy: "I think if you had ten dozen cakes of Apple's soap in the house, I wouldn't be so slow about using it." "Ten dozen cakes? Why, that would cost thirty shillings." "I know. Apple and Co. advertise that the boy selling the greatest number of cakes will get a bicycle free."

Breaking it Gently.

"REALLY, Mr. Stalate," she protested, "you have given me four hours of your time this evening." "Why—er—upon my word! So I have. The hours pass like minutes when I am with you." "You were telling me that since your promotion your time is valuable." "Yes." "Well, papa doesn't allow me to accept expensive presents from young men."

Hardly Suitable.

FIRST ACTOR: "I hear that the orchestra in your theatre were sacked in a body the other night; what was the matter?" Second Actor: "Why, they spoilt the best situation in the whole play. You know the court scene, where the hero is sentenced to death?" "Yes." "Well, they were told to play something appropriate, and the judge had no sooner put on the black cap than the idiots struck up 'Where did you get that hat.'"

How He Managed It.

THE Manager of the Company (at the gallery entrance): "Now, here, you boys, here's a ticket for each of you, and sixpence apiece. And if you don't make a noise like the interior of a cooper's shop after every act, and applaud the leading lady, I'll have the doorkeeper throw you downstairs; do you see?" The same Manager (appearing an hour later before the curtain, in response to thunderous applause): "Ladies and gentlemen, I would it were in my power to express my pleasure and surprise at this cordial "——etc.

Knew It Was Meat.

CHILD OF EIGHT (returning from school): "Mamma, we have been reading of such dreadful times. I should not have liked to live then, and I am sure you would not, for people were tied to a leg of mutton, and after gunpowder had been put round they were all blown up?" Mamma: "Are you sure it was not a stake they were tied to?" Child: "Oh, yes, mamma, it was a steak! I knew it was meat of some kind."

Preparing for Company.

JEWELLER: "Here, sir, is a clock which will, I think, please your æsthetic taste. At precisely ten o'clock every morning a chime of bells rings, and a bird hops out and sings a carol." Customer: "I will take that if you will make a few changes in it." "With pleasure." "I have a daughter, and I want the clock for the room where she entertains her company. Make it so that at eleven o'clock at night a milkman's bell will ring, and a newsboy will skip out and yell, 'Morning papers!'"

Poor, Abused Man.

PERHAPS it might be better for Mr. Smith if he were more observant, or, possibly, more something else. The other morning when he started off to town, his wife gave him an important letter to post, and when he returned in the evening it was in his pocket. "Henry," inquired his wife, just as he had settled himself comfortably, "did you post that letter I gave you this morning?" "You don't suppose, love, that I would carry it about with me, do you?" he replied, in as smooth a tone as he could muster. "I don't suppose anything else," she said, suspiciously; "where did you post it?" "In the box round the corner, love; I did it at once, dear, so I would be sure not to forget it." She jumped up suddenly. "Henry Smith," she exclaimed, "give me that letter. They moved that box to the far side of the square a month ago."

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The Double Number of Pearson's Magazine
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NOR IS IT

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☛ NUMBERS HAS EVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE

Is your photo on page 719?

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

A Half-guinea Fountain Pen will each week be awarded to the reader who is the sender of the most interesting query answered on this page.

Two correct claims have been made this week in connection with the Photo Competition, and £5 notes have been forwarded to:

MR. D. E. JONES (No. 36),
69 Beechfield Street,
Mountpottinger,
Belfast.

MR. J. G. ADAMS (No. 40),
24 Broadway,
Kettering.

⁂

A FURTHER batch of photographs will be found on page 719. Tell your lady friends of this, as they are not sending in their claims nearly so frequently as the men. This week six times as many claims were received from men as from ladies.

⁂

IN a fortnight's time the Christmas Double Number of *Short Stories* will be on sale, and as there is likely to be a big demand for it, you had better tell your newsagent at once to save you a copy. The price will be twopence. It will consist of sixty-four pages, containing the first instalment of a splendid New Serial, and Christmas Stories and Competitions to suit all tastes. The design of the cover, too, will be particularly appropriate to the season of the year. Don't forget to order your copy at once.

⁂

So many readers have written to me lately asking me to start the Brain Gymnasium again that I have decided to accede to their request. The first batch of puzzles will appear in the Christmas Double Number.

⁂

ADVICE TO READERS ON VARIOUS MATTERS.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

"J. C." has recently made the acquaintance of a young lady, but as his business keeps him late in the evening he cannot take her out to places of amusement. He wants to know whether, if he pays her expenses and she goes with lady friends, he ought to be considered "mean."

I don't see that there is the slightest cause for your being considered "mean," "J. C.," under the circumstances. It would, of course, be very different if your business did not keep you late, and you preferred paying her expenses and letting her go with lady friends to going yourself with her; in that case she would have good cause to complain. If she really wants to go out and does not approve of your arrangements for her welfare, I should think it would be better to cease paying her any attention, though if you really care for her I would suggest that you try to get an evening off now and again, so that you can take her out yourself.

"J. G. A." lives with a friend who is very irritable and much given to worrying, even over trifles. He wants me to advise him on the matter of a remedy.

This is not an easy thing to do, "J. G. A.," as I am not a medical man. What I would advise you to do, though, is to get him to play games with you. Chess is a game on which all one's thoughts must be concentrated when playing, and if he were to join you in that he would not have the opportunity of brooding over real or imaginary troubles. If neither of you know chess, try ping-pong, or one of the card games which two can play. Don't give him a chance to worry and he will soon get over the habit. I hope you will write to me again telling me how my suggestion works, after giving it a fair trial.

"MARTHA" writes to ask me how she can cure her little girl of rough, noisy behaviour. She is four years old, and "Martha" feels that she ought to be setting a good example to the other two children.

Be gentle with her, "Martha." Show her a good example, and don't check her unless she is too noisy. Children ought to be such happy little souls, for in years to come they have more than enough of sorrow and trouble. One of the saddest sights on God's earth is to see a wee child made prematurely old and careworn by those who should be foremost in promoting its happiness. Set her to do some simple thing for you, read to her, or tell her a tale when she seems to be getting beyond your control. Every child loves to think that she is helping "mother."

"K. B. M."—The "Blue Peter" is a three-cornered flag with a white square in the centre. The word "Peter" is a corruption of the French word "*partir*"—to go. The flag is hoisted as a signal to anyone in the town to whom any member of the crew owes money, that the ship is about to sail, and thus give them an opportunity of collecting the amounts due, and also to tell anyone on shore belonging to the ship to come on board. In the Navy in olden times it was a recognised custom that debts could be paid by the "fore-sheet," that is to say, if any member of the crew could evade his creditor until the fore-sheet was run up, he might content himself that no claim could me made against him for anything which he had purchased at the port from which the ship was about to sail.

"MAB" is in trouble about her lover. When she is out with him he seems to return her affection, but she has heard that he walks out with someone else, and once she met him with another girl. He passed it off with a joke, but she feels very unhappy.

Well, "Mab," I should advise you to wait awhile; very likely there is nothing in it. On the other hand, if you have certain proof later on that he is in the habit of walking out with other girls, I should certainly give him up.

"J. O'R."—You're quite wrong. Cats can swim if they only care to exert themselves sufficiently. The ancient Egyptians used to fish with them on the Nile, according to the representations on walls and so forth that have come down to us, and I myself have known a tabby to dive into a pond when in full cry after a rat. I don't say that a cat will go in and swim about for pleasure like a dog will; the spectacle she presents afterwards is too sorry a one for her dignified nature.

"IVYROE" asks my advice on the following point: She is in love with a young fellow who loves her very dearly, but her father and mother think that she ought to look out for someone better, as he is only a singer on the stage. She feels sure she will never care as much for anyone else.

I see no reason why you should give him up, "Ivyroe." After all, being a public singer is no disgrace, is it?

"MASHERLAND." — The usual method adopted to remove grease spots from a coat is the application of blotting-paper and a hot iron, but it is by no means the most efficacious. Here is a better recipe. Take a few drops of strong brandy or spirits of wine and rub it in with the hand. By this means the wax is reduced to powder and can be removed without leaving the slightest trace.

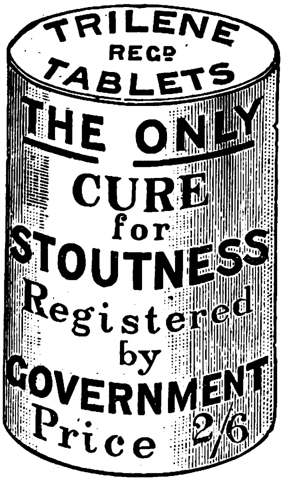
THE Fountain Pen has this week been awarded to Mr. J. Coxon, Mayfield Rd., Ashbourne, Derbyshire.

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

ALL FAT PEOPLE

Can be CURED by taking

TRILENE TABLETS Regd.



For a few weeks. They will safely REDUCE WEIGHT and CURE CORPULENCY PERMANENTLY, whether Abdominal or General. They are small, agreeable, harmless, sent privately, and never fail to improve both HEALTH and FIGURE without change of Diet.

An English Countess writes: "Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."

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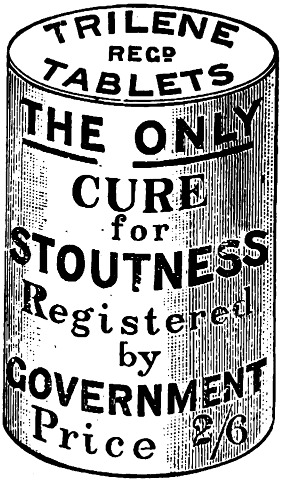

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. **CANHAM**."

Mrs. **DARNLEY SMITH**, Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, writes: "Trilene Tablets have reduced my weight very much. I am so much lighter in every way, and better in health."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse **CROUCHER**, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.

"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 21lb. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me.

"Yours sincerely, M. A. **HEYWOOD**."

Mrs. D. **BURTON**, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss **NORTHLEDGE**, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. **WM. USHER** says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. **McLEOD**, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

A. M. **PRATT**, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. **COX**, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mr. **WALKER**, 236 London Road, Hazelgrove, Stockport, says: "I have used one box and am 14lb. lighter. Send another soon as possible."

Col.-Sergt. **WHITTLE**, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. E. **ALEXANDER**, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They have reduced me quite 2 stone, and I am now quite cured."

Mrs. W. A. **RADFORD**, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess **FURSTENBERG**, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess **LIECHTENSTEIN** writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. **WEAVER**, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. **CROSSLEY**, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. **CONRAD** writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Mrs. **TAYLOR-ROBINSON**, of Tweed Green House, Whalley Range, Manchester, says: "I feel so much lighter and better since taking your Tablets, and am so much thinner that I hardly recognise myself."

Miss A. **LONG**, of 9 South Parade, Waterford, writes: "Your Tablets have reduced me 14lb."

Miss A. **DAWSON**, 62 Orchard Street, Weston-super-Mare, says: "Glad to say the Tablets have sufficiently reduced me. I shall always recommend them."

Miss F. L. **BALL**, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss **PATIENT**, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

Mrs. **DREW**, of 1 Bellevue Gardens, The Nursery, Devizes, writes: "I took Tablets some years ago; they soon reduced me and I have not got stout since Send me a box for my mother."

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A SPECIAL SELECTION OF ONE DOZ. PICTURE PUZZLES, each a little entertainment in itself.

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SPECIAL NOTE.—For an additional 6d. in stamps nearly 200 Views of LONDON and Suburbs. These form the most complete set of London Views published, and during the long winter evenings will be found a never-ending source of delight and instruction.

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No. 676.] For Week Ending December 14th, 1901. [One Penny.

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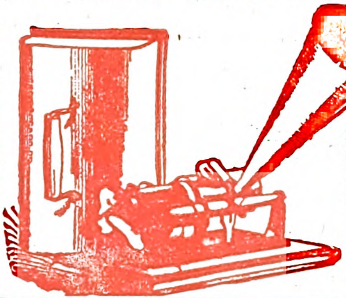

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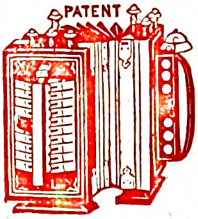

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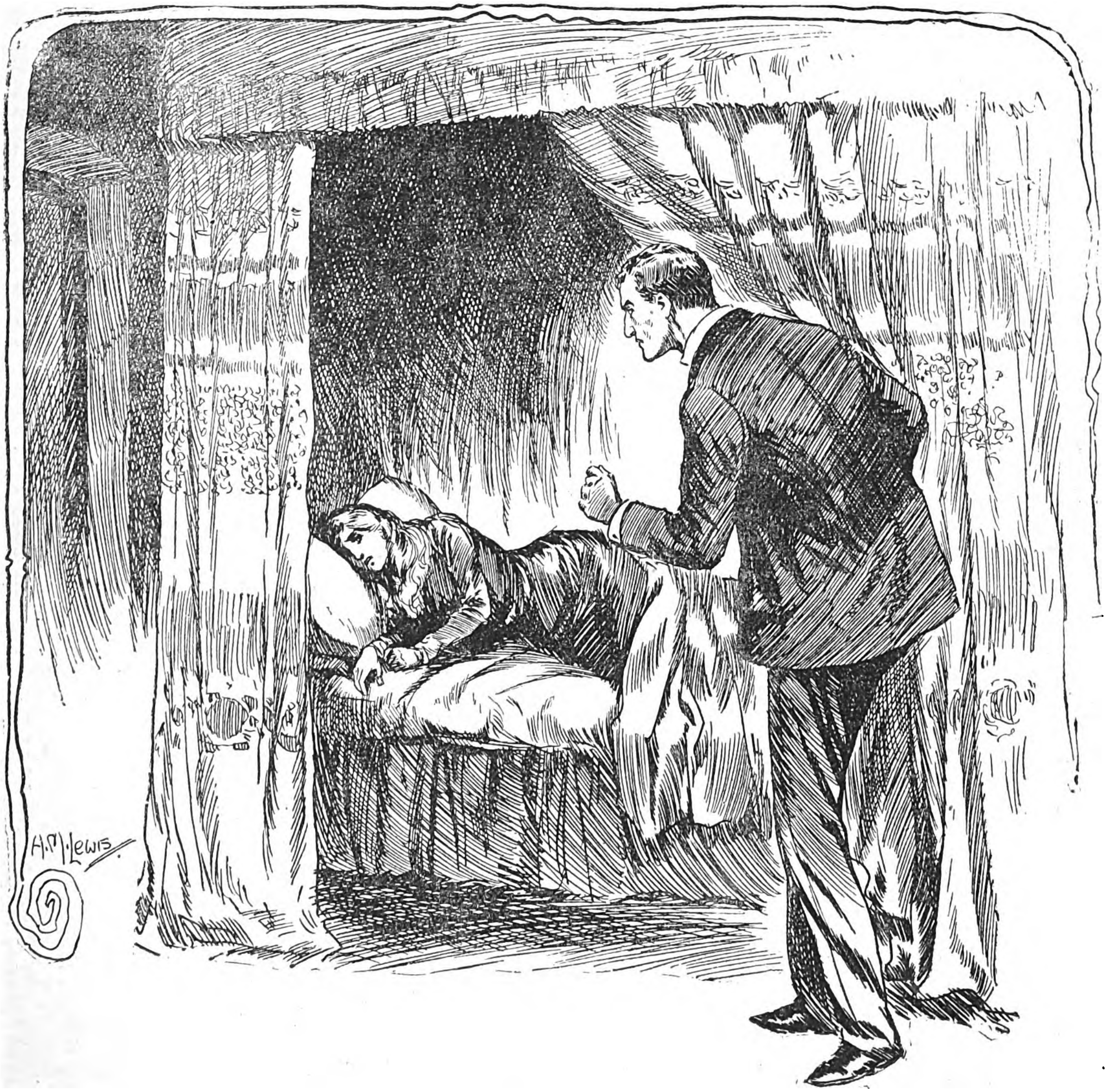
SHORT STORIES

No. 676.] For the Week Ending December 14th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

Adventures of an Actress.



Inside the quadrangular erection was a couch, upon which lay the body of a woman.

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THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

XIX.—THE TORTURED FACE.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

"A GREAT sensation has been caused in the circles of Society lately by the strange disappearance of the beautiful Mrs. Wingfield, wife of the famous R.A., Gilbert Wingfield. Mr. and Mrs. Wingfield were so well-known in London, and the devotion of the pair to each other, a fact so patent to all their friends, that great sympathy has been aroused for the bereaved artist. We are unable to say any details of the mysterious occurrence before our readers as the affair is naturally kept as secret as possible. Mrs. Wingfield was a daughter of the famous Sir Hector Dawlish, the explorer. The matter is engaging the utmost attention of Scotland Yard, who have so far, however, been unable to throw any light upon the unfortunate lady's whereabouts."

"Now that has the makings of a very pretty little case," said Kempton Bond, and he threw down the *Daily Express*, from which newspaper he had culled the above item, and proceeded to light a pipe.

Kempton Bond was a detective who had attained to some degree of eminence in his profession, not by any of those meteoric achievements so dear to the heart of the writer of sensational detective fiction, but by sheer attention to detail, which he himself maintained was the only road to success in his dangerous calling.

It was a cold winter morning, and his simple little office in the Adelphi had a particularly cosy look. A bright fire burnt on the hearth, throwing a cheerful glow upon the plain red walls, hung with a few fine engravings.

For some time the detective sat motionless, merely exhaling huge clouds of tobacco smoke. Neither was he engaged in thinking out some abstruse problem in connection with his profession. It was Kempton Bond's way to let nothing come between him and his moments of relaxation, which were not, it must be confessed, ever of very long duration.

For perhaps ten minutes he smoked on in silence. Then there came a sudden knock at his door. He did not trouble to say 'come in,' for he knew perfectly well that the knock was merely the prelude of an entry, and only a matter of form.

A man glided into the room and said in a soft voice, "Sir Hector Dawlish to see you."

Bond jumped to his feet, and his listlessness vanished.

"Show Sir Hector up, Sefton," he said curtly.

The factotum retired. In another moment or so he reappeared, followed by a slim old gentleman of about medium height, with a soldierly carriage, and bronzed, weather-beaten, clean-shaven face.

Sefton glided out of the room and shut the door. Bond motioned his visitor to a chair with a silent gesture. It was always his custom to allow the first word to come from his clients.

The old gentleman sat down, then he said in precise high-bred tones: "I expect you know what I have come about, Mr. Bond?"

"The strange disappearance of Mrs. Wingfield, I presume," answered the detective quietly.

"Yes; and with your permission I will, without wasting time in further preliminaries, proceed to tell you all I know of the affair.

"My daughter was married to Mr. Wingfield about ten years ago. It was a love match, and I may as well tell you, contrary to my wishes, as I have always looked upon artists and actors with rather an indifferent eye. Mere prejudice, I know, but still there's the thing. However, the marriage, though childless, has, so far as I know, been a happy one. My son-in-law has always given me the idea of having been an exemplary husband, and I have never heard a breath of suspicion against him, though of course, as you know, I have been out of England a good deal. Still, my daughter's letters were always happy and reassuring. And now suddenly comes this bolt from the blue. My daughter has mysteriously disappeared, and left a note to say that she has gone off with another man, whose name is not divulged in the letter."

Sir Hector paused, and though he spoke firmly and concisely, Kempton Bond was far too good a judge of character not to observe that beneath the calm exterior lay all the anguish of a stricken father's heart. He looked keenly into his client's face, and then said slowly:

"But you do not believe yourself that that is the true fact of the matter? I take it that you feel that there is some other factor in the case, that you think there is some other explanation to account for Mrs. Wingfield's disappearance."

"I do, I do!" cried the old man, throwing his assumed cloak of punctiliousness to the winds. "I feel sure that my daughter would be incapable of so terrible a crime. She was my all, Mr. Bond, ever since her mother died, and it went to my heart to give her up, even though I knew I could not always keep her by me. And now, though everything points to her guilt, yet I cannot, I will not believe it, until I hear

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it from her own lips. There has been foul play somewhere, I know it. Sift this mystery to the dregs, Mr. Bond, and I will give you anything you like to ask of me that is in my power to give."

"If it is possible for human capability to do so, Sir Hector, I will. I would do my best to help you if only for my professional reputation," replied the detective. "I will first of all see Mr. Wingfield. You see as the case stands I have really so very little to go upon. He might be able to give me useful information. I will then see you again, and report to you what I have discovered."

CHAPTER II.

THE house occupied by Gilbert Wingfield was in Kensington, and had been, in the days when the fashionable London suburb was only a tiny village on the outskirts of the Metropolis, an old manor house, though it had been done up thoroughly by its present occupier, and presented but few characteristics, internally, at all events, to tell of its pristine self.

The artist was in his studio when Kempton Bond was announced, a splendid oak-pannelled chamber, with numerous canvases, finished and unfinished, round its mellow walls.

The artist received the detective with the chastened air of a man who has not yet recovered from the effects of a grievous sorrow. There were dark lines under his big black eyes. His mouth was disguised by a silky black moustache and pointed Vandyke beard. Undeniably a handsome man.

Kempton Bond did not waste much time in coming to the point. He briefly explained that Sir Hector had visited him that same morning, and had requested him to take steps to discover the whereabouts of the missing lady. To which Wingfield listened in silence, though when the detective had finished, he shook his head sadly, as though to say "all the detectives in the world won't give me back my lost wife."

"I take it you desire me to go on with the case, Mr. Wingfield?" Bond asked, almost sharply.

"Most certainly," answered the artist with alacrity "and if you can restore my wife to me or unearth the villain who has wrecked my domestic happiness—well, I am a rich man, and should be prepared to pay your price, whatever it is."

The detective was silent for a moment, then he said: "Who do you yourself suspect, Mr. Wingfield, as the villain who has run off with your wife? For surely there must be some one at whom you can point the finger of suspicion?"

"You are wrong, Mr. Bond," came the quick answer, "I most solemnly swear to you that there is no one upon whom I can fix suspicion. If you had known my wife you would understand my point exactly. There is no one whom I would sooner have sworn was more the soul of rectitude and honour than she."

"Perhaps you will show me the note that your wife wrote to you telling you that she had gone off with another man?" said the detective, going off upon another tack.

The artist went across to a corner of the studio, to where a fine old Sheraton bureau was placed. From a pigeon-hole he drew forth what turned out to be a piece of note-paper, upon which was written in an eminently feminine and refined hand the following words:

"My dear husband,—For dear you are, and dear you always have been in spite of all that will happen. When you get this I shall be far away. I have left home with one I love not wisely, but so well that I must sacrifice my honour, and, I fear, your happiness, to my passion. Do not try to find me. Try only to forget the woman who was once your loving Wife."

"Before passing my opinion," Bond said slowly, "I should be much obliged if you would let me see some more specimens of Mrs. Wingfield's handwriting. It need not be anything of a private nature, though I am sure that you will absolve me from any feeling of mere curiosity. But the case is one that is more perplexing than any I have yet been engaged upon, and I cannot afford to let any chance slip by that may help me in my investigations."

"I will give you a letter of my wife's," answered the artist without any hesitation, "I am convinced you only ask me to do so for perfectly adequate reasons," and after again rummaging a little in the bureau, he handed the detective a note, evidently in the same hand as the other.

"Perhaps you will be so good as to allow me to keep these two documents for the present?" said Bond. "They will, of course, be shown to no one but myself, in fact, I think that it would be best for the sake of safety that you write me a note confirming my retention of the letter that was left you by Mrs. Wingfield. I should then feel that I had your sanction to my course of action."

The artist elevated his eyebrows.

"Is that your usual custom, Mr. Bond?" he asked. "I am so utterly unused to detectives and their ways that you must pardon the question."

"Such is customary," came the imperturbable answer, "though of course—" but Wingfield put up his hand.

"You shall not find me wanting in manners, Mr. Bond," he cried, and sitting down at his desk, he wrote a short note, as desired.

A few moments later Bond took his leave for the present. Yet as he made his way out into the gloomy street he muttered to himself:

"Perhaps you mayn't be quite so calm next time we meet, Mr. Gilbert Wingfield. You're one of the coolest customers I've ever come across, but I may have a trump-card up my sleeve that will force you to throw down your hand."

CHAPTER III.

IN accordance with the completion of the tour that had been arranged the *Good Samaritan Company* found itself at Bradford once more with a full cast, for Hazel Harlow and Eric Monteith, fresh from their week in London, had rejoined the company in accordance with their agreements.

The death of Hazel's dissolute father had made a great change in her fortunes. For somehow or other the defunct farmer had managed to amass a considerable fortune. And so Hazel, despite all the cravings she had had, had come to the determination to retire from theatrical life after the completion of the present tour in three weeks' time.

What was responsible for this sudden reversion in her feelings? What influences could have been at work to make her so suddenly renounce the chances of becoming pre-eminent in the profession she had voluntarily adopted, and in which she had already secured so strong a foothold?

The answer was to be found in the one word Love. At last what she had longed for so ardently had come to pass. She was in love, and with a man worthy of her whole-hearted affection, who had proved his own unswerving loyalty and devotion to her in a thousand ways. And had he not risked his life for her more than once? At last Eric Monteith was to win his reward.

Yet though Hazel knew in her heart of hearts that at last Love had set his foot upon her destiny, she had not dared to voice her feelings to the world.

It was a raw, cold winter's afternoon, and already darkness had set in. Hazel and her friend and fellow-actress, Jenny Lovelace, were making their way along the gloomy streets towards their lodgings, when suddenly their attention was attracted by the faint sound as of someone weeping.

The wailing noise appeared to come from the ground. Both paused instinctively, and looked around, their sympathies awakened.

A little lad, wretchedly clad, was huddled up on the doorstep of a deserted house, weeping bitterly. Hazel stooped down, and said in a voice of infinite pity: "What's the matter, little boy? Why do you cry so?"

The mite stopped crying and looked up in the sweet face bending over him. Then he said in a voice still choked with weeping:

"Mother's ill. She sent me out for a doctor. And I'm so hungry," and again his tears broke out afresh.

Hazel and Jenny exchanged glances. Their eyes filled involuntarily at the sight of such grief in one so young. Then Hazel spoke again, spoke with all the spontaneity of her kind young heart:

"Will you take us to your mother, little boy?" she said. "Perhaps we can help her!" The little fellow, he was a pretty child despite his rags, sprang up at once. "I will take you to her," he said confidingly, "it's not far."

He conducted the two girls along the street, and then turned into one of far meaner aspect, to dive down a narrow court debouching from this thoroughfare.

It was quite dark up the alley, and the actresses drew closer together for mutual support. Suddenly a faint beam of light disclosed their little guide, who was holding a fragment of candle, stuck in an old bottle. He had mounted a rickety flight of stairs at the head of which he stood, before a half-open door.

The girls, swallowing the natural repugnance they felt at being in such unsavoury surroundings, mounted the crazy stair-way, and followed the child inside a narrow room.

In the corner of the squalid apartment was a bed, or an excuse for one, that seemed to be made chiefly of old sacks. Upon this miserable pallet was the body of a woman, whose face they could but dimly see in the gloomy light of the solitary dip.

"Archie," said the voice of the sick woman, "is that you? What a long time you've been, dearie."

The voice, though faint, was not a common one. Hazel advanced to the side of the pallet, and stooping, said in a low voice: "You are ill? We have come to help you."

With an effort, the sick woman, who had been lying with her face to the wall, turned round and gazed up into the beautiful young face, into the glorious blue eyes that were transfigured with the divine light of pity.

"Who are you?" she muttered hoarsely. "You have a sweet face, but you cannot help me. I'm dying."

Hazel caught her breath, "At least let me go for a doctor," she said.

"All the doctors in the world can't save me," came the answer, and Hazel thought she had never heard a human voice fraught with such agony. "I'm dying of consumption, and I shouldn't care if it wasn't for Archie." Then the voice changed. "Sweet lady, will you do a dying woman, who hasn't a single friend in the world, a last favour? It is much that I shall ask you, yet if you will promise to do what I ask you will at least have the satisfaction of knowing that you have eased the soul of a woman dying friendless and alone."

A wail from the little boy, who had crept to the foot of his mother's bed, brought Jenny to his side. She put her arms about him. The dying woman threw her a look of the deepest gratitude. Then she turned to Hazel.

"Bend down," she muttered. "There is much to say, and but little time to say it in. I was born for better things than this. My father was a well-to-do North Country merchant. I was a governess in London. There I met and fell in love with a man. We were married in secret according to his desire. Then Archie was born, and my husband left me. He had grown tired of me, and I, who loved him only too well, rather than live with a man who made no pretence of desiring to acknowledge me as his wife, left him, and returned home, to find my father dying of the same disease that is killing me, and a pauper.

"After his death I came to Bradford and found employment in a mill as a wool-carder. By dint of the most strenuous exertions I managed to make just enough to keep my boy and myself out of the Union. But the hard work and the unhealthy atmosphere of the factory soon began to tell on my lungs, with the result that God has sent you here to listen to a dying woman's confession. Under my pillow you will find my marriage certificate and the name of my husband. I don't know where he is now, but perhaps you will be able to find him. I shouldn't care for myself if he was never to hear of me again, but there is Archie. Perhaps he will do something for the little one."

Then she raised herself upon her arms, and called out in a loud voice: "Archie, darling, come to me!"

In a moment the little lad was on his knees beside the miserable bed, and the poor wasted arms of his mother were round him.

"Good-bye, little son," she murmured, "tell—your—father—" but the words were never finished. For Death had cut the sentence short.

Underneath the pillow of the dead woman were the papers she had mentioned. Hazel took these forth with reverent hand.

"I shall take these papers, Jenny," she said gently, "and give them to Eric. We had better fetch a policeman and tell him about this poor woman. As to the little boy, what shall we do with him?"

"Take him with us," cried Jenny spontaneously, speaking as her warm heart bade her, her eyes wet with tears.

"Yes," answered Hazel solemnly, no less moved than her comrade had been. "We will take him with us. For somehow I can't help looking upon him as a sacred trust."

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CHAPTER IV.

Kempton Bond sat in his cosy office at an open bureau. Before him lay three documents that he was studying intently.

"That was rather a cute dodge of mine," he muttered, "getting Wingfield to write out that acknowledgment of his wife's letter. I don't think he tumbled to the real reason that made me ask him for it, that it was because I wanted a specimen of his *natural* handwriting. I'm beginning to see daylight faintly. In the first place I believe that the surmise I pitched on first of all as being the only one likely to lead me anywhere is correct.

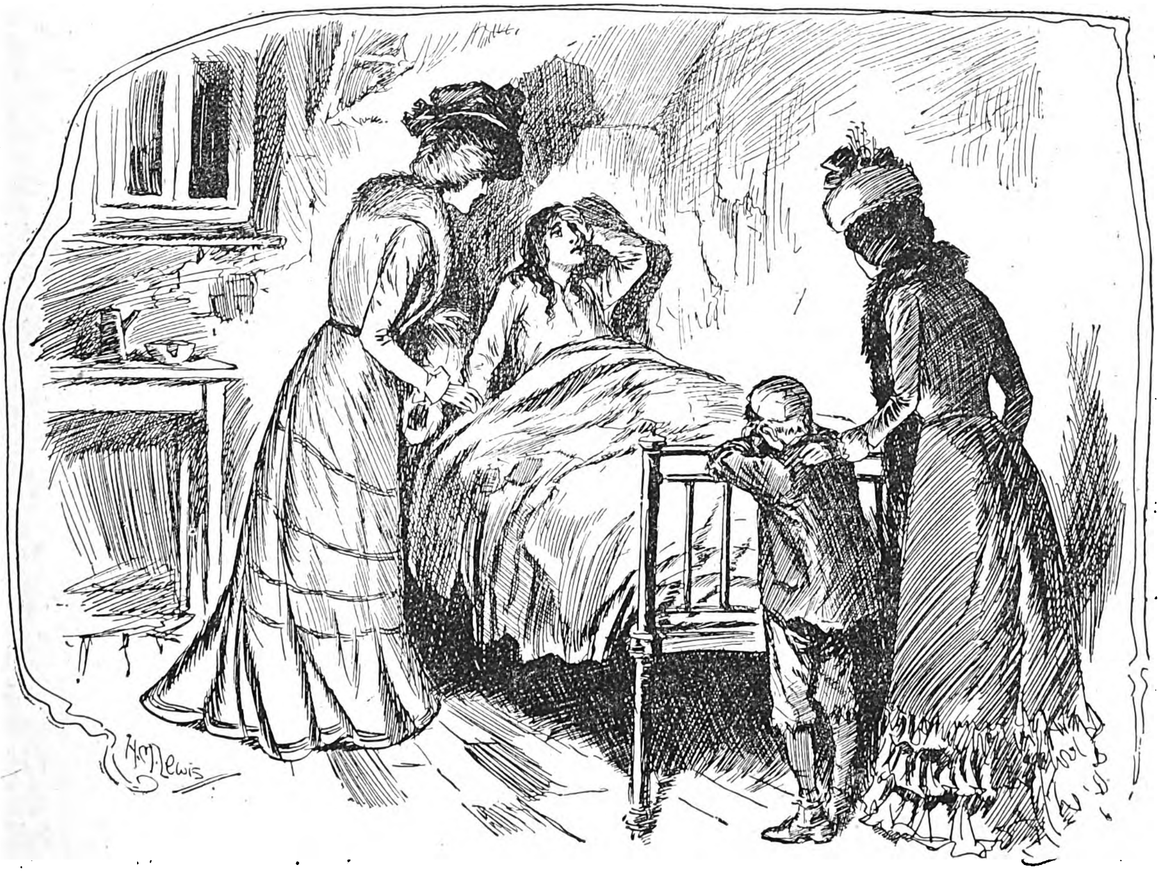
"From the conversation I had with Sir Hector, I take it his daughter would be the last person in the world to run off with a strange man. Why, from all accounts she was as devoted a wife as ever lived. And in spite of what you said, Mr. Gilbert Wingfield, that there is no one upon whom you can fix suspicion, I don't believe you, and that's flat.

"Now, is this last letter of Mrs. Wingfield's a forgery? At first I thought it was. But now that I come to compare it closely with this other one of hers, I'm bothered if I can make up my mind. If it is a forgery, well, there's only one man who can have been responsible for it, Wingfield himself. And against that, there's the argument that he has no reason that we know of for wishing his wife out of the way." The detective rose to his feet, and lighting a pipe, began pacing thoughtfully up and down the room.

"Confound it all!" he resumed, after a few moments silence. "It strikes me there's not so much daylight ahead after all. If the note is *not* a forgery, well then Gilbert Wingfield is a man who has been wronged, and there's no more to be said. If it is a forgery, then the arti must have some solid reason for wishing his wife out of the way, and I shall have to try some other tack to find out what's at the back of it, and we shall have to rout out the past history of the gentleman. If I were one of your pet detectives that can tell who a man's tailor is from the way his trousers are turned up, well, the thing would be as good as done, but I'm not Sherlock Holmes! Makes very good reading, but I should very much like to measure blades with him in real life."

At that moment Sefton entered with a letter. The missive bore the Bradford postmark. "I seem to know that hand-writing," said Bond, and tore open the flap.

There was a letter addressed to the detective, and one or two inclosures.



"There is much to say and but little time to say it in."

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He read the letter through carefully with kindling eyes.

"Well, here's something that licks creation," he said slowly, "Never tell me again that there's nothing in coincidences. I've had some surprises in my life, but I don't think I ever remember anything like this," he thrust the papers into his breast pocket and rang a bell.

In a moment Sefton appeared.

"I'm going round to Sir Hector Dawlish's," the detective said curtly, "I don't know when I shall be back."

Sir Hector was at home. He occupied chambers in Jermyn Street. "Well, Mr. Bond," he said eagerly, as the detective was ushered into his room, "have you any news for me?"

"I have indeed," came the grave answer, "and I want you to be prepared, Sir Hector, for intelligence of a very grave and startling nature."

The baronet caught his breath.

"I only beg that you will not keep me in suspense, Mr. Bond," he cried. "Believe me, I am prepared for anything."

"I will not attempt to beat about the bush," said Bond, "I must preface my news by telling you that your daughter has no right to the title of Gilbert Wingfield's wife. The artist had already a wife living when he married her."

Every vestige of colour fled from Sir Hector's face as he heard this terrible indictment against his son-in-law.

"Merciful Heaven!" he muttered brokenly, "how do you know that?"

"By means that are nothing less than miraculous. With your very kind attention I will read to you a letter that I have but just received from a friend of mine in Bradford, a Mr. Monteith, who is at present the member of a theatrical touring company, but who is a man of gentle birth, and whose testimony is absolutely unimpeachable."

"A letter! May I beg of you to read it to me at once?"

The letter from Eric was as follows:

"Dear Mr. Bond,—I expect you will be surprised to hear from me, and doubtless more so when you have perused this letter. My excuse for writing to you must be that you are the only man I know likely to be able to sift the matter to its dregs, while I am sure that if any man can repair a terrible wrong to those who have no means of doing so for themselves you are that man.

"Last evening, Miss Hazel Harlow, whose name will probably be familiar to you, and her friend, Miss Lovelace, were the chief actors in as sad a little drama of every-day life as can well be imagined. They were walking along the streets when a poor little lad accosted them and begged them to accompany him to the bedside of his mother, who was dying. This they did, to be just in time to witness the poor woman's death.

"Before she died, the poor woman, who had seen better days, intrusted into Miss Harlow's hands the papers that I inclose with this letter. This she did in the hopes that the father of her little boy might be found and induced to do something for the poor little orphan. I can tell you no more about the man than that his name is as is set forth on the marriage certificate: Gilbert Wingfield, the same name as that of the well-known R.A.—"

"And the same man," concluded the detective, handing, as he spoke, the tattered register, all that had been left to the poor dead woman to bind her to the past, to the astounded and horrified Sir Hector.

The baronet looked with almost lack-lustre eyes at the incriminating document that stated that a marriage had been duly solemnised between Gilbert Wingfield and Henrietta Lambert at the registry office in John Street, Clerkenwell.

"But how do you know it's—*he?*" asked Sir Hector in a low voice, "there's nothing here to say who he is."

In answer, Kempton Bond handed a faded piece of note-paper to the baronet.

"Because this was also under the dead woman's pillow," he answered quietly.

"This," was yet another letter, a love-letter that began, "My darling Hetty," and ended up "Your ever loving Gilbert," merely a few burning sentences between the beginning and end of the epistle, breathing undying love and affection, love that had brought the recipient to a terrible and unhallowed grave.

"His writing," muttered the stricken Sir Hector. "Oh, to think that such villainy exists. My daughter—my poor darling daughter—terribly sinned against, yet not, I'll swear, sinning. Where are you? Where are you?"

"Gilbert Wingfield is the only man who can tell us that," answered the detective gently. "I would have you be of good heart, Sir Hector. We are still groping for light, though of course this new discovery has put a powerful weapon in our hands to use against Wingfield. With your acquiescence I will go round to his house at once, and endeavour to wring the whole truth of the story from his lips."

CHAPTER V.

As on the first occasion when Kempton Bond had presented himself at the artist's house, Wingfield was in his studio alone.

The detective was at once struck with the haggard, almost wild look, on the artist's face. He had the appearance of a man who was suffering from the effect of intense mental strain.

He received the detective almost listlessly, and did not even trouble to rise from the chair in which he reclined in the studio. His dark eyes were supernaturally bright, with a far away look in them that Bond could not but notice.

"I have come to see you, Mr. Wingfield," began Bond incisively, "with a piece of news in my possession that has considerably modified the first impressions I had on embarking on this case. I have learnt something about your past life that makes me very uncertain how to proceed."

He paused to note the effects of his preamble. A faint colour came into the face of the other man. He assumed an upright posture in his chair and said, with an evident effort, "May I ask you to be slightly more explicit?"

"Very well," came the clear answer, "I have to tell you that I know of your first marriage with Miss Lambert, in Clerkenwell, on the 15th of February, 1889, and that your first wife was still alive when you married Miss Dawlish."

But if Bond had expected Wingfield to exhibit any feelings of fear on hearing this terrible indictment of his conduct, his anticipations were to receive a severe shock.

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The artist made no sound of any kind. He seemed to have relapsed into the state almost of torpor that he had been in on Bond's arrival. He merely sat motionless and gazed vacantly before him.

The detective, used to all manner of men as he was, had to admit to himself that at last he had chanced upon a being totally different to any one else he had seen in all his long experience.

Then, to his amazement, he discovered that Wingfield was talking gently to himself. It was indeed improbable that he had heard the last sentence addressed to him. The single question he had put to his visitor had evidently cost him an effort. He had put it and relapsed once more into the inner recesses of his own thoughts.

Bond leant forward. The artist was speaking so softly that it was all that he could do to hear what was being said. The words he did hear, however, were as follows:

"To have so nearly achieved success only to fail. Why won't my strength last? And it would have been such a masterpiece, a triumph before which the finest Wiertz or Hogarth would appear a tawdry daub. To be so near—to have fame—almost in my grasp, only to see the jade slip by me. For somehow I feel that I shall never do it now.

Suddenly the artist rose from his seat, and an expression came into his face of more terrible ferocity than any Bond ever remembered to have seen portrayed on human countenance. Like a panther he crept across the room towards a great canvas that was set in one corner of the studio, his eyes roving furtively from side to side, with vacant cunning. Instinctively the detective rose as well. In an instant the madman, for such he undoubtedly was, came to a dead halt. Then he swayed for a few moments like a drunken man, to fall heavily into Bond's arms, foaming at the lips with unmistakable frenzy.

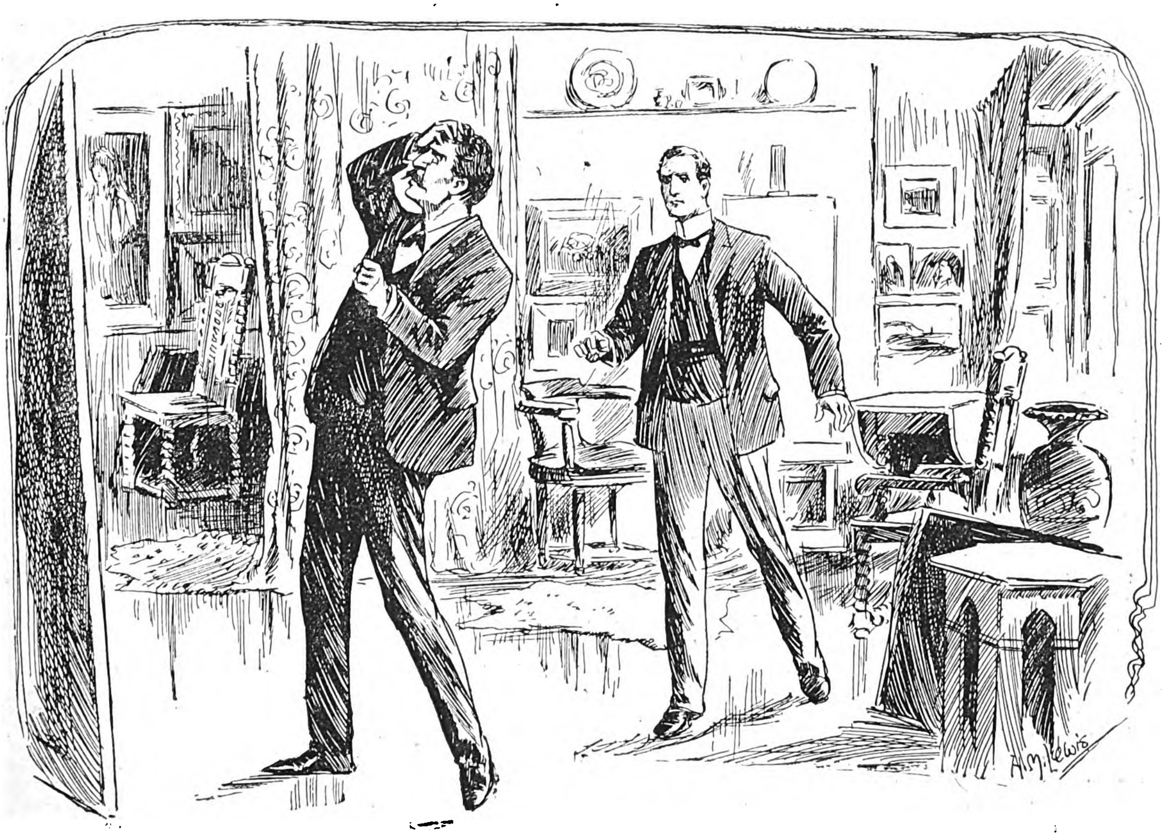
The detective deposited the unconscious body upon a couch, and tore to the bell-pull, which he tugged with all his strength. The pealing summons brought more than one servant into the room in evident alarm.

"Take your master to his room," cried Bond authoritatively, "and run with all haste for a doctor. I'm afraid he's very ill."

The helpless body was carried out, and Bond found himself alone in the studio. With startling alacrity he locked the door, thus securing himself from intrusion.

Then he threw himself into a chair and gave himself up to the deepest thought.

"You're in deep water now, Kempton Bond," he said



In an instant the madman came to a dead halt. Then he swayed for a few moments like a drunken man.

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to himself, "and if you're not very careful you'll be out of your depth. 'A triumph before which the finest Wiertz or Hogarth would appear a tawdry daub.' Those were his words, and that's where I shall find the keystone to this dark business. He's mad, mad as a hatter. The question is, how long has he been insane. I was once in the Musee Wiertz, in Brussels, and I shall not easily forget the terrible pictures that are in that gallery. And Wiertz was mad, too"—barely had the thought flashed through his brain before he had leapt to his feet with a stifled exclamation.

"I think I'm beginning to see daylight now," he went on.

He sat down in the chair lately occupied by Wingfield, and tried to remember all the details of the brief scene that had led up to the crowning end of the short act.

"After he had spoken, what did he do?" continued the detective. "He rose to his feet and set off in the direction of that big canvas. He moved like a man with a purpose, too, as though he were making towards some fixed part of the room."

He hurried towards the great canvas, and pulled it aside, half-expecting to find a door concealed behind the obstruction. But he was doomed to disappointment. There was nothing there but the panelling that ran in like fashion all round the fine old chamber.

"Wait a bit. This room wasn't built yesterday. This house was old, long before you were born, Kempton. This oak panelling is two or three hundred years old. I've heard that this very house was an ancient country manor-house in days gone by. It's more than likely that there is a secret chamber here. If so, by Jove, there's your explanation of what the madman started off with: '*To have so nearly achieved success only to fail. And it would have been such a masterpiece!* Good Heavens! The very idea is enough to curdle your blood!" and with his quick brain working thus at express speed, the detective hastened to put his new-born theory to the test.

His keen eyes ran round the room. Then he advanced to the panelling and began tapping it sharply upon the surface that had been covered by the huge canvas. At one place the wood seemed to give out a distinctly hollow sound. His heart began to beat fiercely.

But the surface of the oak was smooth and devoid of any protuberances. The panelling was about seven feet high. Along the top of it ran a cornice, below which were plain wooden dentals.

He reached up and ran his fingers along the top of the cornice.

The dust lay thick upon the smooth surface of the wood. It was evident that he would derive no inspiration from that point.

His fingers strayed to the dentals. He felt each one in turn, starting with one a considerable distance from the place that had given out the hollow sound.

Ah, what was that? A loose one. He tugged at it. Yet though it seemed loose, it defied his utmost endeavours to remove it.

He reversed the action and pushed it upward. The result was electrifying in its unexpectedness.

A heavy rumbling sound, as of a big door swinging back upon rusty hinges, followed the effort.

The next moment, and the panel immediately to his right seemed to fall inward, and a rush of cold air came out into the warm studio.

Something remarkably like a groan fell from the detective's lips. The sound marked the realisation of all his worst forebodings.

For fully a minute he stood motionless, regarding almost vacantly the black cavity in the wall that led whither he dared not guess. Then, pulling himself together with an effort, he addressed himself anew to his self-imposed task.

"It's got to be gone through with now," he muttered, "cost what it will."

A flight of stairs led upwards from the black void. Bond put his hand in his pocket and produced a tiny electric glow-lamp, a thing he never allowed himself to be without.

He switched on the little light, and flashed the bright though diminutive beam into the cavity. The steps led upwards for some considerable distance, though exactly how far he was unable to determine.

He mounted the stairway with quick firm footsteps, to find his progress barred by a door that, to his chagrin, was locked.

But Kempton Bond was a man of ready resource, as, I venture to think, has already been sufficiently proved. He took a small steel instrument, bright and deadly looking, from some recess on his person, and applied the point of the jemmy, for such it was, to the quaint old lock.

A sound of splintering wood followed, for the timber was rotten with age. The next moment and the door flew open as though by magic.

He found himself in a long, low chamber, lighted from above by a kind of skylight. The room was furnished in Eastern style, with sumptuous Kabyle mats upon the floor, and hangings of rare Persian fabric on the walls.

In one corner was an easel, draped with a cloth. Behind the cloth could be seen the protruding corner of a large canvas.

Bond tore back the concealing drapery from the easel and a cry of horror fell from his lips, as the canvas beneath stood open to his gaze.

It was only the portrait of a woman, life-sized, and unfinished, though what there was was enough to explain the reason for the detective's exclamation. Never had he seen a human face so limned, never would he have believed it possible that any artist could have set down in paint so ghastly a presentment of human agony.

The face was bloodless. The scarlet lips, fearfully vivid by reason of the pallor displayed upon the rest of the countenance, were slightly parted. The eyes were wide open, and it was here that the painter had achieved his most terrible success. With dreadful fixed glare they stared out from the dead canvas like living animate organs. No words can express the horrible ghastliness of those tortured eyes.

Kempton Bond threw back the cloth over the painting with a shudder. A faint groan fell on his ears. The sound acted upon him like a strong tonic. "Thank Heaven," he murmured. "I'm in time after all."

He wheeled swiftly round. In the corner opposite the veiled canvas was an erection that he had cursorily noticed on first entering the room, and that closer inspection proved to be the facsimile of a small Arab tent, quite in keeping with the other appurtenances of the chamber.

It was held up at its four corners by elaborately gilded

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poles, round which were draped hangings richly embroidered in gold and silver filigree.

The detective, without a moment's hesitation, flung back the costly hangings. Inside the quadrangular erection was a couch, upon which lay the body of a woman, whom Bond recognised in an instant as the poor tortured model of the portrait.

This, then, was the explanation of the terrible mystery.

CHAPTER VI.

THE conclusion of the affair is best told in Bond's own words in a letter to Monteith.

"The full explanation of the ghastly business is as follows: Gilbert Wingfield was, and had been a maniac for a considerable number of years. His mother had died in a madhouse, and the germs of the hereditary disease had lain latent in his brain for a long time, to finally blaze out with unrestrained fury.

"More than once it has been proved by the confession of the poor woman who was not his wife, though he had married her, that he was possessed of hypnotic powers. He at last conceived the terrible idea of painting a portrait that should embody in every detail the true presentment of human suffering. With this end in view he determined to procure a model who should really suffer the agonies he wished to portray.

"He therefore hypnotised his wife and got her to write the letter that announced that she had gone off with another man—this explains what I was sure of, namely, that her hand and no other had penned the note in question—and conveyed her away to the secret chamber, the existence of which, incredible though it may seem, was only known to himself.

"But his horrible devices did not stop there. Having thus thrown dust into the eyes of those likely to discover his maniacal plan, he proceeded to experiment upon the unhappy woman with all sorts of drugs, and thus got the model for the terrible portrait that I found.

"He is now under restraint. Miss Dawlish, as she may now be called, is with her father, who is going to take her abroad, for as you can well imagine, the shock to her nerves and constitution generally has been terrible.

"As regards the little Archie, provision will be made for him from Wingfield's estate. That is the one bright spot in the terrible affair—leaving out Miss Harlow's crowning act of mercy—that the child will at least be provided for. And from all accounts, a thing indeed to be thankful for, the little fellow seems to be untainted by his father's terrible malady. He is to be trained for the Navy.

"You can use your own discretion about telling Miss Harlow the true facts of the sad story. My advice to you is—don't, or at least wait until after you are married.

"And, by-the-by, when is that happy event coming off? Mind you don't forget to send me an invitation to the wedding.—Ever yours sincerely,

"KEMPTON BOND."

Eric read through the letter with the keenest attention. When he came to the end of it the colour rushed to his face.

He laid down the missive and gazed thoughtfully out into the murky street.

"We leave Bradford to-morrow," he soliloquised, and in two week's time the tour will be at an end. "Dare I take advantage of the augury contained in Bond's letter? Heaven knows my love for Hazel has never waned, though I have said nothing more about it to her since that day when she told me that although she had regard for me, she had not the love I wanted.

"It's three o'clock now. I'm sure to find Hazel at her lodgings. She won't be out on such an afternoon as this," he gazed out upon the street, along which a driving drizzle of sleet was sweeping.

Then he rose to his feet with an air of sudden determination. In a few more minutes he was hurrying along the wet pavement.

A faint blush rose to Hazel's face as Eric was announced.

Jenny, with that rare tact that some women possess intuitively, rose from her chair and slipped noiselessly from the room before Eric had had time to enter.

The young man entered the room, and his face displayed the pleasure he felt at finding the girl he loved alone.

For a few moments they talked desultorily about the trivialities of the moment. Then suddenly Eric leant forward in his chair.

"Hazel," he said earnestly, "in another fortnight our tour will be over, what are you going to do then?"

Hazel did not answer for a moment. Then she looked up into her lover's face.

"Mr. Venables has made me a very flattering offer to continue with him," she said, trying to speak calmly, "but I am undecided whether to accept."

"Then what do you say to letting me decide for you?" broke in the young man eagerly. "Won't you entertain an offer from me?"

"From you?"

"Yes, Hazel. The offer of going on tour with me for life? I've waited so long for you, darling, will you marry me, Hazel?"

He read his answer in her shining eyes. The next moment he was on his knees beside her chair. His arms were round her. Their lips met. Love had beaten down all obstacles.

A faint cough caused Eric to spring to his feet. The next moment Jenny stood in the room before the plighted lovers.

"You'll ask me to the wedding, Eric?" she said demurely. "Oh, you lucky, lucky man. If ever any one ought to be congratulated, you're he."

Eric's brain was in a whirl. He could hardly realise that what he had longed for so ardently, for so many weary months, had really come true.

"Ask you to the wedding? I should think so," he said soberly. "But you must get Hazel to tell you when that will be."

Hazel's troubles seemed nearly over now. But the series of catastrophes that had dogged her footsteps for so long were not quite over. She had forgotten that she had still one enemy who would never forget or forgive her for having thwarted his base desires, a man who put himself beyond the pale of society by his fierce attempts to entrap her. She was still to be reminded of the existence of Horace Caldecott.

The *Good Samaritan* Company next week is at Norwich, where Hazel and Eric Monteith are able to be of assistance to Jenny Lovelace.

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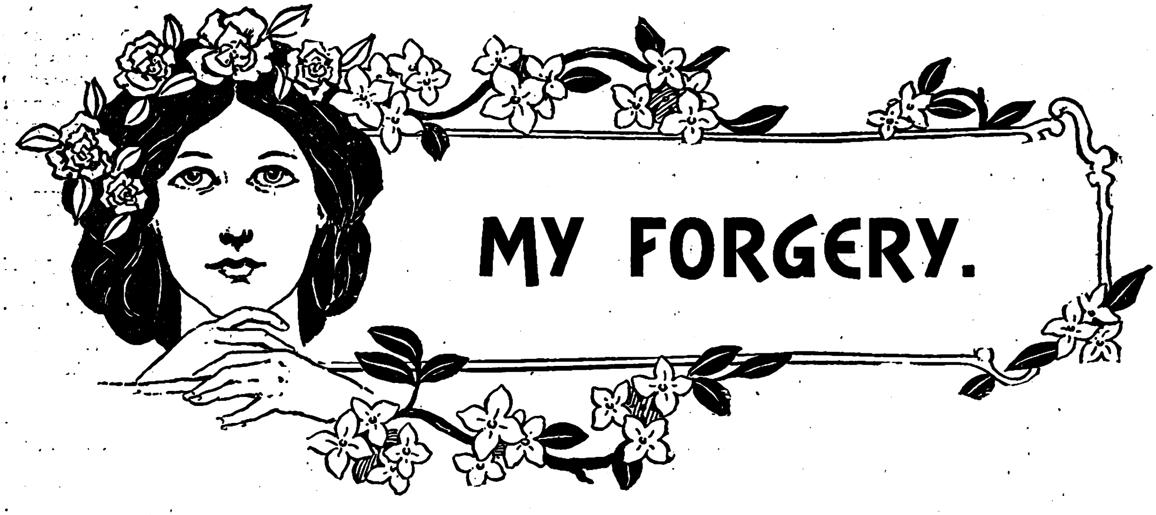

MY FORGERY.

WHEN, at the close of the year 1876, I returned from Texas, having succeeded in losing two of the five thousand pounds which had come to me at my father's death as my share of his personal property, I felt some doubt as to how I should dispose of myself, my time and my talents. Of the latter I had become a little bit distrustful of late, for they certainly had not served me well, when brought face to face with the exigencies of agricultural life in the far West; and I resolved that I would think twice or thrice before committing myself to another venture. As a matter of fact I thought a great many times, but my thinking did not come to much, for I had been idle for six months, when one day in the coffee room of an hotel in one of the large towns in the north of England, which I will call Longborough, I came across my father's old friend Francis Merrick, the accountant of the well-known firm of Langton, Merrick, Gibbs, and Stuart.

"You don't mean to say that it is you, Mr. Richard?" said he, when I held out my hand to him, "you are the very last man I expected to see, for I thought you were thousands of miles away. Did you get tired of the American farm?"

"Yes, I did," I answered, "or else the American farm got tired of me. I know I lost as much money as I thought I could afford to lose at once; so I came home, thinking I might as well lose my next thousand in England."

"A very sensible idea. I suppose you have begun already. What are you doing now?"

"Oh, I am very discreet now. I am not losing money, only spending it."

"Ah, living a lazy life? Very nice thing for the time; I shouldn't mind a couple of months of it myself, but it doesn't pay in the long run. What are you going to do now—something, I suppose?"

"I should be glad enough to do anything; but what is there I can do?"

"Well, you can do a great many things; the question is, what will you do? Just now, for instance, I could give you plenty of work in the office in helping us with the winding-up of two large estates we have got in hand, and the experience you had some years ago at Wellbridge would make it fairly easy to you; but of course you wouldn't come. If you will, I'll give you £200 a year willingly."

"Done," I replied; "it is a bargain; when shall I come?"

"You don't mean it?" said Merrick incredulously.

"Indeed, I do. I was never more serious in my life."

"Very well, then, come on Monday," said he, and I assured him that I would, and that he might expect to see me at nine o'clock.

Our compact had hardly been made when he was called away, and as soon as my own business was concluded I went home, and much surprised my wife by telling her what I had done. She was not only surprised, but a little hostile, for she evidently considered the clerkship decidedly beneath her; but I laughed so persistently at her scruples, that she soon became really, or apparently resigned.

At half-past eight o'clock on Monday morning I got into a train at the little roadside station near the suburban villa, which was our temporary home, and before nine I was at the office of Langton, Merrick, Gibbs, and Stuart. Merrick was there, and he welcomed me with his usual jolly laugh. It was, he said, before his usual time, but he had come down early to see whether I would put in an appearance, though he confessed that he had not expected me. I was taken to a private room, and a junior clerk brought in several baskets appallingly full of papers. Merrick explained to me part of what was needed to be done; and the experience to which he had referred, which had been gained in connection with a small estate of my father's, helped me the rest. The business was a long and somewhat complicated one, but in about a fortnight I had got through it. I then took in hand a similar piece of work, and performed my second task much more quickly. As I put into Merrick's hand the final statement, I asked him what I was to do next.

"This is all the business of this kind," he said, "that we have in hand just now; but I will tell you something that I have been thinking about for the last two or three days. You know that since poor old Marshall, our cashier, died so suddenly six months ago, Mr.

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Stuart has been keeping the cash; but he is anxious to give it up, and we have been looking out for a cashier. Now, if you will take the post it is there for you, and you will have £300 a year to begin with. What do you say?"

I told him I could say nothing then, but that if he would leave the matter open for twenty-four hours I would consider it, talk it over with my wife, and let him know my decision in the morning. On the morrow I informed Merrick that I accepted the offer; and I was at once installed in a room downstairs, with a door and a window opening into the general office, and a private door leading into the corridor. I was not long in getting into the routine of the work, nor was I long in making some discoveries of unsuspected complications in the inner life of the firm. It had originally been founded by Mr. Langton, and my friend Merrick, after serving his apprenticeship, had become his partner.

Mr. Langton's health had more or less failed while he was comparatively a young man, and a paralytic stroke at last put a stop to all his business activities, and as the business was then growing beyond Mr. Merrick's control it was determined to take in as additional partners Mr. Langton's nephew, John Gibbs, and the senior clerk, David Stuart, whose long acquaintance with the affairs of the clients of the firm was really as valuable as the capital which might fairly have been expected from an incoming partner.

Mr. Gibbs, who considered himself the representative of the altogether incapacitated Mr. Langton, had become dissatisfied with the results of the partnership, the offer of which he had, in the first instance, hailed as an extraordinary piece of luck. He considered that the measure of influence he exerted and the amount of profit he drew, were altogether incommensurate with his deserts; and that if Mr. Merrick, who, so far as the outside world was concerned, was really the firm, could somehow be removed out of the way, he would then gain the position to which he was entitled. He had taken Mr. Stuart into his confidence, and infected him with his views, and it did not require much astuteness to see that instead of Mr. Merrick's partners being real allies, they were traitors in the camp. Even from me, a comparative stranger and outsider, they took very insufficient pains to conceal their feelings; and I soon became convinced that if at any time they had an opportunity of inflicting a blow upon him personally, without injuring the firm, he would certainly not be spared.

It is, as we know, the unexpected that always happens, and when the opportunity came, it came in a way upon which the conspirators, as I may call them, could not have calculated. Apart from his connection with the firm, Mr. Merrick's business habits and legal knowledge had rendered him much sought after by the directors of joint-stock undertakings, and there were several large companies in Longborough for which he performed secretarial duties. On inquiring for him at the office one morning, about seven months after my acceptance of the post of cashier, I was told that he had gone to a meeting of directors, and that he would not be back for two hours. My usual luncheon-time came, and I was just running down the steps which led from the door of the corridor in which our offices were situated to the street, when a cab, which had been driven very quickly, suddenly stopped, and Mr. Merrick put his head out of the window.

"I am glad I have caught you here," he said, "for I have not a moment to lose. A telegram has come which makes it necessary that I should start for Brussels by the next train, and I have not had time to countersign these cheques." Here he pushed two cheque-books into my hand. "They have been signed by two of the directors; but of course they must have my signature as well. I can't possibly sign them now; so you must go to the bank and get Mr. Grey to accept the signature of the firm, and then Mr. Gibbs or Mr. Stuart will sign them for you."

"But suppose Mr. Grey won't consent?" I inquired; for I knew that if anything went wrong the company might lose its credit, and Merrick his reputation for ever.

"Oh, tell him he must," said Mr. Merrick, whose principal failing was a habit of making sure that things would go right; "tell him he must, and there is no doubt that he will."

"Well, but if he won't, how am I let to you know? What will be your address for the next three days?"

"I can't tell you, but I will wire to-morrow. Tell Mr. Gibbs I shall certainly not be later than Tuesday, and that I hope to be back on Saturday. It will be all right, you'll see. Good-bye." And the cab drove off, leaving me standing on the pavement with feelings that were decidedly the reverse of comfortable.

I determined that before going to luncheon I would call at the bank, see Mr. Grey, the manager, and set my mind at rest. I was fortunate in catching him, and still more fortunate in finding him in an accommodating frame of mind. I stated my business and waited for his reply with an anxiety which I tried not to show.

"Well, Mr. Radford," he said, tickling his upper lip with the feather of his quill pen, as his habit was, "of course it is not strictly business-like—a little irregular, you know—but still, I should like to oblige Mr. Merrick, and, in short, you may tell Mr. Gibbs or Mr. Stuart that the signature of the firm will be honoured, and it will be all right."

Mr. Grey's words brought my bad quarter of an hour to an abrupt end. A great weight was removed from my mind; that being gone, Richard was himself again, and I ate a hearty luncheon, feeling perfectly at ease. My worry, as I thought, was over; little did I imagine that in a more aggravated form it was yet before me. I went back to the office, and for about a couple of hours was engaged upon some work which I was bound to finish that afternoon. I then took the cheque-books to Mr. Gibbs, told him the circumstances, and said I should be glad if he or Mr. Stuart would sign the cheques either at once or during the morrow, as I should have to begin paying them out early on the morning of Wednesday, which was the following day.

Instead of at once consenting, he said he would not take the cheque books then, but would think over the matter, and would speak to me in the morning. This struck me at the time as rather an odd proceeding, but nothing more. I must have been very stupid, for in spite of all that I knew I frankly confess that not until I lay down on my sofa to enjoy my after-dinner pipe, did it really occur to me that he was contemplating a refusal. The idea, once conceived, was too horribly reasonable to be got rid of, and I spent a wakeful and a wretched night. In the morning my worst fears were realised. When I saw Mr. Gibbs he said he had been thinking the matter over, and had come to the conclusion that it would not be advisable to give the

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signature of the firm. I reasoned, expostulated, and put before him in the strongest words the probable consequences, both to Mr. Merrick and the company, of his unreasonable refusal; but the long-waited-for chance had come, and he was not going to let it slip. At last I said:

"Well, if you won't do it, Mr. Stuart will; I shall ask him."

"Ask him by all means," he said, coolly turning to his newspaper, "but it will be of no use. I have been talking to him about it, and he quite agrees with me. He won't sign, you'll see."

It was now impossible not to perceive that it was a concerted plot, and hope nearly died within me; but I was not going to leave Merrick to the mercy of these Philistines without making a fight for him. I turned on my heel without a word, and walked into Mr. Stuart's office.

It was, as Mr. Gibbs had predicted, of no use. Mr. Stuart refused to sign, and declined to give any reason for his refusal. I was now nonplussed, but I would not quite abandon hope. A telegram from Mr. Merrick might come any moment, and then I could wire to him for instruction in this unexpected crisis. Eleven struck, then twelve, then one; and I dared not wait any longer. I felt I must now act upon my own responsibility; so I locked up my books, put on my hat, and hurried to the bank to lay the matter before Mr. Grey. I told him the story and he listened quietly.

After I had finished he was silent for some time, and did nothing but tickle his lip in a more than usually irritating manner. At last he said:

"It is very awkward indeed. I can't advise you at all; I am perfectly helpless in the matter. Of course the cheques must be countersigned—you know that as well as I do; and if the firm won't sign, we must have the signature of F. W. W. Merrick."

I thought that he put the thing in rather curious language, and when I met his eye he was regarding me with what I may call an expressionless expression, as if he had purposely emptied his face of all meaning, and were laying it before me as a problem to be solved.

"What did you say?" I inquired, simply to give myself time to think.

"I said," he answered, speaking more slowly and decisively than before, "that those cheques must have the signature of F. W. W. Merrick."

"But," said I, "Mr. Merrick is in Belgium."

"Of course he is, and that is the difficulty," said Mr. Grey, now regarding me with an odd look which seemed to inquire, "Is this fellow who professes himself to be a friend of Merrick, a fool or a coward?" I hope I am not quite either; and by a sudden flash of intuition I saw the nature of the suggestion which had been so ingeniously made for me. I sprang to my feet, and exclaimed:

"All right, Mr. Grey; thank you very much; it will be managed no doubt. Good day."

"You are quite welcome," said he; "but after all I have told you nothing that you didn't know before. You see we must have a signature of someone."

As our hands met, our eyes met also, and there was no doubt that we understood one another.

I went back to the office in an unusual state of excitement, but I got through my work as usual, and did not leave for home until the regular time. I took with me the two cheque books and about half-a-dozen letters and other documents, on each of which appeared the signature which Mr. Grey had told me so emphatically he must have—the signature of F. W. W. Merrick.

I rather alarmed my wife by eating and drinking half my usual quantity; but I had business before me which required that both head and hands should be up to the mark, and I was not going to run the risk of putting them out of order. Dinner concluded, I went upstairs to my little library, lighted my pipe, opened and placed on the table one of the letters from the packet, and after studying the signature for some time to familiarise myself with its lines and curves—with what art critics call "the spirit of handling"—I took from a drawer a sheet of foolscap, which I began laboriously to cover with the best imitations I could manage to produce.

The signature was by no means an ordinary one, for it had a number of eccentric and apparently purposeless flourishes, and at first it seemed rather chance work. There would be a few unmistakably poor and wooden attempts, then a fairly free and good one, and so on. Gradually, however, the number of failures began to decrease; at last almost every one I produced was all I could desire, and after working steadily for about two hours, I decided my preparation was complete.

I then opened one of the cheque books with the name of my absent friend and employer. There were about a hundred and seventy of them in all, and the total amount represented was over twenty thousand pounds. It was after midnight when I joined my wife, who had been waiting for me in the drawing-room, wondering what had kept me so long. I told her that I had been doing some office work which I was bound to have ready for the morning; and after taking a couple of glasses of whisky to steady my nerves, and insure my having a good night's rest, went off to bed with perfectly easy mind.

I did not feel so easy the next morning when, about half-an-hour after my arrival at the office, the earliest of the company's creditors presented himself and asked for his money. The conviction that I had possibly ruined myself in endeavouring to save Mr. Merrick forced itself upon me, and I felt strongly tempted to throw the cheque books into the fire, but I had gone too far; I had crossed the rubicon, and I might just as well burn my boats at once. The utterly commonplace and unsuspicious manner in which creditor number one examined his cheque, folded it up, and placed it in his pocket-book helped to set me at ease. Number two disturbed me less, and with number three I felt quite comfortable. Still my nerves were on the stretch, for I knew many of the cheques would be presented that day, and I could not help feeling terribly eager to know how they would be received at the bank.

I turned rather sick two or three times when the recipients seemed to examine their cheques rather curiously; and at last came a horrible moment. About one o'clock my door opened, rather hastily it seemed to me, and a man entered to whom I had given a cheque for a hundred and seventy pounds and a few odd shillings only half-an-hour before. He held the cheque in his hand, and I thought, "it has come at last, they have refused to cash it," my heart almost stopped, but I managed to say, with an appearance of coolness:

"Well, Mr. Judson, what can I do for you now?"

"I have come about this cheque," he said, but I knew that only too well.

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"What about the cheque?" I asked, "it's all right, isn't it?"

"Well, it's right, and it isn't right," he replied. "It seems that my partner, Mr. Wills, has a private account against the company for forty-three pounds ten, and Mr. Merrick promised it should be included in this settlement; but this is only the amount of the regular monthly bill."

"If that is all," said I, "tell Mr. Wills to set his mind at rest"—words cannot tell how grateful I was to Mr. Judson for having set my mind at rest—"there is a cheque for him here. The accounts were really separate, and they have been kept separate to avoid confusion. He can have it now if he will come for it."

This little scare upset me for the afternoon, but I had no similar shock. The cheques were paid out, and as I heard nothing of them I took it for granted that they had been honoured. Many had been called for, many had been sent away, and when Monday morning came I had fewer than a dozen left, and they were only for small amounts. I was involved in some perplexing calculations when I heard someone enter, and looking up, I saw Mr. Merrick.

"Here I am," said he, in his usual free and easy manner; "how are you, and how have you got on?"

"I am pretty well," I replied, "and I have got on better than I might; but I have had a queer time of it."

"Queer time of it?" he asked. "Queer, in what way?"

I looked him full in the face and said—

"Mr. Gibbs and Mr. Stuart refused to sign the cheques of the Longborough Metal Company."

"Refused to sign!" he exclaimed, with a countenance from which all colour had fled; "what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say," I returned; "but we had better go into your office, and I will tell you all about it."

I took the cheque books with me, and said:

"Don't be uneasy, I have managed everything. All has been paid but several trifling matters, as you will see."

He opened the cheque books, stared at the counterfoils, stared still harder at the few cheques still remaining and then asked excitedly,

"What's this? This is my signature, sure enough, but I never wrote it."

"Of course you didn't," I said, "*I* wrote it. I wrote a hundred and seventy-three of them."

"But it's forgery," he said.

"Just so," I replied.

"And the punishment for forgery is penal servitude."

"Exactly; but no one can proceed against me but you, and I don't think you will."

"I should think not. By Jove, Richard, you've saved me from those scoundrels. I shall never forget this to the last day of my life. I don't know what might have happened if those cheques had not been ready. But what made you think of it?"

I told him the story as it has been told here, and he immediately suggested that Mr. Grey must be seen at once. I assented, and in a few minutes we found ourselves in Mr. Grey's office, face to face with the manager and his everlasting lip-tickling quill.

Merrick began, "We have come, Mr. Grey—" when he was interrupted by Mr. Grey himself, who put up his hands and said,

"What does it matter why you have come? I don't want to hear. I would rather not hear; and, as a matter of fact, I won't hear. I think you had better go without trying to tell me anything. It is much the wisest thing to do, I assure you."

Merrick was taken aback at this reception; but I was only amused, and said.

"Mr. Grey is right, depend upon it. There are things it is of no use talking about, and we may as well go."

It was indeed, Hobson's choice, so we left the manager to himself and to his titillating quill, and adjourned to a neighbouring hotel, where, over luncheon, the story was told again with greater fulness of detail. Merrick thanked me again and again for what I had done, and in the excess of his gratitude made me an offer which was particularly tempting to me as I was then situated, but which I did not think it right to accept until it was repeated in a calmer mood a few days afterwards. The result of my acceptance was to bring us into very unreserved relationship with each other; but, though we became more intimate than it is the lot of most business friends to be, there was one subject on which we could never be induced to talk, and away from which he always turned the conversation when it seemed to be leading in that direction. Need I say that the forbidden theme was my forgery?

J. H.

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It is always interesting to know other people's opinion of yourself, especially when that opinion is absolutely unbiassed.

If you want to know what sort of a person you are,
If you want to know

WHETHER YOU ARE GENEROUS OR MEAN,
WHETHER YOU ARE INDUSTRIOUS OR LAZY,
WHETHER YOU ARE CARELESS OR CAREFUL,
WHETHER YOU ARE COLD OR LOVABLE,
WHETHER YOU ARE NICE OR OTHERWISE,

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THE CHARMED DAGGER.

I was not surprised when my doctor told me that I needed a change of air—a few weeks spent in some quiet place where I might rest up from my large law practice. I was feeling fagged out, and when an invitation came from an old college friend of mine to visit him in a remote village I lost no time in availing myself of it. It had been many years since I had seen Kennon Deering, but I found him just the same good, warm-hearted fellow I had known in college. He had never married, and the greater part of his life had been spent in travel; in fact, his foot had trod almost every portion of the earth's surface.

Several days after my arrival, while chatting over our cigars and coffee, he asked suddenly if I was an admirer of curios. Now, if I have a hobby, it is curio collecting, and I hastened to inform him of the fact. Immediately he conducted me to what he called his museum.

He possessed a most interesting collection, and what impressed me most was the unusual number of daggers. One in particular attracted my attention, and on the impulse I removed it from its sheath. The blade was about six inches long, but of the most curious colouring. Somehow there seemed a strong fascination about this little weapon. A thrill seemed to run through my whole body as my fingers closed over the handle, and then the sensation changed to a feeling that was horrible. I was suddenly possessed of a desire to bury the flame-shaped blade in my heart, and in a moment I would have done so had not my host grasped my wrist with such force that the dagger fell from my fingers.

"And now to explain," he said, as I sank giddily upon the nearest chair. "The weapon is one with a history, simple, yet terrible. Each man who has ever possessed one has sooner or later taken his own life or the life of another. It has been in my possession some months, and this is the first time it has been handled."

"For Heaven's sake, destroy it!" I gasped.

"No," he replied; "I prize it as a curiosity too much for that. It is over a thousand years old, and, so far as I am concerned, there is no danger. I know the secret of resistance."

* * * * *

A year went by, and I had heard from Deering but once, by a letter in which he had stated that he was off for a foreign country. One morning, to my surprise, a letter came, in which he said that he had married lately, and both he and his wife wished me to pay them a visit in their new home near Liverpool. To this I wired my acceptance.

The home that my friend now occupied was truly a small-sized palace. Everything that money could buy adorned it. Books, paintings, statuary, costly furniture, rich tapestries, all that heart could desire was there. Mrs. Deering was the most beautiful woman I believe I have ever seen, and as charming in manner as she was handsome. So far as I could see their match was all that could be desired, and the days passed pleasantly in their society. One day, at dinner, Mrs. Deering turned to her husband with the remark that Frank Chesely had written and said he would visit them for a week or so. Deering made no comment on the news, but that it was anything but pleasant to him I could plainly see.

In due time Chesely arrived, and from the moment I laid eyes on his dark, sneering countenance I knew we would never be friends. The feeling of dislike, I am sure, was mutual, and it was not many days before I noticed that my friend had changed from one of the merriest, most talkative of men to one moody and preoccupied. This struck me more forcibly when we were in Chesely's company, and I wondered at it.

One morning Deering and myself were in the smoking-room, one door of which led out on to a little side porch. I had stretched my legs comfortably over a chair and was half-asleep, when suddenly the sound of voices startled me from my doze. It was Mrs. Deering and Chesely.

I looked at Kennon. He was breathing heavily, fast asleep. It is needless for me to repeat the conversation between the woman who was this man's wife and the man who was a guest in his home. Suffice it to say that the relationship between the two was not mere friendship.

At dinner that night Kennon Deering was in high spirits. He laughed, he joked, his wit was sparkling and keen. His melancholia had vanished, and, to my utter amazement, he was more than gracious to Chesely.

The latter was surprised at this sudden turn of affairs, I easily noticed, and Mrs. Deering herself glanced questioningly at her husband more than once. During the meal my host turned to Chesely with the remark that, as soon as dinner was over, he would like to show him his museum, as he understood he was fond of curios.

In a short time we had finished our cigars and Deering led the way to his treasure box.

Something in Deering's manner struck me as being unnatural, and as his cordiality increased towards his false friend the latter's uneasiness became more apparent. However, in spite of this fact he seemed astonished and interested in the sight before him, and when my host pointed out his unique assortment of daggers he seemed to appreciate the great feature of the collection to even a greater extent than I had. But the knowledge of the influence that one among that number exerted caused me to shudder.

"By the way, Val," suddenly remarked Deering, "let me show you my latest acquisition, a suit of Persian armour."

I followed him to the other side of the room, leaving Chesely reading the descriptions under each specimen, and was examining the new curiosity when a muttered oath, the first words of which caused me to turn and stand rooted with horror, told too plainly the meaning of it all.

We saw Chesely standing there, saw his hand raised, saw something glitter, and Frank Chesely lay on the floor still and dead. I rushed to his side.

In the wound I recognised the flame-shaped weapon. It was the accursed dagger I had handled with such strange results.

I looked up and met the eyes of Deering. In that glance my worst suspicions were confirmed. His sleep had only been feigned. And this visit to the museum—was it chance?

T. L. D.

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HERE IS THE SCHEME.

We have in our possession a considerable number of photographs of men, women, and children of all grades of society secured for us by our agents, who have scoured the United Kingdom for this special purpose.

Each week we publish five of these portraits, and to each of the persons thus represented we dispatch the sum of £5, on his or her forwarding a claim on a post-card addressed to PORTRAIT DEPARTMENT, "SHORT STORIES," Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Although the persons whose portraits will appear in this competition are quite unknown to us personally, we have their names and addresses in our possession, and, therefore, a claim can be settled at once, without risk of fraud. Already nineteen claims have been paid since the competition started.

Is your portrait here? If so, drop us a post-card, and get £5.

All claims in connection with the portraits below must reach the address already given above by Tuesday next, December 17th.

Full names and addresses of the correct claimants will appear in succeeding numbers.

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Simply write on a post-card these words:

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(Name and full address.)

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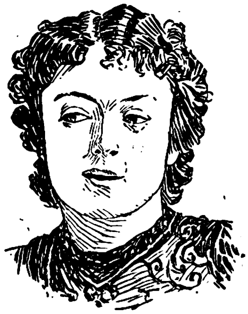

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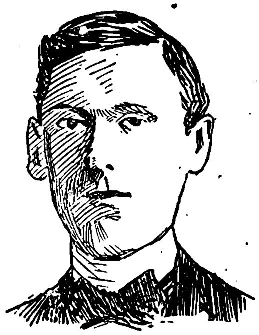

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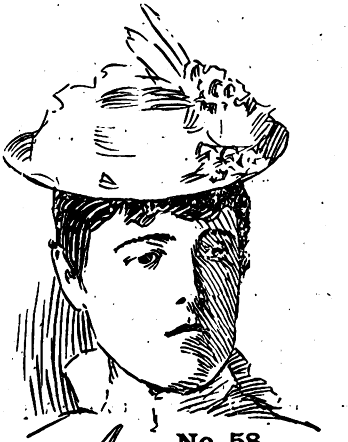

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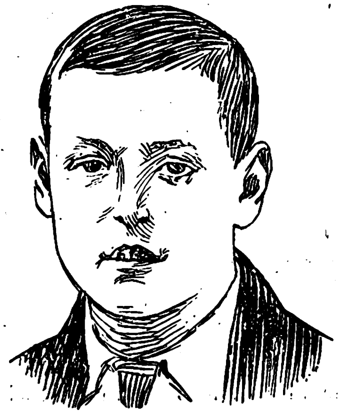

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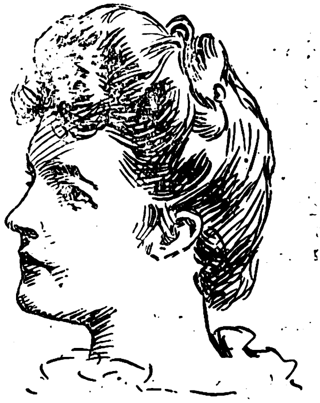

No. 60.

THE FERGUSSON FEUD.

A Tragedy of Errors.

CHAPTER I.

The Advertisement in *The Times*.

"Should this meet the eye of Charles James Fergusson, supposed to have resided, from 1887 to 1898, somewhere in the State of Pennsylvania, U.S., and since the latter year to have lived for some time in the neighbourhood of St. Heliers, Jersey, he is earnestly requested to communicate at once with the undersigned—

"Messrs. Deane and Frobisher
"(Solicitors),
"184, Bedford Row,
"London, W.C."

The man who read this announcement in *The Times*, of February 4th, of this present year of grace, would not at first sight seem to have been one who could possibly have had any interest in, or connection with, the matters referred to therein.

The place was a certain Free Library in the south-east district. The assembled frequenters of the reading-room were none too clean or respectable, so that the individual in the last stage of shabbiness almost, was in no way conspicuous or noticeable.

He was apparently between thirty and forty in actual years, but his unkempt overgrowth of iron-grey hair and beard, his sunken cheeks, and general air of physical decadence, stamped him at once as being unnaturally and prematurely old.

The advertisement in question irresistibly attracted him; he could not get away from it.

"I never was in America," he muttered under his breath. "While as for Jersey, I know no more about it than what I've heard and read."

He tried his pockets (or the apology for them) but failed to find that for which he sought.

"If I had a piece of paper now," he said to himself again, "I'd copy it."

A second search proved as futile as the first, resulting only in a dirty scrap, absolutely useless for the purpose.

"Well, at any rate, the address of the lawyers is easy to remember—'Deane and Frobisher, Bedford Row.' The names seem familiar, but I can't make out in what way."

It was getting towards dusk, and Charles James Fergusson left the Library, and slouched out into the wet streets. As he shuffled along westward, he communed with himself.

"It's too late to do anything to-day; besides, I must prepare myself to answer questions. Say to-morrow afternoon. It will be a ticklish thing to tackle Messrs. Deane and Frobisher in this garb, and state. The clerks mayn't let me get near the principals. Still, I won't give in to the first knock under."

In the course of an hour and a half he was outside the St. James' Restaurant in Piccadilly. He had barely stood there five minutes when a hansom drove up. Out of it stepped a gentleman in evening dress.

The newcomer appeared to have some difficulty in finding silver enough for the fare. Gold he had—a handful—and the sight of it made the eyes of the wet and ragged object watching by the kerb dilate with envious longing, and his lips crack and parch with the thought even of all that gold would buy.

Evidently of an impatient and irritable temperament, the gentleman at last suddenly handed up to the driver half-a-sovereign, telling him to keep the change, and walked into the restaurant.

Charles James Fergusson was, in his way, a bit of a fatalist, and at the same time a grumbler where his own bad luck was concerned.

The two states of mind are somewhat inconsistent, but in this particular instance, inconsistency was regarded much in the light of a virtue, and cherished accordingly.

The tramp certainly envied the gentleman; that was only natural; but he also tried to believe that, out of sheer pity for his misery, Fate had in immediate store for him that which would in all likelihood put them, tramp and gentleman, on a common footing.

Then something happened.

Casting his eyes on the ground, Charles James saw lying on the wet pavement an oblong piece of white pasteboard—a visiting card.

The gentleman must have dropped it when seeking for silver. Picking it up, and taking it to a street lamp, he read upon it a name, which startled him not a little, inasmuch *as it was his own*.

"Charles James Fergusson.
206, Belgrave Road, S.W."

The address was not his, but the name—there was no mistake about that.

"I've an idea. I'll take a walk in that direction and wait for my double. There is no knowing what might come of it."

Time was when shabby Charles James was a wearer of evening-dress suits, and a good customer at the Cafe Royal, and at Frascati's. Time was when, left a more than moderate fortune by his father—a West-end curio dealer in a large way of business, he lived in purple and fine linen for such time as the money lasted.

In an evil day, however, he took to the turf, and reckless betting, and as that way ruin lies, he but fulfilled the good-natured prophecy of those who stood by and watched his career, and "came a cropper." He had not the energy to rise again, but drifted lower and lower, till he eventually touched bottom.

"Perhaps, if I work it right, this swell will help me. If I could but make myself presentable why, I'd have no difficulty with the 'devil's own!' I'm sure I've heard their names before. Frobisher!—Frobisher!—that's it! I know now! There used to be a sharp, nip-featured little man, precise as an old maid, come to see me—years ago—at old Mumble's school at Chiswick. He'd ask me questions; if I'd been a good boy, but never a word about my parents. At the time I thought that odd; but I remember that when I told the governor, he bid me be civil to old Frobisher. You may depend there's something in it! and Charlie Fergusson is going to be a rich man—a man of dollars—a millionaire!"

In his excitement he shouted out at the top of his

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voice, and the constable on point duty in Grosvenor Place eyed him suspiciously.

Half-past ten by the lodge clock at Hyde Park Corner.

"I don't suppose this reflection of me—this fine Mr. Fergusson—will get home over early, so I can take it easy. But I mustn't hang about, or I shall be run in for 'loitering with intent.'"

It was just eleven when he slowly passed the door of 206, Belgrave Road. At one period a semi-fashionable street, it is now the residential haunt of the well-to-do bachelor civil-servant, and leisured man.

Contriving to keep his eye on the house, the while affecting not to "loaf" in a way that would attract unwelcome official attention, the wastrel thought himself fortunate when, at a few minutes past midnight, a cab drove up to 206, his Piccadilly namesake descending from it.

Curiously, he had the same difficulty as before in finding silver. This gave our expectant friend his opportunity, for, crossing the road, he stood in the shadow of the cab waiting events.

"Hullo! What do *you* want?"

The hungry-looking, impossible individual said nothing in reply, but cooly surveyed his questioner with a shrewdly criticising glance that left not even the smallest personal detail out of its calculation.

Charles James Fergusson, briefless barrister-at-law, and sometime special foreign correspondent of the *Daily Scarifier*, was rather amused than otherwise at this other eccentric being's peculiar conduct.

"If," said he, "you are hard-up and want something, why don't you say so? Here! here's a couple of shillings for you. No, by Jove! there isn't, it's only one. I've no more silver. Good-night!"

He took out his key-chain, and turned to ascend the steps of the house.

"Half-a-minute! Mr.—er—Fergusson," said the poor Charles James.

"Eh! How do you know my name?"

"You shouldn't drop your cards about. It isn't surprising, you know, if one gentleman picks up a card that another gentleman has dropped, that the name of gentleman number two should become known to gentleman number one."

"Ah! you are a humorist, I see. Well, come inside, and—and talk. I don't feel up to laughing in the street."

The policeman on his beat quickened his steps as he saw the shabby, slouching figure pass up the steps in the wake of the opera-hatted, dress-coated gentleman. He deemed it to be a case for investigation.

As he came abreast of the portico he flashed his bull's-eye on the incongruous pair.

"All right, sir! D'you want me?"

"Oh, no, policeman; this is—is a friend of mine coming in for an hour's chat."

"Oh, indeed, sir! beg pardon! Good night, sir."

"Good-night, constable."

The policeman was only half-convinced; but, knowing the gentleman at 206, thought it must be all right, even if it did look a bit queer.

"He didn't like your friend's looks," said the visitor, with a half-smile and a smothered chuckle, as they entered the front dining-room, and, seating himself without invitation in the most comfortable chair he could find.

"No," returned his host, turning the gas in the chandelier up full. "You can't quite blame him, though, can you?"

This stalwart young fellow—he looked to be about three or four-and-thirty—stood nearly six feet, and seemed born to pass uninterrupted and good-naturedly through life, along the primrose way. His guest was manifestly of this opinion, for he found himself being almost irresistibly attracted towards this fortunate possessor of his own name.

The rich man, first feeding the poor man, turned him, as it were, inside out in true lawyer-like style, strangely refraining, however, from inquiring his name. Perhaps he thought the name of a man like his visitor, was immaterial and unimportant.

"Who's that?"

"Who's who?"

"Who's that the portrait of—there, over the mantel, who is it?"

"I don't know how the picture can possibly interest you; but, since you ask, it is—or was—my father."

The other walked deliberately across to where it hung, and, after looking at it attentively for a minute or two, gave vent to a long, low whistle.

"If that's your father," he said, "then *your* grandfather must also have been mine, for he is as like as a twin to the man that called me son."

"What is your name?"

"Charles James Fergusson, of that ilk."

"I believe you to be a liar! and that until you read my name on my card, you never so much as heard the name."

"That's unkind! to call a man a liar just because he claims to be himself. If it comes to that, I'm inclined to think that *you* are the impostor, and that you've no more right to my name than has a South Sea Islander!"

"You are an impudent rascal," angrily replied the other. "But——"

He suddenly stopped short, and turning pale to ghastliness, dropped inertly into the nearest chair, his head falling forward on his breast.

Charles James, the social pariah, the outsider, was no heartless vagabond. The helpless condition of his companion touched and roused him. In a flash he took in the situation—more especially the dangers of it—to himself personally.

He gently lifted up the stricken man's head, but there was no intelligence, no speculation in the glassy eyes. A stertorous catching for breath; a gurgling like to the death-rattle in the throat, and in less than three minutes from his seizure Charles James Fergusson, of the Middle Temple, barrister-at-law, lay back in a huddled heap in his chair—dead—stone dead.

To say that the other was altogether collected and uninfluenced by the awful suddenness of the catastrophe, would be to say that which is untrue. To get safely away from the house without being observed, was, however, his first thought when he saw that all was over.

Then he looked hurriedly about him, and, for the first time, noticed, lying upon the big bureau, standing open in the corner by the window, a bulky letter, foolscap-size, ready for posting.

Casting one half-terrified glance at the dead man, he moved over to the desk and lifted the letter. As he did so, his brain conceived the idea that the packet contained information which, if he acted upon it, would give him a fortune.

Slipping the letter into his pocket, and stealing softly across the room again, he listened intently on the threshold, but heard nothing to alarm him.

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In another second he had reached the street-door—opened it—closed it again, and was in the street.

Not a soul was in sight; and as Big Ben boomed out the quarter past one, he halted under a lamp, and read the superscription on the envelope.

It was addressed to—

"Messrs. Deane and Frobisher
(solicitors),
"184, Bedford Row, W.C."

CHAPTER II.

The Story of the Feud.

In the smoke-room at Fergusson Peel, sits the master, ill at ease.

The old Border stronghold, dating back from Will Armstrong's time, and even before, has been altered, or rather added to out of all recognition. The old tower, or "peel," still stands in all its ancient ruggedness, but the comparatively modern house is entirely apart from it. Fergusson is situate in the Scottish borderland, midway between Jedburgh and Hawick—classic ground, every inch of it. The ghosts of the old cattle-raiders are vulgarly supposed to haunt the district, and the huge rusty knocker on the ruinous iron-studded oak door of the keep, is popularly credited with being subject to a midnightly tattoo by the uneasy spirit of Outlaw Will on stormy nights in winter-time.

Two months have wholly changed the outward man of Charles James. He, to all appearance, is not the same person who, but nine weeks ago, stood under a gas-lamp at one o'clock in the morning, in the Belgrave Road, London, deciphering the name and address upon the letter he had only just before abstracted from under a dead man's sightless eyes.

The clean-shaven face and closely-cropped hair; the suit of well-fitting grey clothes, had transformed him. His own mother, were she alive, would not have recognised him.

And yet he is mind-disturbed and restless.

He has satisfied the lawyers, and the law; has entered into peaceful possession of lands and money, which have laid dormant and unclaimed for over fifty years, yet is there a fly in the ointment—a something he knows not what—that spoils his enjoyment, and makes against satisfaction.

Before him on the table is the identical paper which, two months ago, he carried off from the house in Belgrave Road. Its contents certainly enabled him to establish his claim, as, without it, he would have been completely at sea on almost every vital point.

One thing, however, troubles him, if anything more than any other, viz.—that nothing has ever been publicly made known of the Belgrave Road tragedy. The newspapers were silent; there was no record or account of an inquest; and when, a month after the event, inquiries were made on his behalf at 206, the house was found to be empty and to let; no one knowing anything of the late tenants. There was nothing, therefore, to be done, save to accept things as they were, and to make the best of them.

He was now, for the fifth or sixth time, acquainting himself with the contents of the stolen letter, which consisted of several pages of closely-written manuscript.

Briefly epitomised, the story was this:

On the eve of the defeat of Charles I. at Naseby in 1645, two brothers, sons of Sir James Fergusson, an ardent loyalist, quarrelled over the daughter of a certain Puritan preacher—one Caleb Hare. The elder, Charles James, had known the girl longer than had his brother Henry, although Sir James was equally resolved that neither of his sons should marry her.

Charles James, the first-born, was in command of a troop of horse in Sir Marmaduke Langdale's regiment, and though he was at home for a few days, was summoned to rejoin the army at almost a moment's notice. Henry was more of a student than a soldier, and it is to be feared, took advantage of his brother's enforced absence to press his own suit with pretty Naomi Hare. To do this effectually, he found it necessary to so far dissemble with his sweetheart's father as to consent to join the Roundheads under Fairfax. The old minister's objections vanished entirely when Henry assumed steel skull-cap and broad-sword on behalf of the Parliament, and a marriage, all unknown to Sir James, took place early one morning in the pastor's little house on the banks of the Coquet in County Northumberland.

It was a servant of the Fergusson Peel household that carried the news to Charles James at dawn on the day of the fatal fight. The infuriated young man swore, on the cross hilt of his sword, never to cease from the pursuit of vengeance till that vengeance was satisfied. Hot upon the information as to the marriage came the word that Henry Fergusson had joined the ranks of the Parliament men, and would be opposed in arms to his brother in the ensuing struggle.

All through the day did the elder seek the younger. Once he saw him through the dust and press of battle, but the opportunity passed, and Charles Fergusson was saved the guilt of deliberate fratricide. Then came the final rout, and with Cromwell and his Ironsides at their heels, the King's men fled the field, and, as it proved, the cause. Charles James escaped and, though he went through unnumbered vicissitudes, managed to reach a safe hiding-place. On the Restoration he came into his own, his father having died soon after the execution of the King; but the bitter feud between the brothers was, if anything, intensified by time. He married late in life, but it was a loveless match, one child, a son, alone surviving. Named Charles James according to family tradition, the boy in course of time succeeded to the family honours and estate. Henry's eldest son subsequently joining William Penn in his great American colonising scheme.

And so it went on, generation after generation, the two branches keeping up the feud out of sheer family pride. At last, in or about the year 1845 the two sons, and only children of the then representatives of the Fergusson family, went out into the world, and were never more heard of. Inquiries were made in every direction, but without result, and until the present year, when the firm of solicitors, Deane and Frobisher, unexpectedly discovered a clue to the missing heir.

The paper went on to give some particulars as to the barrister Charles James Fergusson's eleven years sojourn in Philadelphia, as special correspondent of the London *Daily Scarifier*. He had been "called," but had never practised, sailing for the United States almost as soon as his fees were paid. The short stay in Jersey was also touched upon, bringing the account to a close.

To put it broadly, the conscience of the man in possession was troubling him. He knew that he had gained his ends by fraudulent masquerading, and that, though the man he was virtually personating was dead, he held his present position solely by criminally false means.

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To get away from himself he determined to return to London, and the amusements and distractions of the metropolis to seek to exorcise the fiends of remorse and self-reproach.

Town was full to the brim, and everywhere was crush and clink and glitter. As yet, he knew nobody, nobody, that is, of any social importance, and was, therefore, thrown entirely upon his own resources. He was, however, successful in getting elected to a fairly good club, through the good offices of young Deane, the son of the senior partner of the Bedford Row firm. This gave him something to do, and an object in life of a sort, and brought him one or two acquaintanceships, which promised to develop into friendly intimacies.

A Major Galbraith, Seaforth Highlanders, retired, held the first place in his esteem, to all appearance the good feeling being mutual. The Major was a grizzled veteran—a widower with three daughters, the elder of whom was a charming girl of twenty-three, or thereabouts. Fergusson was introduced to her by her father at Epsom, the acquaintance very soon becoming, for him, the one thing for which to live.

Up the river to Henley in a steam launch, and down by road to Richmond, only fed the fire, until he could hold back no longer, but opened his whole heart to her.

"I know," he said, "that I am far too old for you, dear; but if you could look over that, I would devote my life to you—would do all that a man may do for your happiness."

"Mr. Fergusson," she said, "I am not sure that that which you deem to be an obstacle, is one in my eyes—is really so."

"Then I may hope?" he asked, in a tone that betrayed how much her answer meant to him.

"I think you may," she replied, looking down, and threading and unthreading her fingers.

After that it might have been thought that he would imbibe a brighter spirit; would regard the future with a certain amount of sanguine anticipation.

As a matter of fact, it was the reverse with him.

She had told him in an outburst of womanly confidence that it was because he was a good man that she was going to marry him; while he knew in his heart-of-hearts that he was a liar! a thief! an utter and shameless impostor!

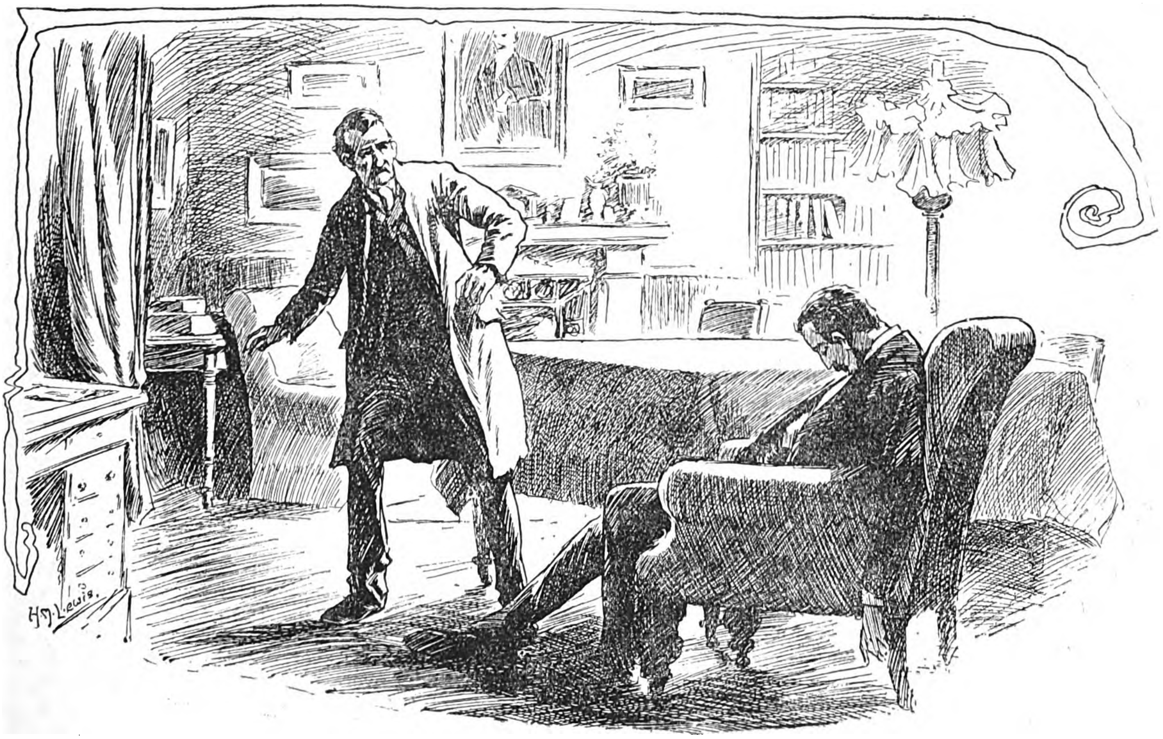
So it was, therefore, that her avowal gave him no real comfort, brought him no peace.

One day it chanced that he made an appointment to meet Hilda Galbraith at Charing Cross Station, and to go with her to inspect a house some thirty miles down the line, in Kent.

While waiting outside the booking-office, the sudden rush of porters and ticket-examiners, and the increase of noise and bustle, announced the arrival of the Continental train.

He had turned to watch the arriving crowd, when the face, thin and drawn with illness, of a man, who was supported on either hand by a hospital nurse and a man-servant, and who was slowly coming towards Hilda and himself, made his blood almost cease coursing through his veins.

It was a pale face: the face of a man who had but lately passed within hailing distance of the "dark valley."



Casting one half-terrified glance at the dead man, he moved over to the desk and lifted the letter.

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It was the face of that other Charles James Fergusson—the man whom he had seen die in the house in Belgrave Road.

CHAPTER III.

Face to Face.

"And you do not mean to prosecute this man?"

"No; I do *not* mean to prosecute him."

"Then you will pardon my saying, Mr. Fergusson, that I, both as a lawyer, and as a man, consider you to be altogether wrong in not doing so."

"I daresay; and I suppose, as a matter of strict law and justice, that I ought to make my supplanter pay roundly for his certainly impudent assumption of my rights and privileges; but—I don't intend doing anything of the kind."

Old Mr. Deane shrugged his shoulders, and expressed, by the uplifting of his hands, and the turning down of his mouth corners, that he quite disclaimed all responsibility in the matter, and regarded his client as lacking even the commonest of common sense.

But he was to be even more astonished.

"Not only," declared Mr. Fergusson, "will I not punish this man, but I purpose leaving him in quiet possession of that which, though crookedly, he undoubtedly cleverly acquired. I have good reason to believe that he was, and is, absolutely unaware of his real connection with my family as a lineal descendant of old Henry Fergusson, who won Naomi Hare by a trick, and by going over to the Parliament side."

"If," interrupted Mr. Deane, "this be so, why the fellow is your cousin, and next in succession to yourself."

"Precisely! and as I have gear in plenty—through my mother—while this poor beggar, who evidently believed me dead when he appropriated that letter, if I turned him out, would practically be on the world again, without a shilling, and without a place to lay his head. Why, I'll just let him stay where he is."

"Then all I can say is, that you are a fine fellow! if you are a fool to yourself."

"Thanks! Perhaps you are right as to my being a fool, but it takes a wise man, you know, to make one; while even a fool may be so only in appearance. Mr. Deane, I have a request to make of you."

"Shall be only too happy to oblige you."

"Well, then, I want to manage this business myself, and in my own way. I don't wish my cousin to get an advance inkling of my intentions."

"Very good! very good! Not a word shall reach him from this office, you may depend."

"Then that's all right; and I leave London to-night for Fergusson, to which place I understand my relative has suddenly retreated."

Early the following morning a stranger alighted at Jedburgh Station, and forthwith engaged a trap to take him to Fergusson Peel. He had no luggage beyond a small Gladstone bag, and was accompanied by a manservant, who attended upon his master with the most devoted solicitude.

The distance being about fourteen Scotch miles, it was past midday when the "Peel" was reached.

"Mr. Fergusson, is he at home?"

"Yes, sir; your name?"

"My name? Oh, James—Mr. James, of London."

"Robert," said the visitor to his companion, when the servant had gone to inform her master. "You will come with me as far, that is, as the room door. I will manage then, and you will wait for me in the hall."

"Mr. Fergusson does not know your name, sir, but he will see you."

Robert took his master's arm, and helped him along to the door of the smoke-room, and left him there. The visitor turned the handle of the door, and entered the room.

The man who stood before him, in all the self-abasement of detected guilt, trembled so that the intervening table, upon which his hands leant, visibly shook.

"Mr. Fergusson," said barrister Charles James, in much the same genial, hearty tone as he had used that February morning in the dining-room in Belgrave Road, "they say that dead men tell no tales. Now I am here to deny that, and refute the theory entirely, for I have a tale to tell, which will be the best possible evidence against the truth of the proverb."

The other Charles James could not speak. He was fascinated by this man returned, as it seemed to him, from the dead. His tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. It frightened him; and he took it as being the just reward of his wrong-doing. Then he learnt how, on that night, the man he deemed dead was but in a trance-like fit, from which he emerged, in a few hours, to a serious illness of several months' duration. Through it all his memory was a blank, and he recollected nothing prior to the sudden heart-seizure.

He told his dazed listener how that he had been alone in the world ever since the age of twelve years, and, until he came across some papers of his late father's on his return to England from Jersey, was in complete ignorance of his own connection with the Fergusson's of the Peel. As soon as he could be moved he went, accompanied by a nurse and his man, to the South of France, from where he had returned four days previously.

"And this is not all," he continued, smiling; "I have found, through a sure channel, that you are the direct and, indeed, only living descendant of Henry Fergusson, who was the main cause of the feud, which has come down to almost recent times. You and I, therefore, ought, in order that the old tradition may be duly observed, to fight out the vendetta to the bitter end. What say you?"

"I don't understand! You say nothing of what I have done; but now that you are here I will go, and leave you to your inheritance."

"I don't fancy you will, when I say that I am myself about to leave again for the Pyrenees, never, so say my doctors, to return more. The best thing, therefore, you can do, is to stay where you are, and to drink my health every Halloween night with a brimmer, and three times three."

"But I don't deserve this!"

"Do we, any of us, get all that we deserve? I know I don't. Robert!"

His man opened the door and came into the room.

"Give me your arm to the trap. Good-bye, namesake! I shall always remember you as a fellow of infinite jest. Good-bye!"

He reached out his hand across the table; the other took and wrung it, till the sick man's face became whiter, and his fingers tingled again. It was the sound of wheels upon the gravel drive that told the one that the other had gone out of his life for ever, and that with his going had gone too—also for ever—the spirit of the family feud.

* * * * * *

Charles James has never told his wife the story; and Hilda Fergusson lives to-day in the happy belief that her husband is at once the noblest, the best, and the dearest of men.

Ralph Enderby.

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DEAD TO THE WORLD.

By Henry T. Johnson.

Author of "Cruce Vincit," "The Pride of the Ring," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXII. *(continued.)*

MEANTIME, Rossiter was pacing the little room in the east wing used as an office by Morgan Chandler, who was seated in a swivel arm-chair at a roll-top desk.

"The head better to-day, Mr. Chandler?"

"It's healing," growled the steward, pressing his hand very tenderly on the bandages he still wore, "but the pain's far from gone, the pain never will be gone till I bring them as did it to justice."

"The mystery is how they entered. The Squire's window was fastened and intact."

"Yes," said Chandler, "it seems to me they must have got in by the far end window in the corridor."

"The lights were switched off when you entered the Squire's room?"

"Yes."

"You're sure Branscombe was one of the men you saw?"

"Certain sure."

"Certain sure? And yet, you know, it was very dark."

The other paused in some confusion. "'Twere he, right enough," he said.

"And the other?"

"I'm not so sure."

"But you've let fall vague hints that you knew the man."

"Rossiter," said the other, wheeling suddenly round, "I'm not my own master here now, somebody else is master."

The detective nodded, and Chandler went on:

"I've got enemies here, enemies who've got the ear of the man who's master now and who'll lose no chance of paying off old scores."

"I can understand that."

"Now, can I talk to you certain sure that what I say will go to neither them nor him?"

"Man to man, what you tell me I'll tell to neither man nor woman."

"Well, then, there's one man employed on this estate, and in the confidence of the master, who owes me a grudge; a man who before he was an under keeper and night watcher was a well-known poacher, loafer, and brawler, a man whose work nowadays is to lie low by day and be abroad by night."

"I know the man you mean," said the detective, "Ned Fletcher," and with a pencil he scribbled a stenographic sign on his shirt cuff. After a few moments' silence he suddenly asked:

"What was your quarrel with Branscombe about?"

"Who told you there was a quarrel?"

And the detective, surer now of his ground, said: "Never mind, I know there was one."

Morgan Chandler was dealing with a detective who might, or might not, be in possession of the facts.

"A man in my position," he said cautiously, "nearly always has disputes of some kind with tenants and dealers."

"Oh, I know all that," said the detective, feeling his ground, "rows about accounts," and he knew from the other's shifty eyes that the shot had gone right home, the shot suggested by what he had learnt of the other's nature.

"Who told you?" he exclaimed hotly.

"Never mind. But it was a bit of a relief to you, Chandler, when he disappeared, wasn't it?"

"I'm not going to be cross-questioned like this, as if I was a thief instead of him," exclaimed the other angrily, "and, look here, Mr. Detective, I wish you good-bye! There's the door."

"Yes, there's the door," said the detective, opening it as he spoke, "but as to good-bye, suppose we say *au revoir?*"

And he left the steward's office, left Fallowfield Hall, remarking confidentially to himself: "Tom Rossiter, have you mistaken your vocation, oughtn't you to be scaring crows in a field or perforating stamps with a punching machine in a Government office, or on some other soft job requiring the brains of a rabbit? Chandler's lying about Branscombe, and lying because he himself's a thief; he's faking the estate accounts. But what was he doing in the Squire's room? Why didn't he touch any one of the bells? Ring up any one of the servants by just pressing a button? I wonder was he there—because he'd been cooking accounts? Is he lying about Fletcher, too? Who brought that strange letter to my place? Who sent that telegram on the day of the inquest? By Jove! what I thought was a split in the camp seems a deep move to put me on the wrong scent."

Looking up, he saw coming in an opposite direction the man who brought the telegram!

The man whom Morgan Chandler accused.

"Many a random shot goes home," he reasoned swiftly, "I'll ask the man who delivered the telegram if he knows anything about the letter."

By this time they had met. Fletcher was touching his cap; the detective wheeled round in answer to the "Morning, sir."

"Stop, Fletcher, you silly chap! Why didn't you wait for an answer to the letter you brought me?"

"I wasn't told to, sir," the man blurted out.

"Why, he said he told you to wait."

"What, the Squire, sir. He told me to shove it under the door and come away and say nowt about it."

"Oh! of course, of course, I was thinking of another letter that came earlier in the day. I beg your pardon, Fletcher, good morning."

And he walked along hastily, almost at a racing speed, to work off the pent up excitement with which his very frame vibrated.

"The Squire—the Squire! What's it mean—what's it mean?" he muttered. "Oh, you've been wide—wide—wide; you've been played with, fooled, Tom Rossiter. You're a disgrace to the Yard; you must never show your face back there till you've undone the tangle you've been making for yourself. By Jove! Tom, I think you're picking up one of the ends, you're picking up——"

"Hullo, Mr. Rossiter, any luck?"

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It was Bingle, the local constable, and he was in a sarcastic mood, and Bingle's moods were always defined; they were not merely engraved, they were dug.

"Surprised you sharp London chaps ain't done something to open our eyes down here, bein' chaw-bacons" (the term had been passed on by some 'good-natured friend').

"Patience, patience, Mr. Bingle, that's what we have to practice in our profession."

"Yes, we've been patient enough, sir; as them two genelmen brothers, Mr. James and Mr. Joseph Nubbley, was a sayin'. 'patience is a virtue, and it's one as is werry useful in the police force.'"

"Pity the brothers Nubbley haven't got business of their own to mind instead of poking into other people's," snapped out the detective, and Mr. Bingle, who had been partaking of the hospitality of the square faced bottle, the joint possession of the brothers Nubbley, remarked with dignity:

"The brothers Nubbley is genelmen, Mr Rossiter, real genelmen, hindependent; not folks as gives theirselves airs, if they do come from London. Between you and me, Mr. Rossiter, as to their pokin' their noses into the business as brought you from London, if they couldn't have done no more, they couldn't have done much less, for all you comes from Scotland Yard."

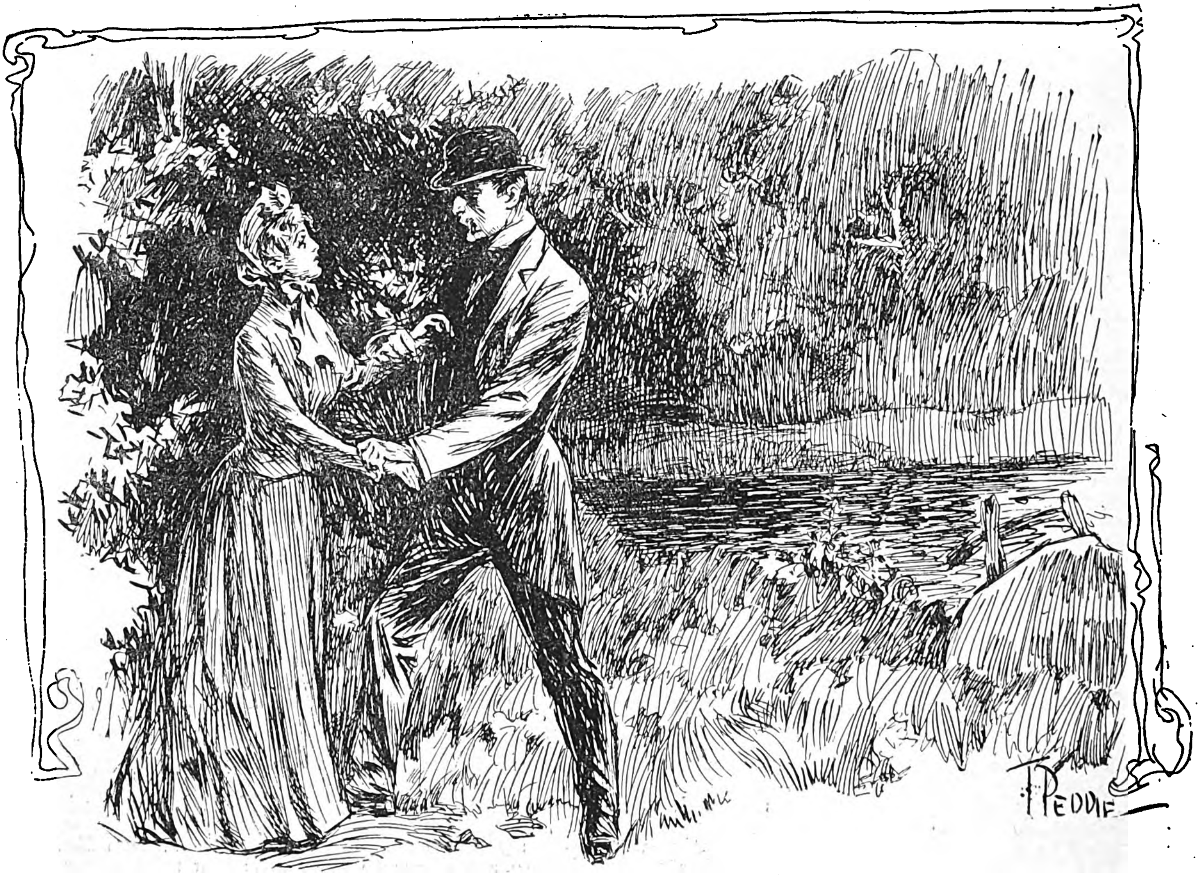
"Why, you hob-nailed village pump washer! You public-house loafer! Go home and sleep off the drink that people treat you to to hoodwink you!" shouted the now angry Rossiter.

And the other, pulling himself up erect as possible, which wasn't very, said:

"All right, Mr. Rossiter, it's Hollands for the chaw-bacons guarding the village pump, but it's choice old port for the Criminal Vessi—vesti—"

No, he couldn't master it. He stalked away, hiccoughing "'partment" with all the dignity and directness of motion at his command, or what there was of it. And Rossiter, looking straight in front of him along the road, noticed the brothers Nubbley as usual basking in the sun in the little garden fronting their little cottage, James leaning on the mossy stone wall, Joseph reclining in his invalid chair, each puffing at his long churchwarden, and the detective reflected not only on the beautiful simplicity and calm of the picture, but also on the circumstance that the brothers Nubbley, in conversation with his rural colleague, had passed remarks.

Rapt in these reflections, he turned into the Roylance Arms, in the tap-room whereof were seated Bob Challoner and sundry boon companions, congenially occupied in the discussion of liquid refreshment and affairs local and public. Strangely enough, their con-



Nearer and nearer he dragged her to the margin of the pool.

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versation dropped as the inspector entered, and the party looked at each other in some amount of self-consciousness and confusion.

"Mornin’ Mr. Challoner," said Rossiter with unwonted suavity, "you'll take a mug of ale with me?"

Bob emptied his mug and expressed his willingness to repeat the operation with celerity.

"And perhaps your friends will join us?" said Rossiter, which suggestion also was adopted with unanimity.

"I want you to do me a favour, Challoner," said Rossiter. "I've a little terrier down at my digs, and I want to try him with a rat. Do you think you could get one for me, and do you think you could bring me one or two in a trap?"

"That I will, sir," said Bob, fired with visions of yet more ale. "Shall I leave 'em at your lodgings?"

"No," said the detective promptly, "I want you to bring them here."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A Chum from "Down Under."

"Cooee!" Startled by the long piercing call Gerald Hastie removed his pipe from his lips, his feet from the mantelpiece, the rest of himself from the easy chair, laid down his book, and went to the window.

"It can't be!" he exclaimed. "And yet, whether it can or not, there's only one man in the world as long as that."

In a moment he was at the door, in another was gripping one of the biggest and cleverest hands that ever gripped the cane handle of a bat. This done, the nonchalance of the Anglo-Saxon race asserted itself. The stranger had come from the other end of the earth, but just as if he had dropped in from over the road, Hastie was saying, "Geoff!"

"Gerry!"

"Come in and sit down, old man. How goes it? Will you have some grub?"

"No thanks. If you've got some good beer."

In a few moments a college pot crested with a white foam was on the table, a big tobacco jar beside it.

"Now light up, and let's have the news, but before you start you'll let me put you up here, won't you?"

"Just for a night or two, Gerry," said the other, filling a big briarwood. "Of course, you guess I've come home to arrange matters for the team next year; got anything very good to meet us?"

"Well, yes, there's Jessop and Stoddy, he'll never grow stale, and there's Mac and Abel, and some new blood from the 'Varsities."

"And your old self as cat-like as ever."

"Well, old man, a man's got to be wide awake with a cornstalk like you who can straddle halfway down the pitch with one foot inside the crease."

"Well, you'll want your best. We're sending a hot lot from Australia. So much for what's bringing me home. Now I've come to Fallowfield to kill two birds with one stone, that is to look up two pals, your dear old self and a man I knew down under. Of course you know him, a chap named Roylance, made a big lump as a Colonial, came back to take up a family estate. One of the best, isn't he?"

"The fact is," said Gerald, "I can't say I know much about him, he rather fights shy of persons, but he seems all right, sits a horse well."

"Then he's learnt something. That's one thing he never could do in the bush, we used to guy him awfully for it."

"What!"

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"Well, never mind, he's one of the right sort for all that. I'm glad to hear he's got home all right because—well, I'm not superstitious or anything of that sort, but I had a bit of a dinner with Cyril the night before he sailed. He was as sober as I am now, but I never knew a chap so despondent. I'm not tiring you?"

"No; go on."

"He was frightfully pale, and when a fair man's pale, he is—well, he's pallid——"

"Fair! My dear chap, his hair is as black as your hat; blacker, that's brown."

"Gerry, my young friend, it strikes me the keenness of observation which used to spot a Proctor's bulldog at a mile in the old days has had the edge taken off it. But I was going to tell you. The night in question Cyril said to me: 'Geoff Heseltine, I'm going a long journey. I'm going back to the home I was born in, the home I left when I was a little kiddie.' 'And good luck to you,' says I, 'wish I were you. What are you sighing for?' For you'd have thought the poor chap was going to a funeral from the grizzling style of him. 'My dear old chap,' he went on, 'when I get back I shall feel like a stranger, a stranger in the house which belonged to my people for three hundred years, a stranger in the district. Do you know there's only one individual whose features I can call to mind, and that's a little girl with a face like one of the cherubs in Sir Joshua Reynold's picture; and bless my soul! she'll be by this time a grown-up young lady with her hair taken up and her frocks let down. Somehow I think I should know her, but I doubt if she'd know me.' 'Well,' says I chaffing, 'if she's grown up as nice as she was when she was little, tell her you've got an old pal who's just dying for a dear little English lady to take pity on him, for better or for worse.' 'Geoff, old man,' he said, 'somehow I've got an idea I shall never reach the old home and I shall never see the little girl.' 'What's the matter?' said I, and I filled his glass with champagne. But, Gerry, old fellow, something in the fellow's face, in his eyes, in his voice, took all the chaff out of me, and I felt for the moment as serious as he was. 'My lad,' said he, 'call it presentiment, premonition, second sight, clairvoyance, superstition; call it what you like, mark my words! I'm setting out for my home in England, I shall never reach that home, I shall never see that girl.' Well, of course, I laughed at the chap, as I shall laugh at him again before long, because it's all turned out skittles, anyway, as far as his reaching home is concerned; of course, I can't say whether he's seen the girl."

"Oh, yes," said Gerald Hastie, "he's seen the girl."

"Well, you're talking about as cheerfully as he was," said Geoffrey Heseltine. "Upon my word, I don't know whether it's the damp of the climate, but you home Britons, you are not boisterously hilarious."

"He's seen her, he's fallen madly in love with her, but he was too late, and he's in an awful temper about it."

"Hum! First thing I should think ever happened to put Cyril Roylance in a temper."

"Really? How different you and I estimate him!"

"Well, never mind about that, his presentimental rubbish has all turned out as I anticipated, in both particulars. So I've got to give him something back."

"Did you bet on it?"

"No; only he was so up to his eyes in his idea that he did this: He said, 'Geoff, old man, I haven't a relation in the world that I know about or care about, the only soul whose welcome I'm looking forward to is that little girl with the hair of spun sunshine and the eyes that bring bluebells to mind. Now, I'm so certain that something's going to happen to me, whether on sea or land, whether by rail or road, that I've made out this. It's a will Geoff, my last will and testament. Don't laugh, dear old chap, no, don't laugh at me. By that will I've given the English home that I know I shall never reach to the dear little girl whom I know I shall never see, and I place it in your hands to see at the proper time that it is carried out.'"

And Geoffrey Heseltine, taking from his breast pocket a document indorsed in German text and legal caligraphy, said: "There it is, old man, and I shall give it back to the dear old chap within a matter of hours. Read it for yourself, there's nothing private."

"He must have been thoroughly imbued with his presentiment, or whatever else we may call it," said Gerald after perusing the two closely written pages. "I say, Geoff, he must have thought a lot of you, judging from these half-dozen lines on page two."

"Oh, yes," said the other, "I shall lose a thumping legacy, and on my soul, Gerry, I shan't be sorry, for to tell you the truth, the dear old man was so earnest I caught half the infection of it, and it's quite a relief to me to know he's reached his English home after his long exile and his long, long journey. And now, after all this pow-wow, give us another pull of beer."

He took up the flagon, gazed at the old college arms, and then they fell to talking about the dear old days, when Plancus was Consul.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SQUIRE MEETS ONE WHO KNOWS HIM—AND ONE WHO DOESN'T!

"RICHARD SELDON!"

They were standing face to face, and she called him by his name. He who had set out to seek her met her midway on her errand, which was to seek him, to plead with him, to command, if need be, that he should quit his evil ways. He tried to evade the challenge.

"Really!" he said. "There's some mistake. You are mistaking me for someone else; you know that everybody has a double."

"I know some men lead a double life. You are Richard Seldon—my husband."

He tried to smile, to treat the affair with levity, only something in her face paralysed the effort.

"Moreover," she said, "you are living the life of Richard Seldon, doing the work of Richard Seldon; it is you marauding this countryside, robbing, housebreaking—oh, God forgive you, Dick, murdering. I thought you dead; that was better than to know you as you are."

"Hush!" he said, with an evil look in his face that had made men call him Tiger Dick.

"Oh! you may threaten, you may strike me; it wouldn't be the first time, Dick, because you know you can be very cruel——"

"Cruel! If you attempt to give me away I'll twist your neck!"

"Very well, then," she said, "kill me if you like and have done with it. My life's hardly worth living with the weight of the knowledge of the life you're leading on it; kill me if you will."

The something better in his nature, tiger that he was, the consciousness that she stood before him, a defenceless, unresisting woman, yes, unresisting were he to clench those iron hands of his upon her neck, made him pause, in some measure ashamed. It had been his one weakness in the eyes of his desperate fraternity, that he, so terrible to the strong, had been so contemptuously indifferent towards the weak.

"Look here," he said, "Pollie, you let me go my way, I'll let you go yours."

"But where's your way leading, Richard?"

"What's that to you?"

"It's this to me. You and those with you have fastened the odium of your wicked deeds upon an innocent man; you may even bring that man, guiltless as

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he is, to the gallows, and he is very dear to one who is very dear to me—one who has been kind as a sister to me—whom I love and cherish as a sister."

Knowing whom she meant and that what she said was truth, the flames of jealous hate blazed up in his heart. Once more in a fury, and seizing her wrists, he said:

"Go your own way, I tell you. Leave me to mine. Baulk me, and by all that's sacred——"

"Oh, Dick! Dick! is there anything sacred to you? Don't swear by what is sacred with the blood of your fellow man upon your soul."

"I tell you," he exclaimed, hoarse with passion, "there's nothing I'll stop at if you try to baulk me."

"Dick Seldon," she said, "I know you for a remorseless man, daring and strong, but I tell you to do your very worst. I will not stand by and see you carry out your plan to send a guiltless man on to the scaffold that you may lead the girl who loves him to the altar of the God you have so grievously offended."

"Ha! ha! there you are!" he laughed sardonically. "It's your cursed woman's jealousy that's stirring you to make mischief. But you shan't—you shan't. I'm a desperate man playing a desperate game for desperate stakes, and there's no card in the pack too desperate for me to play. Why, curse you! do you think I'll let you stand in my path with your sanctified ways and your aggravating sanctimonious sermons. I tell you, what I have I'll hold against the world, and what I want I'll take, and the men or women who stand between me and what I want stand there at their peril."

"Dick! Dick!" she said, clasping his arms as he seized her and dragged her towards the deep pool beside the churchyard wall, "kill me if you like, but I will do this with my last breath—I'll pray for you; I'll do all I can, as I've done from the beginning, to lead you from your evil ways. Oh, Dick! there was a time you loved me, once on a time you said for my sake you'd try to turn your feet to other ways, to shake off the bonds of sin that held you."

Nearer and nearer he dragged her to the margin of the pool.

"Dick! Dick! don't you remember that day when I was quite a girl, when in the garden of my father's house you wooed me and won me, telling me I was the fairest rose of all. I told you then I would love you all my life. Dick! you're strong, even among strong men, and I'm but a weak woman. Throw me in that deep and silent water and let me drown, but then remember whenever you linger on the brink of crime, with my last breath I prayed to God for you."

He looked down at her face, remembered the hour and the garden that she spoke of, how the sun shone, not only in that garden, but in his very heart: how different he felt that day to whatever he had felt before or since. And all of a sudden his arms dropped to his sides, he bowed his head, a sob burst in his throat.

"Oh, Heaven!" he said, "why was I born?"

She was silent, knowing in that moment that even as the rod of Moses smote the rocks and the spring gushed forth, so on his heart a touch of something not of earth had wakened a latent spring.

She took his arm, away from the pool, away from one crime she led him.

"Dick! Dick!" she said, "compose yourself; pull yourself together. See, someone's coming."

They walked along, side by side. Mary bowed, and he raised his hat in response to the salutation of two men, the curate and another. They passed on.

Gerald Hastie was for the moment lost in a reverie. What was the meaning of that evidently confidential *tête-à-tête* between Cyril Roylance and Mary Morrison? Was it possible that his own love was unsuccessful because he had a rival—a rival with a broad domain and

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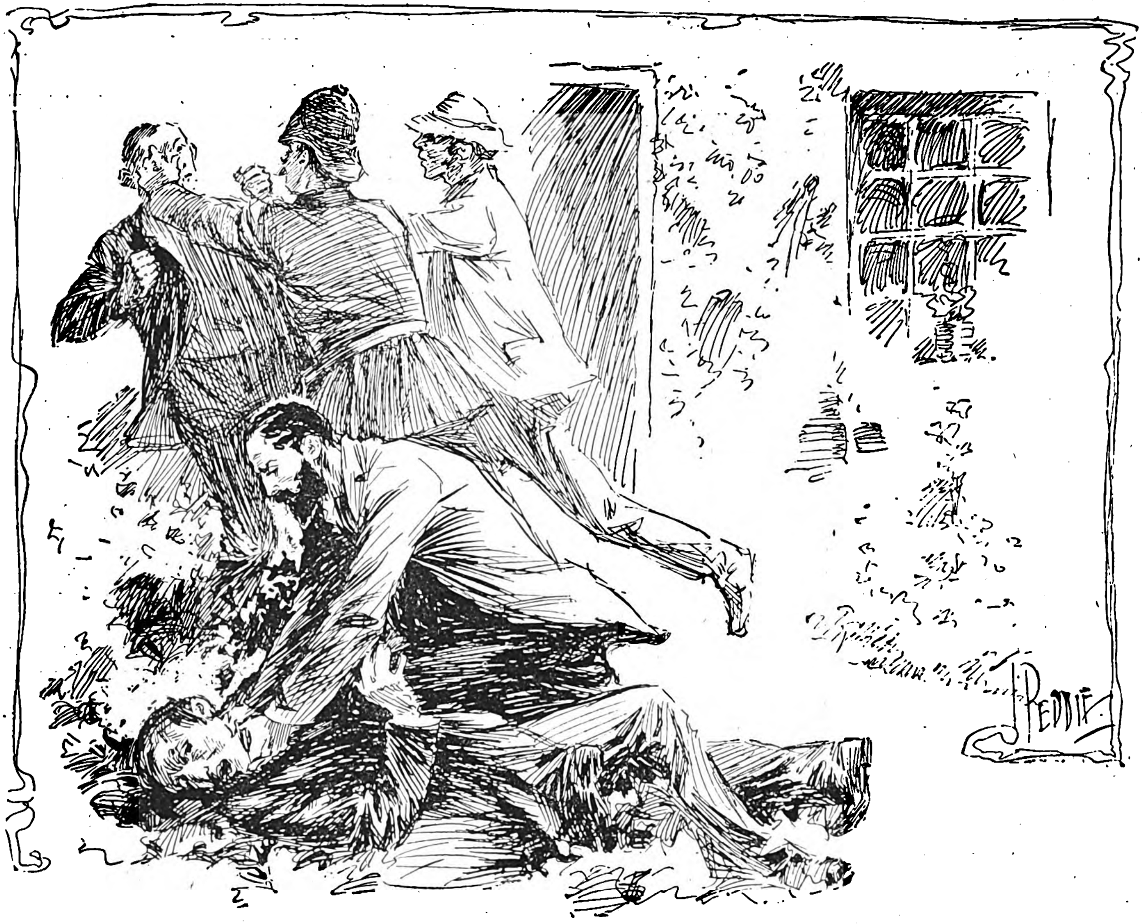

Kneeling on his captive's chest Rossiter shouted: "Bingle, seize the other."

a big rent roll? "No, no! she isn't like that," he said. "If she cares for him, she cares for him, not for his estate; besides, he's the Squire, the patron of her school, of course there are hundreds of matters for them to discuss." Then suddenly he roused himself from his dream, and turning to his companion, said:

"Dear, dear! I'd quite forgotten. Why, bless my soul! why didn't you speak to him?"

And the man from Australia repeated, "Speak to him? To whom?"

"The man who passed—your friend, Cyril Roylance, the master of Fallowfield Hall."

"Cyril Roylance! Why, man, I thought you were dreaming a minute ago, and now I'm sure. That's no more the Cyril Roylance from whom I parted less than six months ago in Sydney Harbour than it's you or I."

CHAPTER XXV.

A WONDERFUL CURE.

THE scornful smile on the moist lips of Police-Constable Bingle occasioned by the appearance of the man from Scotland Yard, grew even broader as he observed what the man from Scotland Yard was carrying, and, affecting not to be aware of his approach, Mr. Bingle proceeded along the road, retraced his steps, returning to the garden wicket of the brothers Nubbley, to whom, as a matter of fact, some few minutes earlier he had been relating the substance of his conversation of the previous day with the man in question.

"Blowed if here he ain't a-comin'," he said behind the back of his hand. "And what d'ye think he's carryin'?"

The brothers exchanged glances.

"Don't you think, brother Joseph," said James, "I'd better take you indoors? It gets a bit chilly for you, brother Joseph, settin' still."

"No, don't go yet," pleaded Mr. Bingle; "do stop and listen to this. What do you think he's a-carryin'?"

"Don't know," laughed Joseph rather weakly. "I think, brother James, if you don't mind p'raps it would be wiser for me to go indoors. You see, when you've got chronic rheumatiz tying your legs up into sailor's knots after an accident, Mr. Bingle, you has to be careful."

"Yes, I quite understands, sir," said Mr. Bingle, "only if you'll let me prescribe for you I should advise

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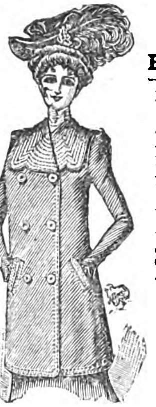

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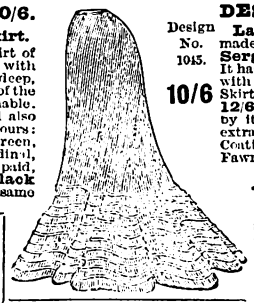

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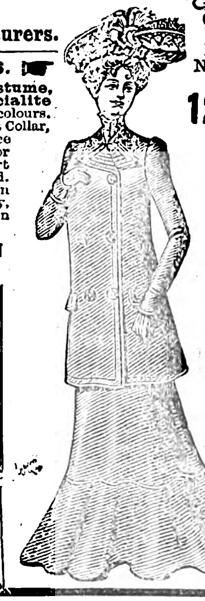

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you to take a nip out of that there bottle o' yours; just the right sort to keep away a chill, and blest if I ain't feelin' a little bit chilly round the small of the back."

Brother Joseph took the hint, also the suggested nip, and the square faced bottle was passed over the wicket to Mr. Bingle. And by this time Rossiter, who had quickened his footsteps, was alongside the garden wall.

"Morning, Mr. Rossiter," said Bingle, returning the square-faced bottle to Mr. James Nubbley and bestowing a wink of the deepest significance on both brothers.

"Good morning," replied Rossiter, with a cheerfulness which somewhat surprised the rural constable, having regard to the nature of their previous meeting. And he nodded genially to the brothers Nubbley.

"I suppose you don't happen to have seen anything of Branscombe or any of his gang?" Bingle inquired with another wink at the brothers.

"Wish I had," replied the detective with a sigh.

"Ah, we lots of us wishes for lots of things that don't come along lots of times," said Bingle. "But hello! I see you have made a capture of some sort at last," and he pointed to the cage carried by Rossiter, wherein half-a-dozen big buck rats were restlessly darting to and fro.

"Ah, yes," said Rossiter curiously, "I've got a little fox terrier at my place and I want to try him at a rat or two, and friend Bob here was good enough to get me these," and he nodded his head in the direction of Bob Challoner, who, with three or four companions, was loitering along towards them.

"And a werry good idea," said Bingle, delighted at the augmentation in the numbers of the audience whom he meant to regale by baiting the man from Scotland Yard. "I must say as 'ow I do admire the way you genelmen from London goes about your work, it's such a lesson to us chaw-bacons. You see when we sets about a job we goes tearing up and down the country all hours of the night arter our men, but you genelmen from Scotland Yard what's sent down here to take our work out of our 'ands, bless my soul! what do you do? When you're supposed to be getting on to the trail of one of the audaciousest gangs of criminals as was ever at large, why you settles yourself down to a nice little country holiday with a day or two's ratting in between."

"Well, you see, Bingle," said the other, when the laugh for which Mr. Bingle had been playing to the gallery had been duly awarded, "you see we all have our different ways of working; you've yours, I've mine. Bless my soul! How clumsy I am," for as he spoke he let fall his pipe over the wicket into the cottage garden.

"Well," chuckled Bingle, with another glance at the gallery, "I ain't going to be so unpolite as to contradict yer."

And in the midst of a second meed of merriment at his expense, Rossiter, disregarding Mr. James Nubbley's "Don't trouble, sir, allow me," lifted the latch of the wicket and was inside the garden stooping for his pipe. He picked it up and replaced it in his pocket.

"Well, anyway, Mr. Bingle," he said in a somewhat appealing tone, "after all, there is a bit of sport in seeing a smart dog setting about a good strong rat or two, and these look strong enough, don't they, Mr. James?"

"Very strong," said brother James admiringly.

"Yes, they're all right, aren't they, Mr. Joseph?" and he held them up to the inspection of the brother in the invalid chair.

"They're very fine rats," said brother Joseph, moving his face aside, "if you don't mind, Mr. Rossiter, not too close. I can't abear the sight of rats, and I ain't over partial to the smell of 'em."

"But these are beauties," said the detective, holding them directly over the invalid chair, "and did you ever see such a clever cage as this?"

"Yes, very simple, but do be careful with it," for the detective was handling that cage in a most imprudent manner.

"You know, the cleverest things always are simple," he said. "Look here, you just twist this handle and you slip back this catch, and the door swings right back as easy as—hullo! look out—why, blest if it ain't slipped back now—look out—look out!" for even as he spoke and fumbled with the bars the door of the cage which he was holding end up swung back and half-a-dozen big buck rats flopped down in a shower on to the occupant of that invalid chair.

"Help—help—murder!" shouted brother Joseph as the fat rats flopped upon him, some outside, some inside the apron.

And in a paroxysm of terror and repulsion he flung back the apron of that invalid chair, out of which he jumped with the agility of an acrobat.

"By Jove!" shouted Rossiter. "What price rats for curing rheumatism! And they've done something else, my friend, they've disarranged your whiskers," and with a grab at the white flowing, silver-haired frame of brother Joseph's face, he snatched it bodily away. In another moment his hands were on the man's throat and the man was on the ground on his back. Kneeling on his captive's chest, Rossiter shouted: "Bingle, seize the other," for brother James, after gazing for a moment, staggered and speechless at what had been going on, had turned and was looking wildly round to choose which way he should make a bolt for it.

"Seize him, I tell you!" shouted Rossiter. "Let him go and that tunic's off your back before the day is out!"

Meantime, Bob Challoner, vaulting the wall, had collared brother James.

"You've gotten to stop, measter. Ah! Mr. Rossiter's after trapping more than rats. I've got him sir," and by this time Bingle, recovering from his stupefaction, had rushed through the gate and laid his hand, too, upon the man.

"Mind, you'll be responsible Mr. Rossiter!" he said, failing even now to understand.

But a fierce swift blow, flush in the face, from brother James, paradoxically half-stunned and quite awakened him.

"That's your game, be it! Hold on to him, Bob! I've got him," and in a moment he had twisted the other's wrist and forced his arm behind his back. "Now lads," he shouted, "help up along with 'em to the lock-up. Ah, Mr. Rossiter, I thowt you an' I 'ud get hold of summat or somebody with this job, between us."

"Mind what you're doin'," gurgled brother Joseph, and Detective-Inspector Rossiter said sternly:

"I know what I'm doing, I take all responsibility. I arrest you, Joshua Branner and Barnaby Plumb, on the charge of wilful murder of John William Barker. I warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you, and I call on all civilians here to assist me in arresting these men in the name of the King."

(To be concluded.)

* * *

Fair Cyclist: "Where do these roads lead to?" Native: "One on 'em leads to my 'ome, an' t'other goes straight on."

Teacher (suspiciously): "Who wrote your composition, Johnny?" Johnny: "My father." Teacher: "What, all of it?" Johnny: "No'm; I helped him."

Jack: "Why do they give all these dishes French names? By their common English names they'd taste as sweet." Tom: "Yes; but they wouldn't cost as much."

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CATARRH OF THE NOSE AND THROAT IN RELATION TO DEAFNESS.

In considering catarrh of the nose and throat as a cause of deafness, let us first fix in our mind some important facts as to the structure, the functions, and the anatomical relations of the Eustachian tube. This tube is a fibrous canal which connects the nose and throat most intimately with the cavity of the middle ear. It has a lining of delicate membrane, which is continuous at one end with the mucous membrane of the ear, and at the other with the membranous lining of the nasal cavities and of the throat. Any inflammation, therefore, of the nose and throat has at once a direct way open to affect the hearing, by extending along the membrane of the Eustachian tube into the middle ear.

The physiological function of the Eustachian tube is also affected by catarrh of the posterior portion of the nasal cavities and of the upper part of the throat. In its normal condition this tube permits air to penetrate to the middle ear, and thus preserves an equilibrium between the pressure of the external air and that contained within the aural cavity. When there is swelling of the membrane around the opening of the Eustachian tube the opening of the canal is closed, thus preventing the air from penetrating to the middle ear. The external air pressure then becomes greater than that of the cavity of the middle ear, with the result that the ear drum is forced inward, interfering with the movements of the minute chain of bones, so essential for conveying sounds to the nerve of hearing. Should this condition of the Eustachian tube continue, an obstinate form of deafness results from adhesions, which bind down the chain of bones and the tympanic membrane, or drumhead, so firmly that their response to the vibrations of waves of sound becomes very feeble, and even impossible in very chronic cases.

A still more complete description of deafness in its relation to catarrh and various other causes will be found in the "Journal for the Deaf," which can be obtained free of charge on application by post to the Editor, 72, Regent's Park-road, London, N.W. The "Journal for the Deaf" also contains an account of a large number of cases of Deafness cured by the Drouet Treatment. The success of this new system, although already widely known, gathers still greater fame from the reports of cures recorded during the past month. From the October records the following are selected as illustrations for this brief treatise on deafness complicated by catarrh:

It would be difficult to find a more obstinate and complicated case of deafness than that described on the Patient's Report Form forwarded to the Drouet Institute by Mr. A. Adams, 22 years of age, of Westbourne-square, London, West. The deafness, in this case, was so great that the ticking of a watch could not be heard, unless pressed close to the ears. There were continuous noises in the head, occasional aching in the ears, and constant discharge. The discharge began when the patient was eight years old, and followed as a result of scarlet fever. Later the deafness was further increased, as a result of catarrhal complications. Mr. Adams had, at several times, tried treatment for the ear trouble, consulting no less than eight doctors, but without beneficial results. On July 7, of this year, Mr. Adams began the treatment prescribed by the Drouet Institute's Consulting Physician, and, as a result of faithfully pursuing the treatment, was able to report a complete cure as follows:

15, Delamere-crescent, Westbourne
Square, W., Oct. 29, 1901.

I should have sent my final report before, but thought I would wait and see if the ears still kept well. I am glad to say they have, and I now can hear a watch tick at arm's length in both ears, and the discharge has entirely stopped.—Yours faithfully,
A. F. ADAMS.

A second report, a week later, is still more interesting:

15, Delamere-crescent, Nov. 6, 1901.

I wish to write and tell you that I am quite cured of my deafness, and also noises in the head, and that the discharge is quite stopped. I feel quite another person now, as I always felt miserable before. I went to five or six different doctors and hospitals, and they did not do me any good. Had a bad ear since I was eight years old. I then went to Toronto, Canada, and also went to two doctors there, but they did not do me any good; but am glad to say that I am cured now by using your treatment, and shall send anybody to you that I know is suffering.—I remain, yours very sincerely,
A. F. ADAMS.

The case of Miss Jane Macdonald, of Glasgow, will be of the greatest interest to those afflicted by catarrh of the nose and throat. In this case the ailment was attributed to having taken a chill, a cause which produces the majority of catarrhal troubles. There were the usual symptoms of discharges from the nose and throat, sneezing, a thick, swollen feeling in the throat, and great difficulty in breathing through the nose. The local doctor, whom she consulted, told her that the obstruction to breathing was caused by a catarrhal inflammation of the membrane inside the nose, of so severe a character that the sides of the nasal cavities touched each other, and thus left no passage. Previous treatment having failed to cure her, after two years of suffering, she decided to place her case in charge of the Consulting Physician, who prescribed the appropriate Drouet treatment by correspondence. Miss Macdonald's first course of medicines was forwarded to her early in September, and, after following out the physician's instructions several weeks, she reported herself completely cured as follows:

4, Leckethill-street, Springburn, Glasgow.
Oct. 21, 1901.

Dear Sir—I have discontinued the use of your medicines for a week now, and I am happy to say that I am perfectly satisfied with my condition, and my nose and throat are now perfectly well.—Yours faithfully,
JANE MACDONALD.

The original letter, with all the others of which extracts have been given above, may be seen at the Autograph Room of the Drouet Institute, where hundreds of letters emanating from grateful patients are kept. The Autograph Room is open to the public every day, except Sunday, from ten a.m. to six p.m.

A special feature of the Drouet treatment is that patients who cannot come to London to be examined are enabled to receive advice by filling up a pathological report form, which allows them to state explicitly their case. This form may be had, free of charge, with a copy of the "Journal for the Deaf," by writing to the Editor, Drouet Institute, 72, Regent's Park-road, N.W. In fact, all the persons whose cures have just been reported were treated by means of the pathological form, and never saw the Consulting Physician who prescribed for them.

It is, however, always advisable when possible to be personally examined at the Drouet Institute, 72, Regent's Park-road, London, N.W., where consultations are held daily, except Sunday, from two to four in the afternoon. Special consultations may also be had at any time by previous arrangement. For all personal consultations a fee is charged. Any advice by correspondence is absolutely free, as are also the consultations given by means of the report form.

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SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 87 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 28lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Coniston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

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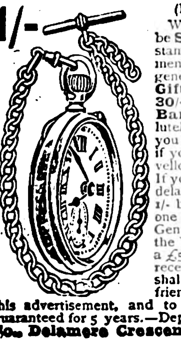

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Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. To those readers who submit storyettes which are used, a six shilling novel will be awarded. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, December 16th. Post-cards only, please.

A Way of its Own.

TOURIST: "Fine morning, Sandy. What's the day going to be?" Sandy: "Well, I'm thinking it'll may be rain." Tourist: "But the barometer is rising, Sandy." Sandy: "Aye, but it's verra little heed the weather hereabouts pays to the barometer."

Consolation for a Sweetheart.

"DON'T cry so bitterly, darling," said the policeman to the weeping fair one. "I can't help it." A tender heart beat under his blue coat, and he murmured: "Even though I'm removed to another beat, sweetest, fortune, I trust, will be kind to me; so wipe away your tears. I will meet another cook, and I will remember to love her, if only for your sake."

A Life Ill-Spent.

"AH, yes, his was a wasted life," sighed the bald-headed gentleman. "How?" inquired a friend, "was he dissipated? Had he antipathy for work? Was he a gambler, a lover of fast horses, a——?" "Nay! Nay!" interrupted the bald-headed gentleman. "None of these, but worse, far worse: he spent his life endeavouring to raise vegetables which should remotely resemble the gorgeous specimens he had seen in the seedsman's catalogues."

Not Realism.

YOUNG AUTHOR: "Would you call my novel realism or romance?" Friend: "What does the heroine say when she accepts the hero?" Young Author: "Oh, she says, 'Yes, dear George, we will tread life's path together, one in heart and purpose, bearing each other's burdens, sharing each other's grief, doubling each——'" Friend: "Oh, that's romance of the first water. A real girl would no more think of making a speech on such an occasion than of singing a song, or dancing the Highland fling."

Seeking Information.

A NUMBER of well-disposed and wealthy residents of the West-end of London started some classes for the purpose of giving instruction in science to their less fortunate fellows who lived in the neighbourhood of Whitechapel. One evening quite a small crowd came together to hear a discourse on "Air," which was to be delivered by a gentleman who had the misfortune to be extremely bald-headed. The lecturer was furnished with a good supply of interesting diagrams, with which he used every means to make his address instructive. In fact, he soon flattered himself that he had thorougly succeeded, for even the youngsters seemed to pay great attention to what he had to say. When his peroration was in full swing, he remarked: "It is quite impossible for any person to live without air." The lecturer's collapse was, however, very speedy, when a sharp-witted urchin shouted: "'Ow about yerself, guv'ner?"

How a Tragedy was Avoided.

"YOU had a row with Grisby to-day, I understand." "Not much of a row, fortunately." "How did it occur?" "Why, he called me a stockbroker, a swindler, and numerous other disagreeable names." "What did you say?" "I told him that for twopence I would horsewhip him." "Did he give you the money?" "No; he had nothing but two penny stamps, and I never take stamps."

To Their Mutual Benefit.

"YOUR little girl is sickening for the measles; please fetch her away at once," was the distressing news sent by the mistress of a West Riding board school to the wife of a working man, whose child showed unmistakable signs of illness. Soon after, the mother strolled leisurely into the school-porch, wiping a pair of soap-smeared hands on the edge of a discoloured apron. "Poor little lassie!" she said, kissing the ailing child on both cheeks. "She's looked bad for three days, but I didn't want to have her at home sooner than I could help, 'cos her cot's very handy for foldin' clothes on, and the oftener the doctor comes to her the more washin' I'll have to take in to pay him. But I knew you wouldn't be too keen on sendin' her back, marm," she went on gratefully, addressing the mistress. "If only a few more of the children can manage to catch the measles, the school will have to be shut up right away, and think what a long Christmas holiday you lucky teachers will get."

A Cabby's Dodge.

SHE was an American, and alighted from the Continental mail at Charing Cross. To a deeply interested hansom-driver, the last arrived girl from Chicago put the question: "Say, hackman, can you get me through to the Hotel Cecil under half-an-hour? My friends will be waiting for me there after half-past six." "Well, miss," replied the guileless cabby, "it's a fairish long drive, but I'll do it all right." Whereupon he lashed up his horse, and proceeded at a break-neck pace down Whitehall, then back along the Embankment, finally bringing up within the stipulated time his over-driven steed, with heaving flanks, at the entrance of that great caravanserai so favoured by our American cousins. "Oh, janitor," said the lady, as she, after her luggage being removed, swept through the portals of the "Cecil," "please pay the hackman; he has driven me such a long way, and at such a pace, too. Look at his poor horse." "Where have you come from, cabby?" said the porter. "What, Charing Cross only? Here you are then—fare and two trunks, one-and-four." The hansom-driver slowly drove away.

"The Baby."
(From *Domestic Ditties.*)

Domestic Ditties.

With Words and Music by A. SCOTT-GATTY Composer of "Plantation Songs." Profusely illustrated in colour. Pictorial boards. Price 2s. 6d.

"The ditties are quite within the intelligence of the very young, while the coloured pictures of crying babies, of tossing bulls, and so forth, will delight old and young alike."—*Daily News.*

The Grand Christmas Double Number will be ready next week. Price 2d.

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

The next issue of *Short Stories* will be the Grand Christmas Double Number. It will consist of 64 pages crammed full of bright stories and competitions, and in addition will contain the opening chapters of a splendid new serial, entitled "The Lovers of Yvonne," by Rafael Sabatini, whose stories are well known to readers of *Pearson's Magazine*. In this issue will appear the first set of Brain Gymnasium Puzzles, which feature will take the place of the Editor's Page during the winter months. Readers are invited to send in puzzles suitable for insertion on condition that they do not compete the week they appear. Pencil-cases will be sent to all those readers whose puzzles are used. Don't forget to order your copy of the Christmas number at once; the price is only twopence, and there will be a big demand for the issue.

* * *

Two correct claims have been received this week in connection with the Photo Competition. The names of the winners are:

Dr. W. G. Grace (No. 42),
St. Andrews,
Laurie Park Road,
Sydenham, S.E.

Mr. F. W. Adams (No. 44),
Chief Officer, Fire Department,
2 Church End Villas,
Hendon, N.W.

* * *

This now brings the total number of winners up to nineteen, so that altogether we have paid away £95. Five more portraits appear this week on page 751, and the correct claimant of each one will receive a £5 note.

* * *

The following is a complete list of previous winners: Mr. Henry R. Pead (No. 2), 58 Newington Green, N.; Mr. R. H. Robinson (No. 4), Post Office, Queen's Square, Bowness-on-Windermere; Mr. H. Bramwell (No. 6), 50 Gordon Buildings, Datchelor Place, Church Street, Camberwell, S.E.; Mr. F. D. Strange (No. 8), Calne, Wilts; Mr. William Maher (No. 9), 22 Tangier Lane, Eton, Bucks; Mr. P. Insall (No. 13), 4 The Parade, Acton Green, W.; Mrs. Blake (No. 14), 49 Rupert Street, Reading; Mr. John Holland (No. 16), 57 Richard Street, Cilfynydd, near Pontypridd, Wales; Mr. W. J. Williams (No. 17), 1a Obelisk Buildings, Lewisham, S.E.; Mrs. W. Cook (No. 19), Axholme Cottage, Cross Street, Crowle, Lincs; Mr. James Thomas (No. 20), 6 Baxter Terrace, Glyncorrw, Cymmer, Glamorganshire; Mr. Stanton Wright (No. 21), 1a Hilton Villas, Champion Crescent, Sydenham, S.E.; Mr. James Cates (No. 23), 28 Esplanade, Scarborough; Mrs. Crask (No. 26), 27 Maidstone Road, Lowestoft; Mr. Geo. R. Sims (No. 28), 12 Clarence Terrace, Regent's Park, London, N.W.; Mr. D. E. Jones (No. 36), 69 Beechfield Street, Mountpottinger, Belfast; Mr. J. G. Adams (No. 40), 24 Broadway, Kettering.

* * *

I would ask my correspondent who signs himself "An Old Reader, of Hackney, N.E." (he carefully omits his name and address—for fear of a visit from the Fighting Editor, doubtless), to refer to any of the winners in the Photo Competition—all of whose names and addresses are on this page—as to its genuineness. I am sure they would all be only too glad to prove to him that they have received the £5 as promised. My correspondent says he has been a reader of *Short Stories* for a good many years, which makes me all the more surprised that he should imagine for a moment that any of the competitions are not genuine. The kindest construction I can put on this letter is that a virulent attack of "sour grapes" has prompted its sending—the writer of it saying that his attempts in competitions have never been successful.

* * *

Will "C. J. McM.," of Belfast, please read the reply to "J. C. K.," published on this page in the issue dated November 23rd.

* * *

Any attempts sent in for the Storyette Competition in envelopes are disqualified. Humorous stories which are too long to be written on a postcard are quite unsuitable for insertion.

* * *

Advice to Readers on Various Matters.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

The matrimonially inclined will doubtless be interested in a problem which has been sent for my solution by a young lady who signs herself "Arnish," and about which she is apparently deeply concerned. If a girl has two lovers, whom we will call for convenience X and Y, and supposing the one she likes best is not the one who likes her best, what ought she to do? X is madly in love with her, and she would be madly in love with X "were t'other dear charmer away." As it is, she won't marry X because of Y, and she can't marry Y because he won't ask her to, and is so wrapped up in the study of metaphysics that he is absolutely impenetrable to hints.

The position is certainly an awkward one, but it seems to me that there is only one way out of it. The girl ought to marry X. Waiting for Y in the hope that he may realise what he is missing seems to be making a lottery of the thing, and lotteries, as we all know, are wrong.

"W. S." wants to know why it is that the weight of precious metals is always spoken of in ounces.

It has always been customary, right away from the very early days, to describe precious metals by weight in ounces. It dates from the first stage of mining. Silver and gold are found in very small quantities, and as fast as they are found a weight is given to them. If this practice were not followed, and miners waited till sufficient metal was found to call it pounds, mining operations would soon get into a hopeless muddle. Gold in bars and silver in ingots are always weighed and sold in ounces—they are precious metals. When they are minted the nomenclature is changed into grains.

"R. C. D." and his friend are in a dilemma. They both love the same girl, and she shows the same affection for them both. They don't wish to quarrel over the matter, and would be glad to know what they can do.

Why not toss up which shall go first and ask her to be his wife? If she cares more for the other one, she can easily refuse the first; and if, on the other hand, she prefers the first-comer, she can just as easily say so. Perhaps she does not care for either of you in that way.

"Studentina."——An average Englishman is supposed to consume annually the produce of rather more than three and one-eighth acres of land. Half-an-acre for bread, two and a half for animal food, one-eighth for beer, cider, etc., one-fiftieth for vegetables, and an equally small proportion for luxuries.

The Fountain Pen this week has been awarded to Mr. William Silcocks, 42 West Street, Trowbridge, Wilts.

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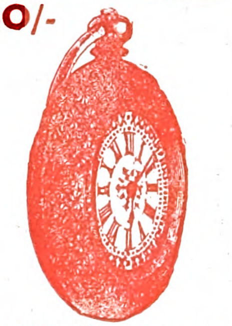

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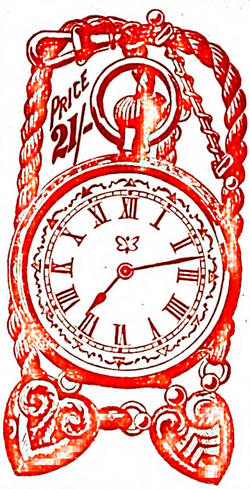

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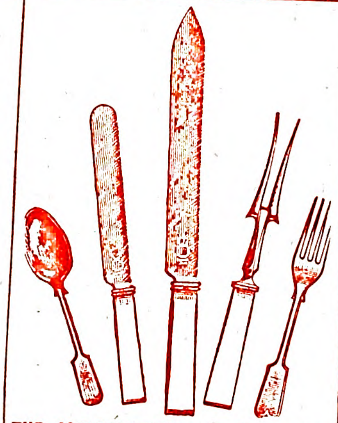

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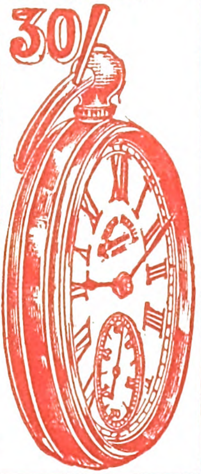

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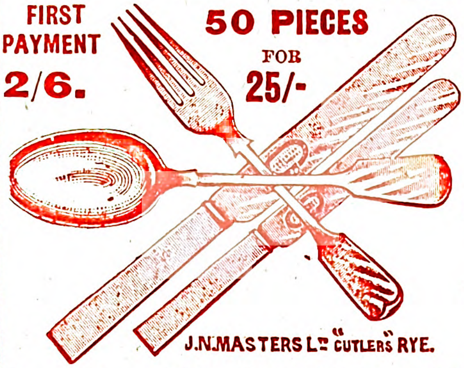
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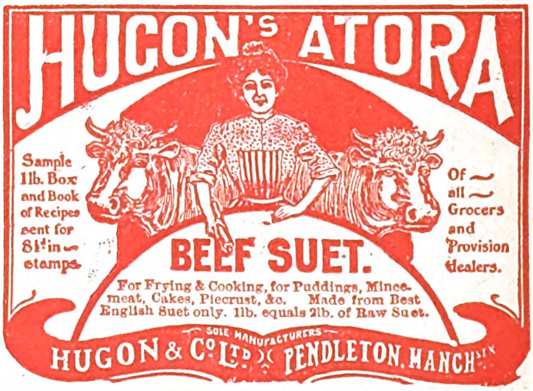
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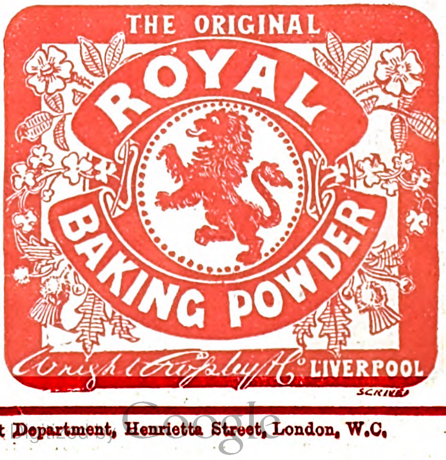

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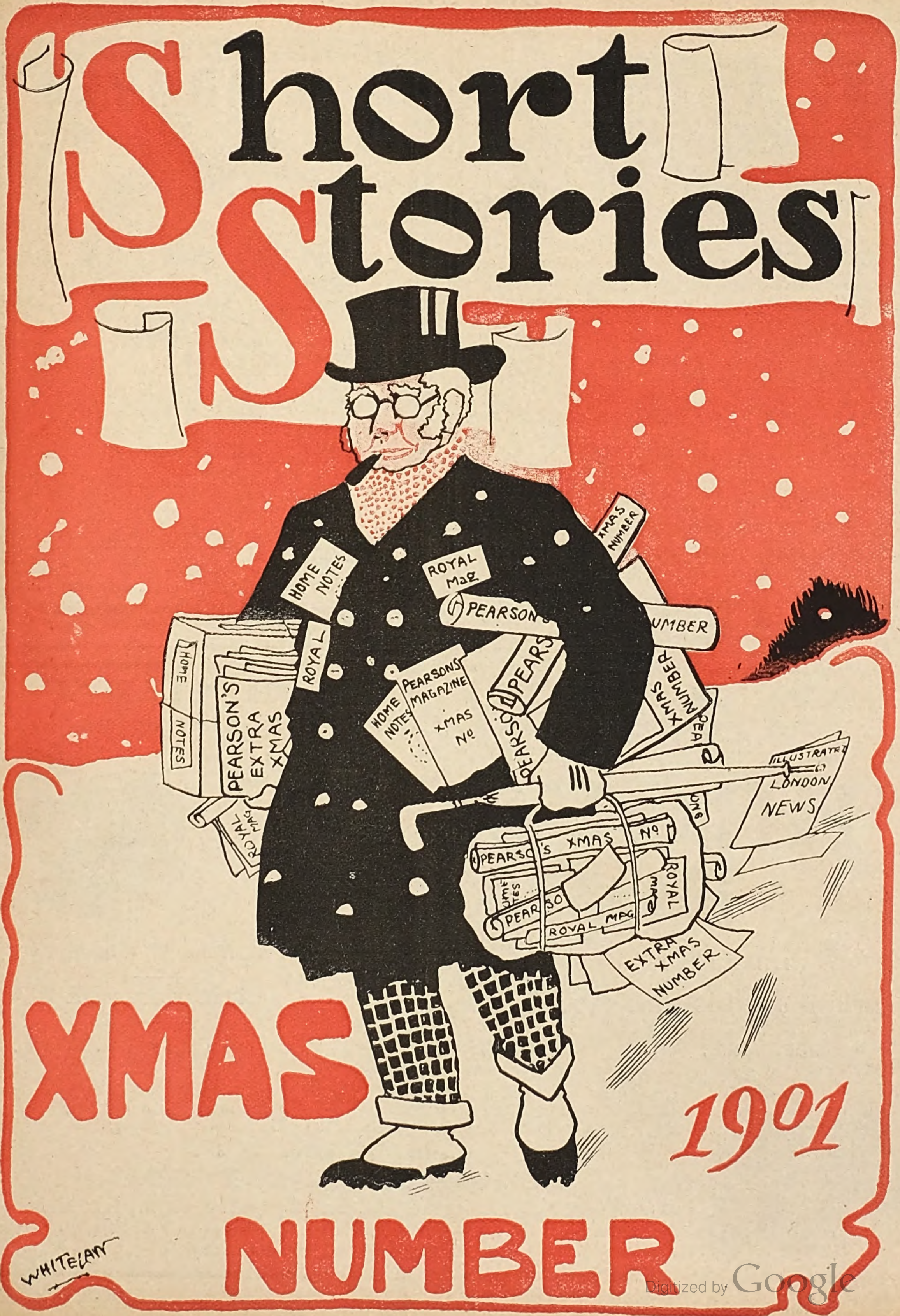
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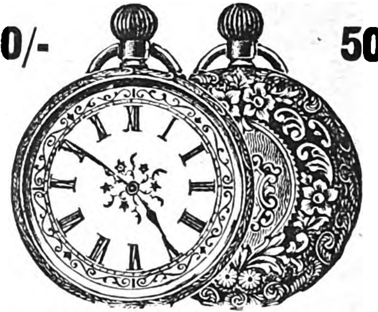

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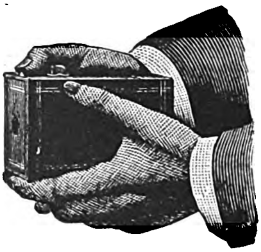

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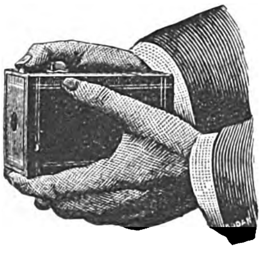

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By RAFAEL SABATINI.

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CHAPTER I.

OF HOW A BOY DRANK TOO MUCH WINE, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

ANDREA DE MANCINI sprawled, ingloriously drunk, upon the floor. His legs were thrust under the table, and his head rested against the chair from which he had slipped; his long black hair was tossed and dishevelled; his handsome, boyish face flushed and garbed in the vacant expression of idiocy.

"I beg a thousand pardons, M. de Luynes," quoth he in the thick, monotonous voice of a man whose brain but ill controls his tongue. "I beg a thousand pardons for the unseemly poverty of our repast. 'Tis no fault of mine. My Lord Cardinal keeps a most unworthy table for me. Faugh! Uncle Guilio is a Hebrew—if not by birth, by instinct. He carries his purse-strings in a knot which it would break his heart to unfasten. But there, some day my Lord Cardinal will go to Heaven—to the lap of Abraham. I shall be rich then, vastly rich, and I shall bid you to a banquet worthy of your most noble blood. The Cardinal's health—perdition have him for the niggardliest rogue unhung!"

I pushed back my chair and rose. The conversation was taking a turn that was too unhealthy to be pursued within the walls of the Palais Mazarin, where there existed, albeit the law books made no reference to it, the heinous crime of *lèse-Eminence*—a crime this for which more men had been broken than it pleases me to dwell on.

"Your table, Master Andrea, needs no apology," I answered carelessly. "Your wine, for instance, is beyond praise."

"Ah, yes! The wine. But, Heavens, Monsieur," he ejaculated, for a moment opening wide his heavy eyelids, "do you believe 'twas Mazarin provided it? Pooh. 'Twas a present made me by M. de la Motte, who seeks my interest with my Lord Cardinal to obtain for him an appointment in his Eminence's household, and thus thinks to earn my good will. He's a pestilent creature this la Motte," he added, with a hiccough, "a pestilent creature; but, by Heaven, but his wine is good, and I'll speak to my uncle. Help me up, de Luynes. Help me up, I say; I would drink the health of this provider of wines."

I hurried forward, but he had struggled up unaided, and stood swaying with one hand on the table and the other at the back of his chair. In vain did I remonstrate with him that already he had drunk over much.

"'Tis a lie," he shouted. "May not a gentleman sit upon the floor from choice?"

To emphasise his protestation he imprudently withdrew his hand from the chair and struck at the air with his open palm. That gesture cost him his balance. He staggered, toppled backward, and clutched madly at the tablecloth as he fell, dragging glasses and bottles with a deafening crash on to the floor.

Then, as I stood aghast and alarmed, wondering who might have overheard the thunder of his fall, the fool sat up amidst the ruins, and filled the room with his shrieks of drunken laughter.

"Silence! boy," I thundered, springing towards him. "Silence, or we shall have the whole house about our ears."

And truly were my fears well grounded, for, before I could assist him to rise, I heard the door behind me open. Apprehensively I turned, and sickened to see that that which I had dreaded most was come to pass. A tall, imposing figure in scarlet robes stood erect and scowling on the threshold, and behind him his valet, Bernouin, bearing a lighted taper.

Mancini's laugh faded into a tremulous cackle, then died out, and with gaping mouth and glassy eyes he sat there staring at his uncle.

Thus we stayed in silence whilst a man might count mayhap a dozen; then the Cardinal's voice rang harsh and full of anger.

"'Tis thus that you fulfil your trust, M. de Luynes," he said.

"Your Eminence," I began, scarce knowing what I should say, when he cut me short.

"I will deal with you presently and elsewhere." He stepped up to Andrea, and surveyed him for a moment in disgust. "Get up, sir!" he commanded. "Get up!"

The lad sought to obey him with an alacrity that merited a kinder fate. Had he been in less haste perchance he had been more successful. As it was, he got no farther than his knees when his right leg slid from under him, and he fell prone among the shattered tableware, mumbling curses and apologies in a breath.

Mazarin stood gazing at him with an eye that was eloquent in scorn, then bending down he spoke quickly to him in Italian. What he said I know not, being ignorant of their mother tongue; but, from the fierceness of his utterance, I'll wager my soul 'twas nothing sweet to listen to. When he had done with him, he turned to his valet.

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"Bernouin," said he, "summon M. de Mancini's servant and assist him to get my nephew abed. M. de Luynes, be good enough to take Bernouin's taper and to light me back to my apartments.

Unsavoury as was the task, I had no choice but to obey, and to stalk in front of him, candle in hand, like an acolyte at Notre Dame, and in my heart the profound conviction that I was about to have a bad quarter of an hour with his Eminence. Nor was I wrong; for no sooner had we reached his cabinet and the door had been closed than he turned upon me the full measure of his wrath.

"You miserable fool," he snarled. "Did you think to trifle with the trust which in a misguided moment I placed in you? Think you that, when a week ago I saved you from starvation to clothe and feed you and give you a lieutenancy in my guards, I should endure so foul an abuse as this? Think you that I intrusted M. de Mancini's training in arms to you so that you might lead him into the dissolute habits which have dragged you down to what you are—to what you were before I rescued you—to what you will be to-morrow when I shall have again abandoned you?"

"Hear me, Eminence," I cried indignantly. "'Tis no fault of mine. Some fool hath sent M. de Mancini a basket of wine and——"

"And you showed him how to abuse it," he broke in harshly. "You have taught the boy to become a sot; in time, were he to remain under your guidance, I make no doubt but that he would become a gamester and a duellist as well. I was mad, perchance, to give him into your care; but I have the good fortune to be still in time, before the mischief has sunk farther, to withdraw him from it, and to cast you back into the kennel from which I picked you."

"Your Eminence does not mean——"

"By Heaven, I do!" he cried. "You shall quit the Palais Royal this very night. M. de Luynes, and if ever I find you unbidden within half-a-mile of it, I will do that which out of a misguided sense of compassion I do not now—I will have you flung into a dungeon of the Bastille, where better men than you have rotted before to-day. Great Heavens, do you think that I am to be fooled by such a thing as you?"

"Does your Eminence dismiss me?" I cried aghast, and scarce crediting that such was indeed the extreme measure upon which he had determined.

"Have I not been plain enough?" he answered with a snarl.

I realised to the full my unenviable position, and with the realisation of it there came over me the recklessness of him who has played his last stake at the tables and lost. That recklessness it was that caused me to shrug my shoulders with a laugh. I was a soldier of fortune—or should I say a soldier of misfortune?—as rich in vice as I was poor in virtue; a man who lived by the steel and parried the blows that came as best he might, or parried them not at all—but never quailed.

"As your Eminence pleases," I answered coolly, "albeit methinks that for one who has shed his blood for France as freely as I have done, a little clemency were not unfitting."

He raised his eyebrows, and his lips curled in a malicious sneer.

"You come of a family, M. de Luynes," he said slowly, "that is famed for having shed the blood of others for France more freely than its own. You are, I believe, the nephew of Albert de Luynes. Do you forget the Marshal d'Ancre?"

I felt the blood of anger hot in my face as I made haste to answer him.

"There are many of us, Monseigneur, who have cause to blush for the families they spring from—more cause, mayhap, than hath Gaston de Luynes."

In my words, perchance, there was no offensive meaning, but in my tone and in the look which I bent upon the Cardinal there was that which told him that I alluded to his own obscure and dubious origin. He grew livid, and for a moment methought he would have struck me. Had he done so, then indeed the history of Europe would have been other than it is to-day. He restrained himself, however, and drawing himself to the full height of his majestic figure he extended his arm toward the door.

"Go," he said, in a voice that passion rendered hoarse. "Go, Monsieur. Go, quickly, while my clemency endures. Go before I summon the guard and deal with you as your temerity deserves."

I bowed, not without a taint of mockery, for I cared little what might follow; then, with head erect and the firm tread of defiance, I stalked out of his apartment, along the corridor, down the great staircase, across the courtyard, past the guard—which, ignorant of my disgrace, saluted me—and out into the street.

Then at last my head sank forward on my breast, and deep in thought I wended my way home, oblivious of all around me, even the chill bite of the February wind.

In my mind I reviewed my wasted life, with the fleeting pleasures and the enduring sorrows that it had brought me, or that I had drawn from it. The Cardinal said no more than truth when he spoke of having saved me from starvation. A week ago that was indeed what he had done. He had taken pity on Gaston de Luynes, the nephew of that famous Albert de Luynes who had been Constable of France in the early days of the late king's reign; and he had made me lieutenant of his guards and fencing-master to his nephews Andrea and Paolo de Mancini, because he knew that a better blade than mine could not be found in France, and because he thought it well to have such swords as mine about him.

A little week ago life had been replete with fresh promises, the gates of the road to fame (and perchance fortune) had been opened to me anew, and now, before I had fairly passed that gate, I had been thrust rudely back, and it had been slammed in my face because it pleased a fool to become a sot whilst in my company.

There is a subtle poetry in the contemplation of ruin. With ruin, itself, howbeit, there comes a prosaic dispelling of all idle dreams—a hard, a grim, a vile reality.

Ruin! 'Tis an ugly word. A fitting one to carve upon the tombstone of a reckless, godless, dissolute life such as mine had been.

Back, Gaston de Luynes; back to the kennel whence the Cardinal's hand did for a moment pluck you; back, from the morning of hope to the night of despair; back, to choose between starvation and the earning of a pauper's fee as a master of fence.

CHAPTER II.

The Fruit of Indiscretion.

Despite the dejection to which I had become a prey, I slept no less soundly that night than was my wont, and, indeed, it was not until late next morning, when someone knocked at my door, that I awakened.

I sat up in bed, and my first thought as I looked round the handsome room, which I had rented a week ago upon receiving the lieutenancy in the Cardinal's guards, was for the position that I had lost and of the need that there would be ere long to seek a lodging more humble and better suited to my straitened circumstances. It was not without regret that such a thought came to me; for my tastes had never been modest, and the house was a fine one, situated in the Rue St. Antoine at a hundred paces or so from the Jesuit convent.

I had no time, however, to indulge the sorry mood that threatened to beset me, for the knocking at my chamber door continued, until at length I answered it with a command to enter.

It was my servant Michelot, a grizzled veteran of huge frame and strength, who had fought beside me at Rocroi, and who had thereafter become so enamored of my person, for some trivial service he swore I had rendered him, that he had attached himself to me and my luckless fortunes.

He came to inform me that M. de Mancini was below and craved immediate speech with me. He had scarce done speaking, however, when Andrea himself, having doubtless grown tired of waiting, appeared in the doorway. He wore a sickly look, the result of his last night's debauch; but, more than that, there was stamped upon his face a look of latent passion, which made me think at first that he was come to upbraid me.

"Ah, still abed, Luynes?" was his greeting as he came forward.

His cloak was wet and his boots splashed, which told me both that he had come afoot and that it rained.

"There are no duties that bid me rise," I answered sourly.

He frowned at that; then divesting himself of his cloak he gave it to Michelot, who, at a sign from me, withdrew. No sooner was the door closed than the boy's whole manner changed. The simmering passion of which I had detected signs welled up and seemed to choke him as he poured forth the story that he was come to tell.

"I have been insulted," he gasped. "Grossly insulted by a vile creature of Monsieur d'Orleans' household. An hour ago, in the ante-chamber at the Palais Royal, I was spoken of in my hearing as the besotted nephew of the Italian adventurer."

I sat up in bed, tingling with excitement at the developments which already I saw arising from his last night's imprudence.

"Calmly, Andrea," I begged of him; "tell me calmly."

"Heavens, man, how can I be calm. Ough! The thought of it chokes me. I was a fool last night—a sot. For that, perchance, men have some right to censure me. But to think that a ruffler of the stamp of Eugène de Canaples should speak of it, should call me the nephew of an Italian adventurer, should draw down upon me the cynical smile of a crowd of courtly apes—pah! I am sick at the memory of it."

"Did you answer him?"

"Gracious! I should be worthy of the title he bestowed upon me had I not done so. Oh, I answered him—not in words. I threw my hat in his face."

"That was a passing eloquent reply!"

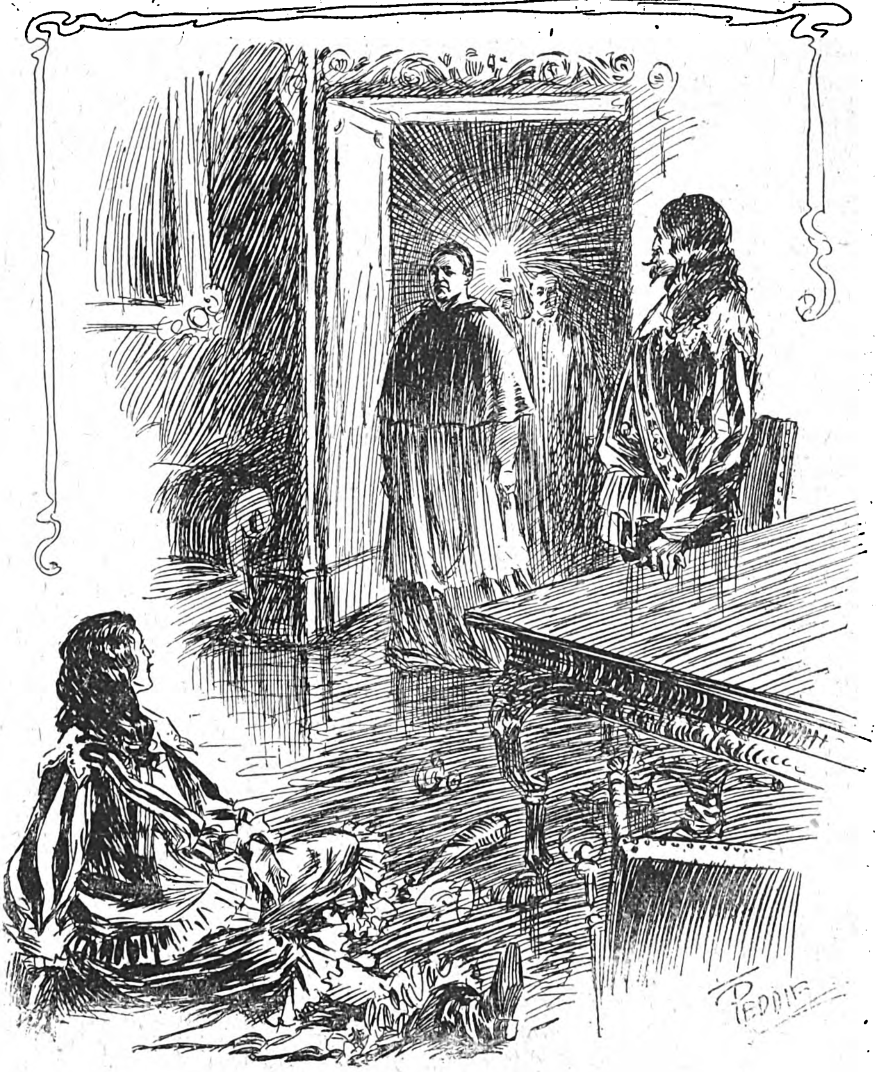
"So eloquent that it left him speechless with amazement. He thought to bully with impunity and see me slink into hiding like a whipped dog, terrified by his blustering tongue and dangerous reputation. But there," he broke off, "a meeting has been arranged for four o'clock at St. Germain."

"A meeting!" I exclaimed.

"What else? Do you think the affront left any alternative?"

"But—"

"Yes, yes, I know," he interrupted, tossing his head. "I am going to be killed. Verville has sworn that there shall be one less of the Italian brood. That is why I have come to you, Luynes, to ask you to be my second. I don't deserve it, perhaps. In my folly last night I did you an ill turn. I unwittingly caused you to be stripped of your commission. But if I were on my deathbed now,



With gaping mouth and glassy eyes Mancini sat there staring at his uncle.

and begged a favour of you, you would not refuse it. And what difference is there 'twixt me and one who is on his deathbed? Am I not about to die?"

"Well, I hope not," I made answer with more lightness than I felt. "But I'll stand by you, with all my heart, Andrea."

"And you'll avenge me?" he cried savagely, his Southern blood a-boiling. "You'll not let him leave the ground alive?"

"Not unless my opponent commits the indiscretion of killing me first. Who seconds M. de Canaples?"

"The Marquis de St. Auban and M. de Montmédy?"

"And who is the third in our party?"

"I have none. I thought that perhaps you had a friend."

"I! A friend?" I laughed bitterly. "Pshaw, Andrea, beggars have no friends. But stay; find Stanislas de Gouville. There is no better blade in Paris. If he will join us in this frolic, and you can hold off Canaples until either St. Auban or Montmédy are disposed of, we may yet leave the three of them on the field of battle. Courage, Andrea. While there's life, there's hope."

My words seemed to cheer him, and when presently he left me to seek out the redoubtable de Gouville, the poor lad's face was brighter by far than when he had entered my room.

Down in my heart, however, I was less hopeful than I had led him to believe, and as I dressed after he had gone, 'twas not without some uneasiness that I turned the matter over in my mind. I had, during the short period of our association, grown fond of Andrea de Mancini. Indeed, the wonted sweetness of the lad's temper and the gentleness of his disposition were such as to breed affection in all who came in contact with him.

In a way, too, methought he had grown fond of me; and I had known so few friends in life—truth to tell, I fear me that I had few of the qualities that engender friendship—that I was naturally prone to appreciate a gift that from its rareness became doubly valuable.

Hence was it that I trembled for the boy. He had shown aptitude with the foils, and derived great profit from my tuition, yet he was too raw by far to be pitted against so cunning a swordsman as Canaples.

I had but finished dressing when a coach rumbled down the street that halted by my door. Naturally I supposed that some one came to visit Coupri the apothecary, to whom belonged this house in which I had my lodging, and did not give the matter a second thought until Michelot rushed in, with eyes wide open, to announce that his Eminence, Cardinal Mazarin, commanded my presence in the adjoining room.

Amazed and deeply marvelling what so extraordinary a visit might portend, I hastened to wait upon his Eminence.

I found him standing by the window, and received from him a greeting that was passing curt and cavalierly.

"Has M. de Mancini been here?" he inquired peremptorily, disregarding the chair I offered him.

"He has but left me, Monseigneur."

"Then you know, sir, of the harvest which he has already reaped from the indiscretion into which you led him last night."

"If Monseigneur alludes to the affront put upon M. de Mancini, touching *his* last night's indiscretion, by a bully of the Court, I am informed of it."

"Pish, Monsieur! I do not follow your fine distinctions. Possibly this is due to my imperfect knowledge of the language of France, possibly to your own imperfect acquaintance with the language of truth."

"Monseigneur!"

"Faugh!" he cried half-scornfully, half-peevishly. "I came not here to talk of you, but of my nephew. Why did he visit you?"

"To do me the honour of asking me to second him at St. Germain this evening."

"And so you think that this duel is to be fought? That my nephew is to be murdered?"

"We will endeavor to prevent his being—as your Eminence daintily puts it—murdered. But for the rest, the duel, methinks, cannot be avoided."

"Cannot!" he blazed. "Do you say *cannot*, M. de Luynes? Mark me well, sir, I will use no dissimulation with you. My position in France is already a sufficiently difficult one. Already we are threatened with a second Fronde. It needs but such events as these to bring my family into prominence and make it the butt for the ridicule that malcontents but wait an opportunity to slur it with. This affair of Andrea's will lend itself to a score or so of lampoons and *pasquinades*, all of which will cast an injurious reflection upon my person and position. That, Monsieur, is, methinks, sufficient evil to suffer at your hands. The late Cardinal would have had you broken on the wheel for less. I have gone no farther than to dismiss you from my service, a clemency for which you should be grateful! But I shall not suffer that, in addition to the harm already done, Andrea shall be murdered by Canaples."

"I shall do my best to render him assistance."

"You still misapprehend me. This duel, sir, *must not* take place."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"How does your Eminence propose to frustrate it? Will you arrest Canaples?"

"Upon what plea, Monsieur? Think you I am anxious to have the whole of Paris howling in my ears?"

"Then possibly it is your good purpose to enforce the late king's edict against duelling, and send your Guards to St. Germain to arrest the men before they engage?"

"Faugh!" he sneered. "And what will Paris say if I now enforce a law that for ten years has been disregarded? That I feared for my nephew's skin and took this means of saving him. A pretty story to have on Paris' lips, would it not be?"

"Indeed, Monseigneur, you are right, and I doubt me the duel will needs be fought."

"Have I not already said that it shall *not* be fought?"

Again I shrugged my shoulders. Mazarin grew tiresome with his repetitions.

"How can it be avoided, Eminence?"

"Ah! Monsieur, that is your affair."

"My affair?"

"Assuredly. 'Twas through your evil agency he was dragged into this business, and through your agency he must be extricated from it."

"Your Eminence jests!"

"Undoubtedly 'tis a jesting matter," he answered with terrible irony. "Oh, I jest. By Heaven, yes. But I'll carry my jest so far as to have you hanged if this duel be fought—aye, whether my nephew suffers hurt or not. Now, sir, you know what fate awaits you; fight it; turn it aside; I have shown you the way. The door, M. de Luynes."

CHAPTER III.

THE FIGHT IN THE HORSE MARKET.

I LET him go without a word. There was that in his voice, in his eye, and in the gesture wherewith he bade me hold the door for him, that cleared my mind of any doubts touching the irrevocable character of his determination. To plead was never an accomplishment of mine; to argue, I saw, would be to waste the Cardinal's time to no purpose.

And so, I let him go, and my curse with him, and from my window I watched his coach drive away in the drizzling rain, scattering the crowd of awe-stricken loiterers who had collected at the rumour of his presence.

With a fervent prayer that his patron saint, the Devil, might see fit to overset his coach and break his neck before he reached the Palace, I turned from the window and called Michelot.

He was quick to answer my summons, bringing me the frugal measure of bread and wine wherewith it was my custom to break my fast. Then, whilst I munched my crust, I strode to and fro in the little chamber and exercised my wits to their utmost for a solution to the puzzle his Eminence had set me.

One solution there was, and an easy one—flight. But I had promised Andrea de Mancini that I would stand beside him at St. Germain; there was a slender chance of saving him if I went, whilst if I stayed away, there would be nothing left for his Eminence to do but offer up prayers for the rest of his nephew's soul.

Another idea I had, but it was desperate; and yet so persistently did my thoughts revert to it, that in the end I determined to accept it.

I drank a cup of Armagnac, cheered myself with an oath or two, and again called Michelot. When he came, I asked him was he acquainted with M. de Canaples, to which he replied that he was, having seen the gentleman in my company.

"Then," I said, "you will repair to M. de Canaples' lodging, in the Rue des Gesvres, and ascertain discreetly whether he be at home. If he is, you will watch the house until he comes forth, then follow him, and bring me word thereafter where he is to be found. Should he be already abroad before you reach the Rue des Gesvres, endeavour to ascertain whither he has gone, and return forthwith. But, be discreet, Michelot. You understand?"

He assured me that he did, and left me to nurse my unpleasant thoughts for half-an-hour, returning at the end of that time with the information that M. de Canaples was seated at dinner in the "Auberge du Soleil."

Naught could have been more attuned to my purpose, and straight-away I drew on my boots, girt on my sword, and, taking my hat and cloak, I sallied out into the rain and wended my way at a sharp pace towards the Rue St. Honoré.

One o'clock was striking as I crossed the threshold of the "Soleil" and flung my dripping cloak to the first servant I chanced upon.

I glanced round the well-filled room, and at one of the tables I espied my quarry in company with St. Auban and Montmédy—the very gentlemen who were to fight beside him that evening—and one Vilmorin, as arrant a coxcomb and poltroon as could be found in France. With my beaver cocked at the back of my head, and a general bearing that for aggressiveness would be hard to surpass, I strode up to their table, and stood for a moment surveying them with an insolent stare that made them pause in their conversation. They raised their noble heads and bestowed upon me a look of haughty and disdainful wonder—such a look as one might bestow upon a misbehaving lackey—all save Vilmorin, who, with a coward's keen nose for danger, turned slightly pale and fidgeted in his chair. I was well-known to all of them, but my attitude forbade all greeting.

"Has M. de Luynes lost anything?" St. Auban inquired icily.

"His wits, mayhap," quoted Canaples, with a contemptuous shrug.

He was a tall, powerfully built man, this Canaples, with a swart, cruel face that was nevertheless not ill-favored, and a profusion of black hair.

"There is a temerity in M. de Canaples' rejoinder that I had not looked for," I said banteringly.

Canaples' brow was puckered in a frown.

"Ha? And why not, Monsieur?"

"Why not? Because it is not to be expected that one who fastens quarrels upon schoolboys would evince the courage to beard Gaston de Luynes."

"Monsieur!" the four of them cried in chorus, so loudly that the hum of voices in the tavern became hushed, and all eyes were turned in our direction.

"M. de Canaples," I said calmly, "permit me to say that I can find no more fitting expression for the contempt I hold you in than this."

As I spoke, I seized a corner of the tablecloth, and with a sudden tug I swept it, with all it held, on to the floor.

Heavens, what a scene there was! In an instant the four of them were on their feet, as were half the occupants of the room, besides, whilst poor Vilmorin, who stood trembling like a maid who for the first time hears words of love, raised his quavering voice to cry soothingly, "Messieurs, Messieurs!"

Canaples was livid with passion, but otherwise the calmest in that room, saving perhaps myself. With a gesture he restrained Montmédy and St. Auban.

"I shall be happy to give Master de Luynes all the proof of my courage that he may desire, and more, I warrant, than he will relish."

"Bravely answered!" I cried, with an approving nod and a beaming smile. "Be good enough to lead the way to a convenient spot."

"I have other business at the moment," he answered calmly. "Let us say to-morrow at——"

"Faugh!" I broke in scornfully. "I knew it! Confess, Monsieur, that you dare not fight me now lest you should be unable to keep your appointments for this evening."

"By Heaven!" exclaimed St. Auban, "this insolence passes all bounds."

"Each man in his turn, if you please, gentlemen," I replied. "My present affair is with M. de Canaples."

There was a hot answer burning on St. Auban's lips, but Canaples was beforehand with him.

"That will do!" he cried. "You go too far, sir, with your 'dare' and 'dare not.' Is a broken gamester, a penniless adventurer, to tell Eugène de Canaples what he dares? Come, sir; since you are eager for the taste of steel, follow me, and say your prayers as you go."

With that we left the inn, amidst a prodigious hubbub, and made our way to the horse market behind the Hotel Vendôme. It was not to be expected, albeit the place we had chosen was usually deserted at such an hour, that after the affair at the "Soleil" our meeting would go unattended. When we faced each other, Canaples and I, there were at least some twenty persons present, who came, despite the rain, to watch what they thought was like to prove a pretty fight. Men of position were they, for the most part, gentlemen of the Court, with here and there a soldier; and from the manner in which they eyed me, methought they favoured me but little.

Our preparations were brief. The absence of seconds disposed of all formalities; the rain made us impatient to be done, and in virtue of it Canaples pompously announced that he would not risk a cold by stripping. With interest did I grimly answer that he need fear no cold when I had done with him. Then casting aside my cloak, I drew, and professing myself also disposed to retain my doublet, we forthwith engaged.

He was no mean swordsman, this Canaples. Indeed, his reputation was already widespread, and in the first shock of our meeting blades, I felt rumour had been just for once. But I was strangely dispossessed of any doubts touching the outcome; this being due, perchance, to a vain confidence in my own skill, perchance to the spirit of contemptuous raillery wherewith I had from the outset treated the affair, and which had so taken root in my heart that even when we engaged, I still, almost unwittingly, persisted in it.

In my face and attitude there was the reflection of this bantering, flippant mood; it was to be read in the mocking disdain of my glance, in the scornful curl of my lip, and even in the turn of my wrist as I put aside my opponent's passes. All this Canaples must have noted, and it was not without effect upon his nerves. Moreover, there is in steel a subtle magnetism which is the index of one's antagonist; and from the moment that our blades slithered one against the other, I make no doubt but that Canaples grew aware of the confident, almost exultant mood in which I met him, and which told him that I was his master. Add unto this the fact that whilst Canaples' nerves were unstrung by passion, mine were held in check by a mind as calm and cool as though our swords were baited, and consider with what advantage I took my ground.

He led the attack fierce and furiously, as if I were a boy whose guard was to be borne down by sheer weight of blows. I contented myself with tapping his blade aside, and when at length, after essaying every trick in his catalogue, he fell back baffled, I laughed a low laugh of derision that drove him pale with fury.

Again he came at me, almost before I was prepared for him, and his point, parried with a downward stroke and narrowly averted, scratched my thigh, but did more damage to my breeches than my skin. In exchange I touched him playfully on the shoulder, and the sting of it drove him back a second time. He was breathing hard by then, and would fain have paused awhile for breath, but I saw no reason to be merciful.

"Now, sir," I cried, saluting him as though our combat were but on the point of starting, "to me! Guard yourself!"

Again our swords clashed, and my blows now fell as swift on his blade as his had done a while ago on mine. So hard did I press him that he was forced to give way before me. Back I drove him, pace by pace, his wrist growing weaker at each parry, each parry growing wider, and the perspiration streaming down his ashen face. Panting he went, in that backward flight before my onslaught, defending himself as best he could, never thinking of a *riposte*, beaten already. Back, and yet back he went, until he reached the railings and could back no farther, and so broken was his spirit then that a groan escaped him. I answered with a laugh—my mood was lusty and cruel—and thrust at him. Then, eluding his guard, I thrust again, beneath it, and took him fairly in the middle of his doublet.

He staggered, dropped his rapier, and caught at the railings, where for a moment he hung swaying and gasping. Then his head fell forward, his grip relaxed, and, swooning, he sank down into a heap.

A dozen sprang to his aid, foremost amongst them being St. Auban and Montmédy, whilst I drew back, suddenly realizing my own spent condition, to which the heat of combat had hitherto rendered me insensible. I mastered myself as best I might, and dissembling my hard breathing, I wiped my blade with a kerchief, an act which looked so calm and callous that it drew from the crowd—for a crowd it had become by then—an angry growl. 'Tis thus with the vulgar; they are ever ready to sympathise with the vanquished without ever pausing to ask themselves if his chatisement may not be merited.

In answer to the growl I tossed my head, and, sheathing my sword, I flung the blood-stained kerchief into their very midst. The audacity of the gesture left them breathless, and they growled no more, but stared.

Then that outrageous fop, Vilmorin, who had been bending over Canaples, started up, and coming towards me with a face that was whiter than that of the prostrate man, he proved himself so utterly bereft of wit by terror, that for once he had the temerity to usurp the words and actions of a brave man.

"You have murdered him," he cried in a strident voice; and, thrusting his clenched fist within an inch of my face, "Do you hear me, you knave? You have murdered him!"

Now, as may be well conceived, I was in no mood to endure such words from any man, so 'twas but natural that for answer I caught the dainty Vicomte a buffet that knocked him into the arms of the nearest bystander and brought him to his senses.

"Fool!" I snarled at him. "Must I make another example before you believe that Gaston de Luynes wears a sword?"

"In the name of Heaven——" he began, putting forth his hands in a beseeching gesture; but what more he said was drowned by the roar of anger that burst from the onlookers, and it was like to have gone ill with me had not St. Auban come to my aid at that most critical juncture.

"Messieurs," he cried, thrusting himself before me, and raising his hand to crave silence, "hear me. I, a friend of M. de Canaples, tell you that you wrong M. de Luynes. 'Twas a fair fight. How the quarrel arose is no concern of yours."

Despite his words they still snarled and growled like the misbegotten curs they were. But St. Auban was famous for the regal supper parties he gave, and to which all were eager to be bidden; and amidst that crowd, as I have said, there were a score or so of gentlemen of the Court, who, with scant regard for the right or wrong of the case, and every regard to conciliate this giver of suppers, came to range themselves beside and around us, and thus protected me from the murderous designs of that rabble.

Seeing how the gentlemen took my part, and deeming, in their blessed ignorance, that what gentlemen did must perforce be well done, they grew calm in the twinkling of an eye. Thereupon St. Auban, turning to me, counselled me in a whisper to be gone whilst the tide of opinion flowed in my favor. Intent to act upon this good advice, I took a step towards the little knot that had collected round Canaples, and with natural curiosity inquired into the nature of his hurt.

'Twas Montmédy who answered me, scowling as he did so.

"He may die of it, Monsieur. If he does not, his recovery at least will be slow and difficult."

I had been wise had I held my peace and gone; but like a fool I must needs give utterance to what was in my mind.

"Ah! At least there will be no duel at St. Germain this evening."

Scarce had the words fallen from my lips than I saw in the faces of Montmédy and St. Auban and half-a-dozen others the evidence of their rashness.

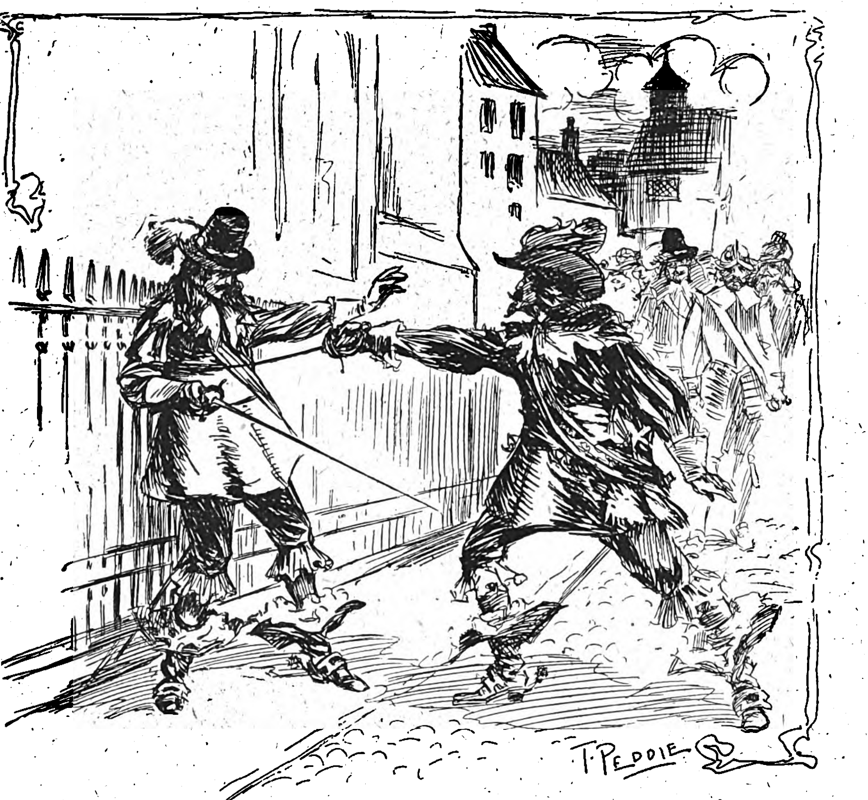
"So!" cried St. Auban in a voice that shook with rage, "that was your object, eh? That you had fallen low, Master de Luynes, I knew; but I dreamt not that in your fall you had come so low as this."

"You dare?"

"Heavens! I dare more, Monsieur, I dare tell you—you, Gaston de Luynes, spy and bravo of the Cardinal, that your object shall be defeated. That, as God lives, this duel shall still be fought—by *me* instead of Canaples."

"And I tell you, sir, that as God lives it shall *not*," I answered with a vehemence not a whit less than his own. "To you and to what other fools may think to follow in your footsteps, I say this, that not to-night nor to-morrow, nor the next day shall that duel be fought. Cowards and poltroons you are, who seek to murder a beardless boy who has injured none of you.. But, by my soul, every man who sends a challenge to that boy will I at once seek out and deal with as I have dealt with Eugène de Canaples. Let those who are eager to try another world make the attempt. Adieu, Messieurs!"

And with a flourish of my sodden beaver, I turned and left them before they had recovered from the vehemence of my words.



Then eluding his guard, I thrust again, and took him fairly in the middle of his doublet.

CHAPTER IV.

Fair Rescuers.

Like the calm of the heavens when pregnant with thunder was the calm of that crowd, and as brief as it was; for scarce had I taken a dozen steps when my ears were assailed by a rumble of angry voices and a rush of feet. One glance over my shoulder, one second's hesitation whether I should stay and beard them, then the thought of Andrea de Mancini and of what would befall him did this crowd vent its wrath upon me decided my course, and sent me hot foot down the Rue Monarque. Howling and bellowing, that rabble followed in my wake, stumbling over one another in their indecent haste to reach me.

But I was fleet of foot, and behind me there was that which would lend wings to the most deliberate, so that when I turned into the open space before the Hotel Vendôme, I had set a good fifty yards betwixt myself and the foremost of my hunters.

A coach was passing at that moment. I shouted, and the knave who drove glanced at me, then up the Rue Monarque at my pursuers, whereupon, shaking his head, he would have left me to my fate. But I was of another mind. I dashed towards the vehicle, and as it passed me I caught at the window, which luckily was open, and drawing up my legs I hung there despite the shower of mud which the revolving wheels deposited upon me.

From the bowels of the coach I was greeted by a woman's scream; a pale face and a profusion of fair hair flashed before my eyes.

"Fear not, Madame," I shouted. "I am no assassin, but rather one who stands in imminent peril of assassination, and who craves your protection."

More I would have said, but at that juncture the lash of the coachman's whip curled itself about my shoulders and stung me vilely.

"Get down, you rascal," he bellowed; "get down, or I'll draw rein."

To obey him would have been madness. The crowd surged behind with hoots and yells, and had I let go I must perforce have fallen into their hands. So instead of getting down as he inconsiderately counselled, I drew myself farther up by a mighty effort, and thrust half my body into the coach, whereupon the fair lady screamed again, and the whip caressed my legs. But within the coach sat another woman, dark of hair, and exquisite of face, who eyed my advent with a disdainful glance. Her proud countenance bore the stamp of courage, and to her it was that I directed my appeal.

"Madame, permit me, I pray, to seek shelter in your carriage, and suffer me to journey a little way with you. Quick, Madame! Your coachman is drawing rein, and I shall of a certainty be murdered under your very nose, unless you bid him change his mind. To be murdered in itself is a trifling matter I avow; but it is not nice to behold, and I would not for all the world offend your eyes with the spectacle of it."

I had judged her rightly, and my tone of flippant recklessness won me her sympathy and aid. Quickly thrusting her head through the other window, "Drive on, Louis," she commanded. "Faster!" Then turning to me, "You may bring your legs into the coach if you choose, sir," she said.

"Your words, Madame, are the sweetest music I have heard for months," I answered drily, as I obeyed her. Then, leaning out of the carriage again, waved my hat gallantly to the mob, which, now realising the futility of further pursuit, had suddenly come to a halt.

"I hope we shall meet again, gentlemen," I shouted. "Come to me one by one, and I'll keep the devil busy finding lodgings for you."

They answered me with a yell, and I sat down content, and laughed.

"You are not a coward, Monsieur," said the dark lady.

"I have been accounted many unsavoury things, Madame, but my bitterest enemies never dubbed me that."

"Why, then, did you run away?"

"Why? Why, because in the excessive humility of my soul I recognized myself unfit to die."

She bit her lip and her tiny foot beat impatiently upon the floor.

"You are trifling with me, Monsieur. Where do you wish to alight?"

"Pray let that give you no concern; I can assure you that I am in no haste."

"You become impertinent, sir," she cried angrily. "Answer me, where are you going?"

"Where am I going? Oh, ah—to the Palais Royal."

Her eyes opened very wide at that, and wandered over me with a look that was passing eloquent. Indeed, I was a sorry spectacle for any woman's eyes, particularly a pretty one—splashed from head to foot with mud, my doublet saturated and my beaver dripping, with the feather hanging limp and broken, whilst there was a rent in my breeches that had been made by Canaples' sword. I take it that I had not the air of a courtier, and that when I said that I went to the Palais Royal, she might have justly held me to be the adventurous lover of some kitchen wench. But unto the Palais Royal go others besides courtiers and lovers—spies of the Cardinal, for instance—and in her sudden coldness and the next question that fell from her beauteous lips I read that she had guessed me one of these.

"Why did the mob pursue you, Monsieur?"

There was in her voice and gesture, when she asked a question, the imperiousness of one accustomed to command replies. This pretty queenliness it was that drove me to answer, as I had done before, in a bantering strain.

"Why did the mob pursue me? Hum! Why does the mob pursue great men? Because it loves their company."

Her matchless eyes flashed an angry glance, and the faint smile on my lips must have tried her temper sorely.

"What did you do to deserve this affection?"

"A mere nothing—I killed a man," I answered coolly. "Or, at least, I left him started on the road to—Paradise."

The little flaxen-haired doll uttered a cry of horror, and covered her face with her small white hands. My inquisitor, however, sat rigid and unaffected. My answer had confirmed her suspicions.

"Why did you kill him?"

"Why," I replied, encouraging her thoughts, "because he sought to kill me."

"Ah! And why did he seek to kill you?"

"Because I disturbed him at dinner."

"Have a care how you trifle, sir," she retorted, her eyes kindling again.

"Upon my honour, 'twas no more than that. I pulled the cloth from the table whilst he eat. He was a quick-tempered gentleman, and my playfulness offended him. That is all."

Doubt appeared in her eyes, and it may have entered her mind that perchance her judgment had been over-hasty.

"Do you mean, sir, that you provoked a duel?"

"Alas, Madame! It had become necessary. You see, M. de Canaples——"

"Who?" Her voice rang sharp as the crack of a pistol.

"M. de Canaples."

"Was it he whom you killed?"

From her tone and the eager, strained expression of her face, it was not difficult to read that some mighty interest of hers was involved in my reply. It needed not the low moan that burst from her companion to tell me so.

"As I have said, Madame, it is possible that he is not dead—nay, even that he will not die. For the rest, since you ask the question, my opponent was indeed M. de Canaples—Eugène de Canaples."

Her face went deadly white, and she sank back in her seat as if every nerve in her body had of a sudden been bereft of power, whilst she of the fair hair burst into tears.

A pretty position was this for me; luckily it endured not. The girl roused herself from her momentary weakness, and seizing the cord, she tugged it violently. The coach drew up.

"Alight, sir," she hissed. "Go! I wish to Heaven that I had left you to the vengeance of the people."

Not so did I; nevertheless, as I alighted, "I am sorry, Madame, that you did not," I answered. "Farewell!"

The coach moved away, and I was left standing at the corner of the Rue St. Honoré and the Rue des Bons Enfants, in the sorriest frame of mind conceivable. The lady in the coach had saved my life, and for that I was more grateful, perchance, than my life was worth. Out of gratitude sprang a regret for the pain that I had undoubtedly caused her, and the sorrow which it might have been my fate to have cast over her life.

Still, regret, albeit an admirable sentiment, was one whose existence was usually brief in my bosom. Heavens! Had I been a man of regrets, I might have spent the remainder of my days weeping over my past life. But the gods who had given me a character calculated to lead a man into misfortune, had given me a stout heart wherewith to fight that misfortune, and an armour of recklessness against which remorse, regrets, aye, and conscience itself, rained blows in vain.

And so it befel that presently I laughed myself out of the puerile humour that was besetting me, and finding myself chilled by inaction in my wet clothes, I set off for the Palais Royal at a pace that was first cousin to a run.

Ten minutes later I stood in the presence of the most feared and hated man in France.

"What's this?" cried Mazarin as I entered his cabinet. "Have you swum the Seine in your clothes?"

"No, Eminence, but I have been serving you in the rain for the past hour."

He smiled that peculiar smile of his that rendered hateful his otherwise not ill-favoured countenance. It was a smile of the lips in which the eyes had no part.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I have heard of your achievements."

"You have heard?" I ejaculated, amazed by the powers which this man wielded.

"Yes, I have heard. You are a brave man, M. de Luynes."

"Pshaw, Eminence," I deprecated, "the poor are always brave. They have naught to lose but their life, and that is not so sweet to them that they lay much store by it. Howbeit, Monseigneur, your wishes have been carried out. There will be no duel at St. Germain this evening."

"Will there not? Hum! I am not so confident. You are a brave man, M. de Luynes, but you lack that great auxiliary of valour—discretion. What need to fling into the teeth of those fine gentlemen the reason you had for splitting Canaples, eh? You have provoked a dozen enemies for Andrea where only one existed."

"I will answer for all of them," I retorted boastfully.

"Fine words, M. de Luynes, but to support them how many men will you have to kill? Pah! What if some fine morning there comes one who, despite your vaunted swordsmanship, proves your master? What will become of that fool my nephew, eh?"

And his uncanny smile again beamed on me.

"Andrea is now packing his valise. In an hour he will have left Paris secretly. He goes—but what does it signify where he goes. He is compelled by your indiscretion to withdraw from Court. Had you kept a close tongue in your foolish head—but there, you did not, and so by a thoughtless word you undid all that you had done so well. You may go, M. de Luynes; I have no further need of you. And thank Heaven that you leave the Palais Royal free to go whither your fancy takes you, and not to journey to the Bastille or to Vincennes. I am merciful, M. de Luynes—as merciful as you are brave; more merciful than you are prudent. One word of warning, M. de Luynes. Do not let me learn that you are in my nephew's company, if you would not make me regret my clemency, and repair the error of it by having you hanged. And now, farewell!"

I stood aghast. Was I indeed dismissed? Albeit naught had been said, I had not doubted since my interview with him that morning that did I succeed in saving Andrea, my rank in his Guards, and thereby a means of livelihood, would be restored to me. And now matters were no better than they had been before. He dismissed me with the assurance that he was merciful. It would have been as merciful to have hanged me.

He met my astonished look with an eye that seemed to ask me why I lingered. Then, reading mayhap what was passing in my thoughts, he raised a little silver whistle to his lips and blew softly upon it.

"Bernouin," said he to his valet, who entered in answer to the summons, "reconduct M. de Luynes."

I remember drawing down upon my bedraggled person the curious gaze of the numerous clients who thronged the Cardinal's antechamber, as I followed Bernouin to the door which opened on to the corridor, and which he held open for me. And thus, for the second time within twenty-four hours, did I leave the Palais Royal to wend my way home to the Rue St. Antoine with grim despondency in my heart.

I found Michelot on the point of setting out in search of me, with a note which had been brought to my lodging half-an-hour ago, and which its bearer had said was urgent. I took the letter, and bidding Michelot prepare me fresh raiment that I might exchange for my wet clothes, I broke the seal and read:

> A thousand thanks, dear friend, for the service you have rendered me and of which his Eminence, my uncle, has informed me. I fear that you have made many enemies for yourself through an action which is like to go unrewarded, and that Paris is therefore as little suited at present to your health as it is to mine. I am setting out for Blois on a mission of exceeding delicacy, wherein your advice and guidance would be of infinite value to me. I shall remain at Choisy until to-morrow morning, and should there be no ties to hold you in Paris, and you be minded to bear me company, join me there at the *Hôtel du Connétable*, where I shall lie to-night.
>
> Your grateful and very devoted
>
> Andrea.

So! There was one at least who desired my company! I had not thought it. "If there be no ties to hold you in Paris," he wrote. Ha, ha! A change of air would suit me vastly. I was resolved. A fig for the Cardinal's threat to hang me if I were found in his nephew's company.

"My suit of buff, Michelot," I shouted, springing to my feet, "and my leather jerkin."

He gazed at me in surprise.

"Is Monsieur going a journey?"

I answered him that I was, and as I spoke I began to divest myself of the clothes I wore. "Pack my suit of pearl gray in the valise, with what changes of linen I possess, then call Master Coupri, that I may settle with him. It may be some time before we return."

In less than half-an-hour I was ready for the journey, spurred and booted, with my rapier at my side, and in the pocket of my doublet a purse containing some fifty pistoles, best part of which I had won from Vilmorin, at *lansquenet* some nights before, and which moderate sum represented all the monies that I possessed.

Our horses were ready, my pistols holstered, and my valise strapped to Michelot's saddle. Despite the desperate outlook of my fortunes, of which I had made him fully cognisant, he insisted upon clinging to me, reminding me that at Rocroi I had saved his life, and that he would leave me only when I bade him go.

As four o'clock was striking at Nôtre Dame we crossed the Pont Neuf, and going by the Quai des Augustins and the Rue de la Harpe, we quitted Paris by the St. Michel Gate, and took the road to Choisy. The rain had ceased, but the air was keen and cold, and the wind cut like a sword-edge.

CHAPTER V.

MAZARIN THE MATCHMAKER.

'Twixt Paris and Choisy there lies but a distance of some two leagues, which, given a fair horse, one may cover with ease in little more than half-an-hour; so that as the twilight was deepening into night we drew rein before the hostelry of the *Connétable*, in the only square the little township boasts, and from the landlord I had that obsequious reception which is ever accorded to him who travels with a body-servant.

I found Andrea installed in a fair-sized and comfortable apartment, to the original decoration of which he added not a little by bestowing his boots in the centre of the floor; his hat, sword, and baldrick on the table; his cloak on one chair, and his doublet on another. He himself lay toasting his feet before the blazing logs, which cast a warm, reddish glow upon his sable hair and dainty shirt of cambric.

He sprang up as I entered, and came towards me with a look of pleasure on his handsome, high-bred face that did me good to see.

"So you have come, de Luynes," he cried, putting forth his hand. "I did not dare to hope that you would."

"No?" I answered. "Truly it was not to be expected that I could be easily lured from Paris just as my fortunes are nearing a high tide, and his Eminence proposing to make me a Marshal of France and create me Duke. As you say, you had scant grounds for hoping that my love for you would suffice to make me renounce all these fine things for the mere sake of accompanying you on your jaunt to Blois."

He laughed, then fell to thanking me for having rid him of Canaples. I cut him short at last, and in answer to his questions told him what had passed 'twixt his Eminence and me that afternoon. Then as the waiter entered to spread our supper, the conversation assumed a less delicate character, until we were again alone, with the table and its steaming viands between us.

"You have not told me yet, Andrea, what takes you to Blois," quoth I then.

"You shall learn. Little do you dream how closely interwoven are our morning adventures with this journey of mine. To begin with I go to Blois to pay my respects to the lady whom his Eminence has selected for my future wife."

"You were right then in describing this as a mission of great delicacy."

"More than you think. I have never seen the lady."

"Never seen her? And you go a-wooing a woman you have never seen?"

"It is so. I have never seen her; but his Eminence has, and 'tis he who arranges the affair. Ah, the Cardinal is the greatest matchmaker in France. My cousin Anna Martinozzi is destined for the Prince de Conti, my sisters Olympia and Marianne he also hopes to marry to princes of the blood, whilst I dare wager that he has thoughts of seating either Maria or Hortensia upon the throne of France as the wife of Louis XIV., as soon as his Majesty shall have reached a marriageable age. You may laugh, de Luynes, nevertheless all this may come to pass, for my uncle has great ambitions for his family; and it is even possible that should that poor, wandering youth, Charles II. of England, ever return to the throne of his fathers, he may also become my brother-in-law. I am like to become well connected, de Luynes, so make a friend of me whilst I am humble. So much for Mazarin's nieces. His nephews are too young for alliances just yet, saving myself; and for me his Eminence has chosen one of the greatest heiresses in France—Yvonne St. Albaren de Canaples."

"Whom?" I shouted.

He smiled.

"Curious, is it not? She is the sister of the man whom I quarrelled with this morning, and whom you fought with this afternoon. Now you will understand my uncle's reasons for so strenuously desiring to prevent the duel at St. Germain. It appears that the old Chevalier de Canaples is as eager as the Cardinal to see his daughter wed to me, for his Eminence has promised to create me duke for a wedding gift. 'Twill cost him little, and 'twill please these Canaples mightily. Naturally, had Eugène de Canaples and I crossed swords, matters would have been rendered difficult."

"When did you learn all this?" I inquired.

"To-day, after the duel, and when it was known what St Auban and Montemédy had threatened me with. My uncle thought it well that I should withdraw from Paris. He sent for me and told me what I have told you, adding that I had best seize the opportunity, whilst my presence at Court was undesirable, to repair to Blois and get my wooing done. I in part agreed with him. The lady is very rich, and I am told that she is beautiful. I shall see her, and if she pleases me I'll woo her. If not, I'll return to Paris."

"But her brother will oppose you."

"Her brother? Pooh! If he doesn't die of the sword-thrust you gave him, which I am told is in the region of the lung and passing dangerous, he will at least be abed for a couple of months to come."

"But I, my dear André? What *rôle* do you reserve for me that you have desired me to go with you?"

"The *rôle* of Mentor, if you will. Methought you would prove a merry comrade to help one o'er a tedious journey, and knowing that there was little to hold you in Paris, and probably sound reasons why you should desire to quit it, methought that perhaps you would consent to bear me company. Who knows, my knight errant, what adventures may await you and what fortunes? If the heiress displeases me, it may be that she shall please you; or mayhap there is another heiress at Blois who will fall enamoured of those fierce moustachios."

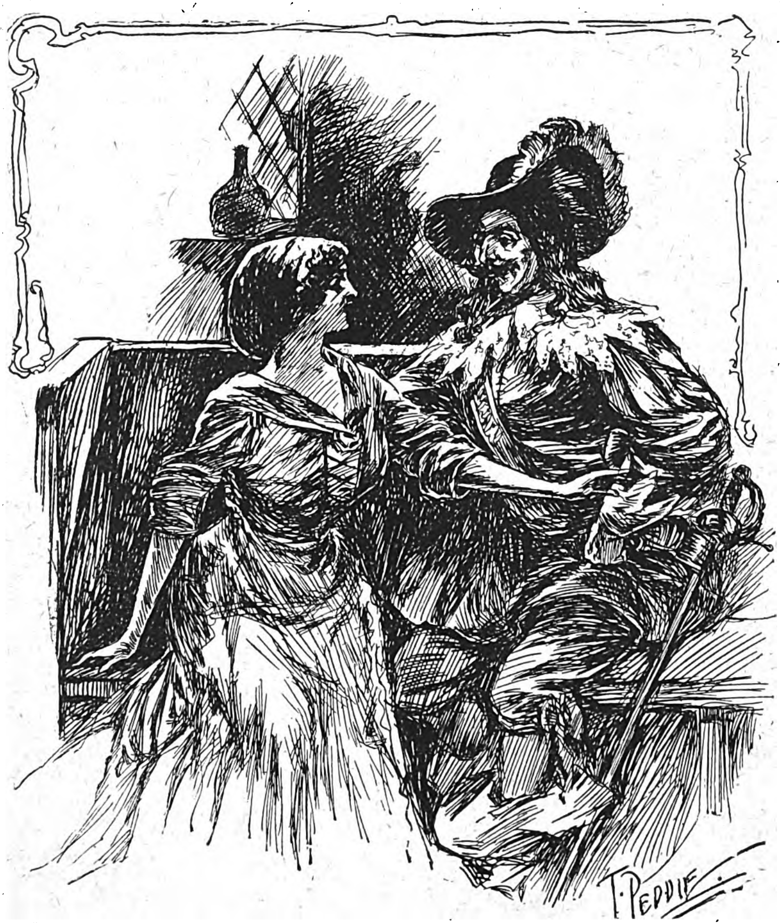
I laughed with him—at the improbability of such things befalling. I carried in my bosom too large a heart, and one that was the property of every wench I met, for just so long as I chanced to be in her company.

It was no more than in harmony with this habit of mine that when next morning in the common-room of the *Connétable* I espied Jeanneton, the landlord's daughter, and remarked that she was winsome and shapely, with a complexion that would not have dishonoured a rose petal, I permitted myself to pinch her dainty cheek. She slapped mine in return, and in this pleasant manner we became acquainted.

"Sweet Jeanneton," quoth I with a laugh, "that was mightily ill-done. I did but pinch your cheek as one may pinch a sweet-smelling bud, so that the perfume of it may cling to one's fingers."

"And I, sir," was the pert rejoinder, "did but slap yours as one may slap a misbehaving urchin's, so that he may learn better manners."

Nevertheless she was pleased with my courtly speech, and perchance also with my moustachios, for a smile took the place of the frown wherewith she had first confronted me. Now if I had uttered glib pleasantries in answer to her frowns, how many more did not her smiles wring from me? I discoursed to her, in the very courtliest fashion, of cows and pullets, and such other matters as interesting to her as they were mysterious to me. I questioned her in a breath touching her father's pigs and the swain she loved best in that little township, to all of which she answered me with a charming wit, which would greatly divert you did I but recall her words sufficiently to set them down. In five minutes we were become the best friends in the world, which was attested by the protecting arm that I slipped round her waist as I asked her whether she loved that village swain of hers better than she



"And I, sir, did but slap yours as one may slap a misbehaving urchin's, that he may learn better manners."

loved me, and refused to believe her when she answered that she did.

Outside two men were talking, one calling for a farrier, and when informed that the only one in the village was absent and not like to return till noon, demanded relays of horses. The other, probably the hostler, answered him that the *Connétable* was not a post-house, and that no horses were to be had there. Then a woman's voice, sweet yet commanding, rose above theirs.

"Very well, Guilbert," it said. "We will await this farrier's return."

"Let me go, Monsieur," cried Jeanneton. "Some one comes."

Now for myself I cared little who might come, but methought that it was like to do poor Jeanneton's fair name no benefit if the arm of Gaston de Luynes were seen about her waist, and so I obeyed her; but not quickly enough, for already a shadow lay athwart the threshold, and in the doorway stood a woman, whose eye took in the situation before we had altered it sufficiently to avert suspicion. To my amazement I beheld the lady of the coach, she who had saved me from the mob in Place Vendôme, and touching whose identity I could have hazarded a shrewd guess.

In her eyes, also, I saw the light of recognition, which swiftly changed to one of scorn. Then they passed from me to the vanishing Jeanneton, and methought that she was about to call her back. She paused, however, and turning to the lackey who followed at her heels, "Guilbert," she said, "be good enough to call the landlord, and bid him provide me with an apartment for the time that we may be forced to spend here."

But at this juncture the host himself came hurrying forward with many bows and endless rubbing of hands, which argued untold deference. He regretted that the hostelery of the *Connétable*, being but a poor inn, seldom honoured as it was at that moment, possessed but one suite of private apartments, and that now occupied by a most noble gentleman. The lady tapped her foot, and as at that moment her companion, who was none other than the fair-haired doll I had seen with her on the previous day, entered the room, she turned to speak with her, whilst I moved away towards the window.

"Will this gentleman," she inquired, "lend me one of his rooms, think you?"

"Alas, Mademoiselle, he has but two, a bedroom and an antechamber, and he is still abed."

"Oh!" she cried in pretty anger, "this is insufferable! 'Tis your fault, Guilbert, you fool. Am I then to spend the day here in the common room?"

"No, no, Mademoiselle," exclaimed the host in his most soothing accents. "Only for an hour, or less perhaps, until this very noble lord is risen, when assuredly—for he is young and very gallant—he will resign one or both of his rooms to you."

More was said between them, but my attention was suddenly drawn elsewhere. Michelot burst into the room, disaster written on his face.

"Monsieur," he cried, in great alarm, "the Marquis de St. Auban is riding down the street with the Vicomte de Vilmorin and another gentleman."

I rapped out an oath at the news; they had got scent of Andrea's whereabouts, and were after him like sleuth-hounds on a trail.

"Remain here, Michelot," I answered in a low voice. "Tell them that M. de Mancini is not here; that the only occupant of the inn is your master, a gentleman from Normandy, or Picardy, or where you will. See that they do not guess our presence, the landlord, fortunately, is ignorant of M. de Mancini's name."

There was a clatter of horses' hoofs without, and I was barely in time to escape by the door leading to the staircase, when St. Auban's heavy voice rang out, calling the landlord.

"I am in search of a gentleman named Andrea de Mancini," he said. "I am told that he has journeyed hither, and that he is here at present. Am I rightly informed?"

I determined to remain where I was and hear that conversation to the end.

There is a gentleman here," answered the host, "but I am ignorant of his name. I will inquire."

"You may spare yourself the trouble," Michelot interposed. "That is not the gentleman's name. I am his servant."

There was a moment's pause, then came Vilmorin's shrill voice. "You lie, knave. M. de Mancini is here. You are M. de Luynes' lackey, and where the one is, there shall we find the other."

"M. de Luynes?" came a voice unknown to me. "That is Mancini's sword-blade of a friend, is it not? Well? Why does he hide himself? Where is he? Where is your master, rascal?"

"I am here, Messieurs," I answered, throwing wide the door, and appearing, grim and arrogant, upon the threshold.

Merciful Heavens! Had they beheld the devil, St. Auban and Vilmorin could not have looked less pleased than they did when their eyes lighted upon me, standing there surveying them with a sardonic grin.

St. Auban muttered an oath; Vilmorin stifled a cry; whilst he who had so loudly called to know where I hid myself, a frail little fellow, in the uniform of the *gardes du corps*, stood now silent and abashed.

The two women, who had withdrawn into a dark and retired corner of the apartment, stood gazing with interest upon this pretty scene.

"Well, gentlemen," I asked in a bantering tone, as I took a step towards them, "have you naught to say to me now that I have answered your imperious summons? What! All dumb?"

"Our affair is not with you," said St. Auban curtly.

"Your pardon! Why, then did you inquire where I was?"

"Messieurs," exclaimed Vilmorin, whose face assumed the pallor usual to it in moments of peril, "methinks we have been misinformed, and that M. de Mancini is not here. Let us seek elsewhere."

"Most excellent advice, gentlemen," I commented. "Seek elsewhere."

"Monsieur," cried the little officer, turning purple, "it occurs to me that you are mocking us."

"Mocking you! Mocking *you?* Mocking a gentleman who has been tied to so huge a sword as yours? Surely—surely, sir, you do not think——"

"I'll not endure it," he broke in. "You shall answer to me for this."

"Have a care, sir," I cried in alarm as he rushed forward. "Have a care, sir, lest you trip over your sword."

He halted, drew himself up, and with a magnificent gesture, "I am Armand de Malpertuis, lieutenant of his Majesty's Guards," he announced, "and I shall be grateful if you will do me the honour of taking a turn with me outside."

"I am flattered beyond measure, M. Malappris——"

"Mal-per-tuis," he corrected furiously.

"Malpertuis," I echoed. "I am honoured beyond words, but I do not wish to take a turn."

"Good Heavens, sir! Don't you understand? We must fight."

"Must we, indeed? Again I am honoured; but, Monsieur, I don't fight sparrows."

(*To be continued.*)

A FALSE ENTRY.

"HERE we are at last, father. Now do please be careful what you talk about, and above all, try to forget that such things as sausages exist, or, at any rate, that you have anything to do with them."

"I'll try to, Effie, I'll try to, my dear, but when I've thought about them for the last thirty years it's a bit hard to put them out of my mind now, but I'll try my best, my girl."

The train stopped, and Effie Larkins and her father got out, to fall the prey of the motley group of porters, commissionaires and envoys of the various hotels of Lausanne. He was a jolly-looking, grey-haired man of perhaps fifty-five or sixty, and she a lively, if not actually pretty, brown-haired, brown-eyed girl of twenty-three or so.

And while an English-speaking porter is piloting them and their luggage safely through the Customs, we may as well learn how they found their way to Switzerland, and why Mr. Larkins was forbidden to forget that the succulent dainties known as sausages, existed.

Samuel Larkins had begun life as an errand boy in a sausage shop, he had worked hard and prospered, and for many years now he had himself been the owner of a large shop in the Borough devoted entirely to the sale of sausages, of which he was also the maker.

"Larkins' sausages" enjoyed enormous local favour, and Samuel Larkins was quite rich enough to indulge his only daughter in any reasonable wish. Her wish was to visit Switzerland, and so they came. His wife was dead, and Effie, his only child, the apple of his eye. She had been educated at an excellent school, and on her return home, could not but be struck by the very homely surroundings and manners of her father.

She would have liked to move from the neighbourhood, but on this one point her otherwise indulgent father was firm. He had lived over his sausage shop for twenty-five years, he had brought his wife home to it on their wedding day, Effie had been born there—"and I'll die there," he asserted, so Effie was forced to content herself by effecting a complete metamorphosis of the shabby rooms and old-fashioned furniture, with the sole exception of the room behind the shop which was her father's particular sanctum, and into which even she never penetrated. He adored his daughter, and lavished all he could upon her.

For himself he would have preferred remaining in London and superintending the making and selling of his sausages, but he realised that young people need change, and as he could not bear to be parted from Effie, he bought the tickets, made the journey, and found himself safely arrived at the end of it.

His daughter's warning was perhaps needed, for her father took an honest pride in his occupation, and was fond of boasting that nothing but the best ingredients found a place in *his* sausages.

The luggage passed, they took a carriage and drove to the pension where they had engaged rooms. A short time after their arrival, according to the Swiss law, whereby the authorities must be at once supplied with the name, address, and occupation of every visitor, the proprietor brought up the visitors' book. This was an anxious moment for Effie. With all her fastidious little heart she hated the idea of being in any way connected with sausages. At home, of course, everybody knew it, and disguise was useless, but here, what need to proclaim the fact? She watched her father write "Samuel Larkins, London," and then his pen travelled on to the space headed "Occupation." The first "s" of the hated word was formed before her resolution was made.

"Stop," she called out suddenly, "I will put it," and before the bewildered man could speak she had changed the "s" into a "g" and, according to the visitors' book, Samuel Larkins had no other occupation than that of being "a gentleman."

His expostulations were coaxed away. "It doesn't really make any difference," she assured him, "no one will trouble to read it. It is only a joke, you can't make the page all untidy by scratching it out," and the adoring father gave in, though not without some qualms as to the sin of inscribing what he bluntly called a lie.

The time passed delightfully at Lausanne, with trips on the blue lake, excursions to the neighbouring towns, a visit to Montreux to see the "*Fete de Narcisses*," where one is driven to believe that all the narcissi in Switzerland have found their way to the sunny little town, so assailed is one on every side by the sight of them, and the scent of their sweetness. There were several excursion parties made up by the visitors at the pension, and Effie and her father were always invited to join, for she was an amusing, thoroughly nice girl, and he had a certain bluff heartiness about him hard to resist.

He kept his word faithfully to his daughter, and the much-disliked word had not been spoken, so she breathed freely, and gave herself up to enjoyment.

The people staying in the pension were an endless amusement to her; there was an old English lady (to be found, surely, in every pension abroad) who, by virtue of long residence has come to regard herself as queen of the house, who arranges excursions, makes conversation, and graciously sets, or tries to set, newcomers at their ease, who holds a species of court in the salon each evening, and believes herself to be a person of some importance. Then, too, there was the ultra-English lady, who aggressively aired their superiority over all others to a roomful of foreigners, but who found nothing good once the shores of Britain were behind her.

There was also the fussy dame, the vagaries of whose digestion were a source of keenest joy to her, of woe to her neighbours when compelled to listen to her account of them. She "enjoyed bad health," as an old Wiltshire woman once happily expressed it, and sat at meals with a pair of scales by her side, with which she conscientiously and obtrusively weighed every mouthful. There were yet other types; the lady who sat waiting (figuratively speaking) to be cheated, who disputed every item of her account and talked for an hour on the thieving propensities of the entire Swiss nation, because her laundress charged fifteen instead of ten centimes for washing a collar.

The list might be extended almost indefinitely if it were not wearying and almost pathetic to find so many women with no object, no interest in life, save the petty scandals and trivialities of pension existence. In the whole pension there was only one man, but he, in the opinion of the ladies, made up for being the only one, by possessing a title.

The Honourable Robert Murgatroyd was the nephew of the fussy lady with the interesting digestion, and he was in Lausanne to regain his strength after a severe illness. He found the pension woefully dull, and welcomed the arrival of the Larkins with enthusiasm. From the rooms they occupied, and their mode of living he could not fail to see that they were well off, and his aunt did not omit to impress it on him.

"The old man," she said, "mayn't be much to look at, but he is a gentleman—I know, because I looked in the visitors' book. It is odd he speaks so badly and gets so often confused over his grammar and aspirates, but I suppose he was badly educated. However, the girl is very nice, and as she is the only child, she will come in for all the money, and I am told he must be really very well off."

But Robert Murgatroyd was no fool. He felt sure that Effie's father was no more a gentleman either by birth or education, than he was a Turk, and he had no intention of doing more than amuse himself with a quite unknown girl, possessing an impossible father. So he talked to her in a low-toned voice in corners, gave her flowers and bon-bons, and in fine made himself so agreeable that poor Effie, simple as a child, innocent as a baby, quite thought he was in love with her, and wove happy dreams of herself as the Honourable Mrs. Murgatroyd.

Her father was equally guileless: he regarded the flirtation with which Robert Murgatroyd filled up his many dull hours as genuine love-making. He had visions of Effie in a golden coronet, driving in a carriage and pair, perhaps even with four horses, to visit him in his sausage shop. So vague were his ideas about Society that he even believed she might be called the Honourable Lady Effie.

So he dreamed on in his loving, ignorant way, and Effie, though she hardly loved, yet was fascinated and charmed by the brilliant young man.

But one day a look in her eyes which had never been there before, an inflection in her voice which he had never before heard, warned the man that he had gone far enough. He packed his luggage, and left that night for England.

That same night, while Murgatroyd was settling himself comfortably in the Paris express, Mr. Larkins sat in his room, thinking deeply, and somewhat miserably. He could not help knowing that he was unpolished and uncouth as compared with other people in the house, and he had lately taken into his head the idea that Murgatroyd despised him. Personally he cared nothing for the young man's opinion, but he believed Effie loved him, and her happiness was the one thing he most desired. He half suspected that Murgatroyd knew and sneered at his business, and he felt that while he was in evidence his daughter might never receive a direct proposal. The result of his meditations was a letter which was handed to Effie the following morning, with another in an unknown handwriting, when the maid brought her coffee.

"From father," she thought wonderingly, "whatever made him write to me? Can he be ill?" and she tore the envelope open. Tears sprang to her eyes as she read the few badly-expressed, strangely-spelt words, in which her father told her he could never be good enough to have to do with the wife of what he called "a honourable gent," how he was sure Murgatroyd was withheld from proposing to her by his presence, and how he intended to return to London without delay, leaving her in the care of Mrs. Stanton, the proprietress of the pension, who would gladly look after her.

"And you needn't be afraid, my dearie," the letter finished, "I won't come to the wedding or nothing, and it will be as if you had no father except for settlements, and that I'll see to well, for you're all I have in the world, and that's why I'm going, because he won't propose while I'm here, and I love you too well to stand in the way of you being made a lady."

Effie sat and cried, never before had she realised the deep love her father had for her, never till now, when, for what he thought her advantage, he proposed giving her up. All the oddities of speech and manner which had often irritated and offended her were forgotten, and she remembered only his sterling goodness, and unfailing love and tenderness. Murgatroyd did not enter her head at all.

Impulsively she threw on her dressing-gown, and ran to her father's room, where he was stuffing his belongings into a portmanteau in a sad and preoccupied way. She threw her arms round his neck. "Father, my dear, good, kind little father, how *could* you think I could live without you. If Mr. Murgatroyd wants to marry me, he must be friends with you too."

Her father did not answer: he was so delighted to find how she loved him, that his voice was trembling, and he could only stroke her hair and kiss her.

Suddenly Effie remembered the other letter, which she still held in her hand, and she tore it open.

"Dear Miss Larkins,—I am obliged to return to England on urgent business, and have not even time to say good-bye to you. I am very much obliged for all the pleasure I have had in the society of your father and yourself during my visit here.

"With kind regards to him and yourself, believe me to remain, yours sincerely, ROBERT MURGATROYD."

"Look," she cried, "that is what you would have liked me to take instead of you. He meant nothing: I understand it all now. He was only amusing himself with me because he had nothing else to do. Thank Heaven I never grew to really love him. Oh, father, I am tired of Lausanne, let us go home."

"Yes, little girl, we'll go home to-day. I'm tired of being abroad, too. Give me old England. Never mind, my darling, don't bother your pretty head any more about it; run away and pack."

They left Lausanne that evening, but before going Samuel Larkins said to his daughter.

"Effie, there's one little thing I'd like to do. You know when we first came you wrote down in the book that I was a gentleman. It's been on my mind ever since; it seems to me nothing but a false entry. I'd be happier if it was altered."

And Effie, understanding now that to be written down a gentleman is not always a proof of being one, agreed.

"You shall do just as you like, dear father," she said tenderly, "it was only my silly vanity that made me write it."

So the book was obtained, and the alteration made, and to this day those who stay at the Pension X. may, if so minded, turn back the pages of the visitors' book to where is written "Samuel Larkins, London, gentleman," but the last word is scratched through, and over it is written in slightly tremulous characters, "sausage-maker."

CLAUDIA ASHTON.

LIKE A KNIGHT OF OLD.

It was of no use Peggy crying, she couldn't go. Millions of tears, she assured herself despairingly, would make no difference—she couldn't, couldn't go!

The certainty with which she said, almost screamed, this truth might have shown her to be a philosopher, had she not at the same moment proved herself to be so very much the reverse, by burying her face deep in the tumbled bed, and doing her best to shed another million or so of these same "idle tears."

As there was no one at hand to sympathise with her she presently stopped and took breath, then wrestled fruitlessly with her pocket for a handkerchief, and failing to find it either on or under the bed, sighed grievously, and in sheer absence of mind wiped one poor red eye with the sheet and the other with a wisp of hair that was hanging wet and matted on her forehead.

The most bitter part of it all was, that the day was so brilliant; the little white clouds looked like wings of doves nestling against the deep blue of the sky, and her window, high though it was in the schoolhouse, could not keep one rustling branch of an elm from whispering and waving at the lowest pane. Birds lived in its hollows and were twittering and carolling there, the children's voices below in the orchard were laughing in expectant happiness—one called her name—and yet, oh, it was hard, she couldn't go.

"If I'd been bad-tempered now!" broke out Peggy afresh, addressing herself to the round knob of the bedstead, but turning her eyes away as suddenly, finding its brazen surface but a poor reflector. "If I'd been bad-tempered like Archie or had broken the best looking-glass like Polly Walker, it would be right, quite right. But just because I hadn't a pair of boots! Oh, dear, oh, dear, why must I be punished when it isn't my fault?" And finding, as so many of her elders daily do, no answer to this sad question, she began crying afresh, but more gently, as if getting used to her sorrow.

The door opened without a knock, and Bessie the one maid, looked in, drying her hands on her coloured apron.

"Is there no way Miss Peggy, dear? Till my month comes round I've nothin' but what I stand upright in, but my heart ached while I packed their sangwidges. I b'lieve I cried on the salt, and spilt the lot!"

"No, Bess, thank you. It can't be helped. Nobody's to blame, and I wouldn't have mother know—but, oh, isn't it horrid to be poor?"

"And this a lady's school, that's the worst. Else you might run barefoot to-day, and be as happy as a bird."

Peggy was silent, turning over in her mind many things, principally questions to which her puzzled brain had no answer whatever. Life seemed such a tangle already, and a cheap school a never ending—so it seemed—and drudging misery, lit up, however, and saved as it were during the monotonous holidayless year by about three dazzling red-letter days. On these, the father of a large family of boys and girls took every one in the house up the mountains behind the orchard for a picnic on which wonderful occasions the word "Allowance" was banished, and peace, plenty, liberty and laughter were the order of the day, the children forgetting in the freedom of the hour the narrowness and rigour and meanness awaiting them on the morrow.

Bessie's next remark, though meant kindly, was not a happy one.

"Missis 'ud no doubt lend you a pair—she's got two—if your mother didn't owe her such a lot for—"

The blood flew into Peggy's face with a rush, and her eye—quite tearless now—flashed up indignantly into the placidly astonished face of her humble friend.

"Shut up!" she cried, or rather commanded, in loud hysterical tones. But upon Bessie jerking from the room and slamming the door, Peggy—her strength quite gone—hugged her knees with her long arms in an agony, and hid her burning face down on them.

"Oh, mother—mother, dearie—if you only knew!"

Half-an hour passed, but she did not move. Her thin shoes worn down at the heel, and "out" at each little toe had both somehow shuffled themselves off and left her feet uncovered; for Peggy's dress was still short, too short for a girl in her sixteenth year.

She had heard it all so cruelly, so clearly through the open window, the preparations, the dragging of the luncheon baskets by the boys—Archie and his big brother Jim—along the gravel path, the skurrying of many feet down the stairs, Hettie's voice calling to Laura, Laura's to Polly, and Polly too happy for ordinary spoken words, singing back a reply. Then the hasty careless good-bye shouted to her and Bessie, amid more laughter and chatter, the voices finally dying away, leaving silence, broken only by the songs of the birds, which seemed so much to her that Peggy threw her frock over her head to shut the glad sounds out. So effectually did she do this, so drowsily overcome was she by all that had happened, that a loud heavy tread in the hall below, on the stairs, outside on the landing, at her very door, failed to rouse or even reach her. A quick decided rap followed—but there was no answer; a sharp rattle of the handle had been repeated three times before Peggy, wondering—her heart a little fluttering for it seemed as if help had come, peeped over the hem of her dress and set her back resolutely to the window. Then she cried in a succession of little gasps—

"Jim, not you, really! Silly old boy—come in." The handle gave one more twist, and the door was flung back, rebounding against the wall.

Yes it was Jim, hot from running, his face red and shining, his curly hair rough and disordered, his best blue tie awry, his eye—which matched it in colour—

after one comprehensive glance fastened upon the mat, his hands behind him.

Peggy said not a word, but a little light, half-hope, half-merriment, glimmered in her eye. It was not in her mind to be coquettish with Jim, but neither was she going to help him at all, so she just folded her hands and waited. A minute he stood bearing it, his cheek growing a duskier red, his chest visibly heaving, his right foot shuffling a grotesque *pas seul* round his left. He snatched another look at Peggy, pulled his cap over his eyes still intent on the mat, and blurted out:

"Come along out of that, Pegs! I'm not going without you."

"I was wondering if you could, Jim—and after a year's absence too! But you dear silly old boy, I can't go barefooted like Mrs. Kelly's children. They'd send me back if I did."

"I know they would," growled Jim.

"Well, then, I can't go. You couldn't carry me to the top of Grube!"

Peggy ducked her head, conscious of having laid a trap, and Jim looked up at the landing ceiling as if in search of it. The spirit of his first compliment hung upon his lips, but so utterly confounded and paralysed them that it never escaped beyond, and when, after a pause, he did speak, his voice sounded quite gruff—almost angry.

"Carry you! I suppose you think me a fool, Peggy; but I'm not, and you're not a baby either. I ran back to tell you to come, and I've brought you a pair of my boots to come in. Here they are. The hand behind threw itself forward with a swing, and deposited them with a mighty thud at her feet. Peggy looked at them a moment silently, and at her shame-faced deliverer still panting as if for breath, and then burst into a merry little peal of laughter. It was not to be wondered at either, considering how pretty and arched her foot was, how slender and how small, and to picture them encased in such rough coverings. They had row upon row underneath of bright nails, and the leather was of that strong kind requiring no lining, long strips of the same substance brown and unbreakable hung from brass hooks for laces, and solid masses of metal almost covered the heels. Many a time Peggy had laughed at them, and at their like hanging in lines outside the Douglas shoemakers' shops, and as she slid, almost jumped into this pair of Jimmy's, her glee knew no bounds.

In the midst of laughter, which still had some traces of tears in it, she bestowed a little impetuous kiss upon the hard crinkled top edge of each, and then seizing Jim's reluctant hand, would have rewarded it in like manner had he not been too quick for her and jerked it away.

But he knelt at her feet and tied the laces round them and stowed away the ends quite tidily.

"Worst of it is, your foot's so small," said he at last. Then turning his eyes up to hers for the first time—

"But I swore you should go, Peggy, and so you can now. And if the brutish things do hurt, I'll—well, I *will* carry you all the way back!"

* * * * *

The weight was only fun at first, and the curious roominess which allowed her toes free action even while her ankles were stung by the tightness of the laces (which alone prevented her from dropping off her boots altogether) was a subject of merriment to them both for the first hour. It is true they rather rubbed her heel awkwardly, and they had a trick also of throwing her forward on her knees unexpectedly, but Jim was ever ready to help her, and succeeded in less than an hour in getting her up the steep hill to where the whole party was resting, previous to unpacking the luncheon baskets.

Peggy, at sight of them, grew grave, and suddenly sank, not this time extending her hand with "just to be helped."

"No, Jim; oh, I can't. Let me rest; the heather is like a soft bed, and—oh, each foot weighs a hundred pounds!"

Nobody regarded her much except Nettie, who, with a pleasant little smile, came down to know how it had all been made possible, and then returned with Jim for sandwiches and cake. Shouts of laughter followed her narration, and two of the boys came down to inspect "Madame Peggy's big boots." But before they could reach her, long quick striding steps over-took them, and in another moment they retraced theirs, howling.

Peggy lay on her back, the soft heather almost covering her and rising inches above her head. She forgot she was in pain; everything was so beautiful.

"Clever boy, you got here first. But why did they cry? You hadn't a hand to hurt them left."

"No," responded Jim laconically, "but I had a *foot!*"

The corners of Peggy's mouth twitched, but she asked no explanation, and perched up on one arm, contentedly munched a sandwich. Jim poured out a glass of water, holding the bottle on high that he made quite a fine "head."

"Guess who's up there with them," he said then.

She paused on the verge of another bite.

"Not—— Oh, Jim, don't say it's Charlie Sparrow!"

Noting her tone of concern he immediately became curiously hard and even callous; ungrammatical as well. He set his teeth and spoke through them.

"Yes—him." And then appearing to entirely forget her presence, deliberately, slowly and exasperatingly, demolished two more sandwiches and three pieces of cake without looking at her.

Now Peggy's case was a hard one. For she had told her own heart for at least half-a-year, and had even confided the same to Laura not a month back, that she had a hero, and that hero's initials were C. S.

She had moreover learnt "Charlie is my darling," until she knew every word of it and every little turn of its pretty tune. In that dreary school, where he was a visitor sometimes in the summer, he brought the sunshine more surely than the season did to this lonely girl, who treasured his every kind word, and magnified his slightest acts of courtesy into almost deeds of chivalry. Once, indeed, he had saved her from being beaten; once again he had taken her away into safe hiding while he mended with his own hand a tear in her frock, while she stood by trembling, frightened and helpless, although superlatively happy.

He had told her she was like his sister, his favourite sister too, and when she had cried because he was going away a year ago he had put his arm round her and had kissed her—once, twice—on the forehead, and had begged her to remember him for another year.

She was thinking of that now; of how she'd often pictured his visit, she knowing before and fully prepared, with a new dress two inches longer and more womanly in make, her hair daintily arranged and tied with ribbon, and on her feet sweet clocked stockings, and—oh, dreadful—oh, terrible—disaster of disasters! she was about to meet him now, her hero, her darling, in the same old worn dress, her hair rough and untied, and on her feet these hideous lumbering *comic* boots of Jim's!

Far away into the heather she threw the crust of bread in her hand, and up in a moment she stood erect, though wincing with acute pain.

"Jim, dear, help me! I mean to go back—he hasn't seen me—he is only just joining them; perhaps he doesn't know I'm here. Quick! I can't let him see me!"

With a resolve to bear unflinchingly the cutting pain in her feet and ankles, she tore quickly past him down the incline at a break-neck pace, her hands clenched, her face a-flame, her hair flying round it!

With one lightning look of anger at the cause of all this change, Jim sprang up and in a moment overtook her.

"Peggy, stop! Oh what a fool I was—your feet are bleeding! What a blind idiot I was! I never knew—oh, Peggy, forgive me!"

"You dear old Jim, how should you know. Girls have such silly soft feet, and—oh, Jim——"

"What is it, Peggy?"

"Can one die of pain in one's toes and heels, do you think? It's just like being tipsy—and it's all going to my head! What's that?"

Jim looked back and was again ungrammatical. "That's him!" Then under his breath, "dash him!" But Peggy did not hear. Far behind them rang a clear voice calling her name, and the music of it made her little heart thump and her little brain whirl.

"Peggy!" it cried "Peggy, dear, stop!"

But she only ran the faster.

"Jim—take my arm—just to reach my room—see the house is in sight. Only to pass the firs now, and then the orchard, and then—oh, dear—oh, Jim, save me!"

The hands unclenched, the heavy feet dragged and stumbled, her eyes drooped and closed, and in a moment more she lay quivering and senseless at his feet.

Jim knelt, and with his penknife cut from top to bottom the tightly drawn laces, and then, so gently that his hand twitched as he did it, he lifted each foot out of its cruel prison, calling himself the hardest names he knew the while. Directly after, Charlie had caught up to him, and was kneeling too, holding Peggy's inanimate hand.

"I am sorry for this, Jim. Poor little girl—and on the holiday too. I wonder what's caused it."

"Why, I have, if you want to know!" said Jim fiercely. "She's got no boots, and I couldn't see her left behind, so made her wear mine. And I wish somebody 'ud knock my brains out with the thick end of 'em!"

Charlie bit his lip, but slipped hisa rm very kindly through Jim's, not at all rebuffed by his rough reception.

"I hope to do something better than that for you, Jim. But first, Peggy. We can't leave her here. Her poor little feet can do no more walking to-day. I am taller than you, and two years older. I'll carry her home."

Charlie was springing lightly up without noticing the gathering storm in the other's face. Before his hand again touched Peggy's, before he could well realise what had taken place, he found himself in an instant thrown backwards on a bed of rough brake or coarse fern. Jim stood above him irate and towering.

"Touch her if you dare! It's through me she's lying there, as if she was dead—it's through me she has lamed herself, and is cut and bleeding, and it will be through me, and only me, that she shall get back home."

Without any pause or word of apology he stooped and picked her up, letting her lie stretched across his arms like an infant, and with a few steady long strides was out of sight.

Everyone was kind that night to Peggy.

* * * * *

"That is the best of being a little ill," she said. "People half believe they love you then."

"Some of them do," whispered Charlie, and Peggy's eyes grew wistful and dreamy, thinking of the going back for good in the autumn, and of how near *his* house was to her own dear home. But it was not his name she mentioned when she spoke next, for a pang like remorse made her heart heavy.

"Where's Jim?" she said, and Charlie rose to look for him. She caught his wrist:

"Are you angry with him at all?" But he only laughed.

"Angry? No. I deserve more than I got for attempting to take his place."

Jim came, confused and silent.

"Good night, dear Jim."

"Good night, Peg."

She raised herself as well as the bandaged feet would let her, and opened her arms wide.

"Jim—you dear, dear Jim! Let me kiss you!"

He stooped to her and her arms twined round his neck and held him close, but he never returned her kiss, and there was no smile on his lip when she released him.

"Good night, Peg," he said again, and then, turning to Charlie, "I behaved like a cad to you to-day, I beg your pardon," went by him abruptly and left the room.

* * * * *

"Good night, Peggy."

"Good night, Charlie."

"Soon I shall see you, when you go home, every week—sometimes twice in the week. Do you look forward to it as much as I do?"

She closed her eyes.

"Oh, so much!"

"Then, good night again, and—and—give me a kiss too.!"

But Peggy, with scarlet cheeks, pushed him from her.

"No, not you."

"Why, a moment ago—Jim——"

"So different—ah so different! He's like my brother, he knows that. People always kiss their brothers, and——"

"Well, I don't want to be your brother." Charlie hesitated a moment, and then threw himself down by her sofa. "Peggy—darling little Peggy, will you—will you be my sweetheart?"

"Oh, Charlie—not really!"

"Yes, really. True to me till you get to be a woman—beyond that—true always. True as that needle in the little compass I gave you which never swerves or alters."

Peggy raised her hand from where it hung by the sofa and pressed her finger on the middle button of her frock, whispering, her head half-buried in the cushion:

"It's under there, Charlie. It's been there ever since."

"My own dear Peggy. Then—then, have you a kiss for me now?"

JESSIE ROUTH.

CHRISTMAS STORYETTES.

He wasn't Generous.

Father: "Your schoolmaster can't be such a mean man as you make out. I notice his son has all the Christmas toys he can possibly need." Tommy: "Why, those are what his father takes away from the other boys."

He was Sorry.

Teddy: "I wish I hadn't licked Jimmy Brown this morning." Mother: "You see how wrong it was, don't you, Teddy?" Teddy: "Yes, 'cause I didn't know till the afternoon he was going to have a big Christmas cake."

Lazy Boy!

Little Frank wrote a letter to Santa Claus, in which he asked that genial old soul to remember him with sundry articles which he desired. But he put in a proviso that is worth noting: "Don't put anything in my stocking. It is too much work to take 'em out. Lay 'em on the chairs."

Freddy's Letter.

"Mamma," said Freddy, "I am going to invite Santa Claus to my Christmas party." "Very well," replied mamma. And Freddy sat down and wrote: "Dear Santa Claus,—You presents are desired at my house on Christmas morning.—Your loving little friend, Freddy Fosdick."

Sold.

Jones had been entertaining a few friends at dinner. Ordering coffee to be served in the library, he led the way to that apartment. Taking down a sword that was hanging on the wall and brandishing it with much affectation of martial ardour, he said: "Never, gentlemen, shall I forget the day when I drew this trusty blade for the first time." "And where was that?" asked a curious guest. "Why, in a Christmas raffle."

A Christmas Story Boiled Down.

It was Christmas Eve. Streets—brilliantly lit shop windows—toys—gay crowds—snow on the ground—everybody out—Christmas. Jane Allalone wandered all alone—crowd—sweet, sad face, wistful eyes. Five years before, James Goodygoody—Christmas Eve—betrothed to Jane—sailed away—India—ship lost—never heard of—foundered on coast of Africa. Jane held on to hope and her sewing machine—never would marry—pined away, &c. William Badbody—rich, corrupt, dissipated—mortgage on Jane's mother's house—foreclosure. Away villain! Rather poverty, crusts, &c. Turned out of doors—homeless. Down by the dark river—about to make the fatal plunge—in fact, Jane did plunge. But just then the ship, with Captain James W. Goodygoody, which had not been lost at all, came sailing up to the dock, loaded to the water's edge with china, silk dresses, and tea. Captain Goodygoody saw Jane struggling in the water. He fished her out with a boat-hook and hauled her on board his own good craft. "My Jane!" "My James!" The cook dried her at the galley-stove, and although soaked with salt water, she looked as fresh as a daisy. In fact, Jane was a daisy, and don't you forget it. They were married on Christmas Day.

He wanted to Know.

Bobby: "How are you goin' to keep Christmas Day?" Tommy: "Dunno. Is there any way to keep it so it'll last till next one comes?"

It Depended.

Fond Aunt: "Well, my dear, what shall I get you for Christmas?" Six-year-old Nephew (patronisingly): "It all depends upon how much money you have."

She liked to Know their Cost.

Miss Bright: "What, shopping again! Mercy! but what a lot of presents you must be making this year!" Miss Flight: "I never give presents; am opposed to it on principle. But I do like to go round and price things. It is so gratifying, you know, when you make a visit after Christmas, and are shown the presents that have been received, to know just how much the things cost."

A Feminine Talker.

Small Boy: "Mum wants a loaf of stale bread ter make stuffin' with for our Christmas turkey." Baker: "We have no stale bread left." "No bread?" "Nothing but fresh bread." "Gimme a loaf." "But you said your mother desired stale bread." "Yes." "This isn't stale." "Mum's run acrost th' street to talk with the neighbours 'bout th' goings-on at Mrs. Blinker's last night, an' it'll be stale by the time she gits back."

Under the Mistletoe.

Gertie (who had just been kissed by Arthur under the mistletoe, which he had discovered hanging in the hall): "Oh, Arthur, you wicked wretch! To take advantage of me like that! I wish I knew who hung it there; I'd—I'd pay them out, that's all!" Arthur (to little brother, later on in the evening): "Tommy, I am going to take Gertie away from you soon. Will you mind?" Tommy: "Not in the least, Mr. Popp. Sis and I are not friends now." Arthur: "How's that?" Tommy (heedless of Gertie's killing glances): "Oh, she boxed my ears for tipping her off the chair when she was nailing up that mistletoe in the hall!"

A Christmas Terror.

The stout man with a large package beneath his arm hurried through the crowded thoroughfare, closely pursued by a small man of haggard aspect, with a thick stick in his hand. On and on, relentless as the ticking of a clock, the forlorn man dogged the other, and those who passed him heard an occasional word drop from his lips, indicative of despair, of awful terror. Finally some of the crowd turned and followed the pair, determined not to miss the fun. The crowd grew larger, and finally a bold man went up to the person of haggard countenance. "What's the matter?" he asked. The little man turned. "Matter?" he echoed. "See that man with a bundle? He is my next-door neighbour, and in that bundle he has a cornet which he has bought for his small son at Christmas." But the crowd waited no longer. It surged ahead with relentless fury and left him to work out his own vengeance, and when peace had been restored the remains of a battered man and a battered cornet lay upon the pavement.

COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL.

CINDERELLA ROGERS.*

. . . By Tom Gallon. . . .

"Hobson!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Bring me the morning paper—any one will do."

The trim, stolid man-servant slipped out of the room, and returned almost immediately with a carefully folded newspaper, which he held out to his master, and then drew back near the door and stood passively waiting. The master, seated in a deep chair near the fire, impatiently turned the leaves, and began at last frowningly to scan the advertisement columns. The servant coughed, and glanced at the plain silver watch he drew from his pocket.

"It's nigh on to seven o'clock, sir," he ventured at last.

"I know."

"And you dine with——"

"Yes—yes; don't worry. I'm not going. I'm not going anywhere."

"Very good, sir."

Martin Chaloner got up and stood before the fire, still with his eyes fixed upon the paper. A tall, brown-faced man, quite young, with kindly, grey eyes, and certain humorous lines about his mouth; a man who bore the look of having seen much, of having been, indeed, an unobtrusive and somewhat amused spectator in the big playhouse of the world, where so many men and so many women strive together, and fret out their little lives upon the same stage.

"Look well at me, Hobson," he said at last, without removing his gaze from the paper.

"Yes, sir."

"You've known me for a good many years, I think; saw you ever a being so unfortunate?" He spoke in the same quiet, matter-of-fact tone, half-absently and without looking at the man.

The servant coughed again, and smiled a little behind his hand.

"Well, sir," he ventured deferentially. "I would scarcely 'ave been so bold as to put it quite that way. A gent as 'as, in a manner o' speaking, all as the 'eart could desire——"

"Oh, you think that, do you? You think that the power to write a cheque for any sum I may require, chambers in a fashionable quarter of town, a host of acquaintances, and a pretty wide experience of life, mean all that the heart could desire, eh?" He glanced over the top of the paper keenly at the man for a moment and then glanced down again. "You're no philosopher, Hobson."

"No, sir," replied the man humbly.

"Frankly, Hobson, I'm tired of it all—tired of all the dull round of things, the certain knowledge of what is to happen day by day, and the people I am to meet, and the clothes I am to wear. For want of a better expression, I might say that I am in search of a new sensation. You don't understand that, I suppose, Hobson?"

"Can't say as I do, sir," replied the man, looking at his master with his head on one side. "I've found, sir, as a man gets on best by takin' wot Providence sends him day by day and sleepin' sound o' nights. New sensations is apt to upset a man, sir, in a manner o' speakin'."

Martin Chaloner laughed softly, and the lines about his mouth deepened. "Well, I dare say you're right, Hobson," he said, "from your point of view. You've been a good faithful fellow ever since you joined me first, years ago, and I—hallo! what's this?" He was reading one of the advertisements with a little more eagerness than he had hitherto displayed.

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"Nothing the matter, sir, I 'ope?"

"Oh, no; nothing's the matter." He hesitated a moment, and then glanced up at the man. "Just go and pack a bag for me with things enough for—let us say—a week. I can send to you for some more if I want them. Hurry up!"

"Goin' away, sir?"

"Yes; I'll give you the address presently. Look sharp with those things."

Left to himself, Martin Chaloner read the advertisement which had attracted his attention over again softly.

> A LADY, from pecuniary considerations, is anxious to receive a gentleman as paying Guest in her home. Refined and cheerful society. Select neighbourhood. Address, etc.

"Sounds dull enough," he muttered. "It's perfectly idiotic on my part, even to contemplate such a thing; but it'll be a change, and somehow"—he looked at the paper frowningly—"there's something that seems curiously to attract me about it. There are dozens of advertisements of the same type, and yet I find myself turning again and again to this one. What does it mean? I am not a superstitious man, but——"

He sat with puckered brows, pondering over it for a long time, and at last got up, and flung the paper from him, and began to stride up and down the room.

"What a fool I am!" he ejaculated, with something that was almost a sigh. "After all, Hobson was right; I'm supposed to have everything that the heart could wish for, as he tersely expresses it; and yet I am contemplating going into a lodging-house—for that's what it means I suppose—on the chance of some adventure turning up. As if any adventures ever came to a man in that way, save in books. Here we are, within a fortnight of Christmas; and I've got the pick of half-a-dozen places where a lonely man may be happy, and I don't want one of them. What's the matter with me? Am I, despite all my philosophy, beginning to cry out on the hollowness of things; beginning to feel there's something deeper under life than anything I have found? Oh, Martin Chaloner, Martin Chaloner!" he put his head for a moment between his hands and sighed, "your old cynic of a father left you his fortune, and some of his beliefs in the emptiness of all things; your gentle mother left you her heart. And the two make a bad mixture, my boy."

Still uneasy and undecided, he picked up the paper again, and sought out the advertisement, and re-read it. "After all, it might prove to be rather good fun; to drop into the midst of people who know nothing of me—to disappear, as I have disappeared before, and yet to be within a cab drive of everything. That's better than bolting across seas, and more out of the common. Well, it doesn't matter much either way; I'll toss for it."

He spun a coin in the air, whispering to himself, as he covered it with his hand: "Heads I'm a paying guest; tails I go to Lady Bertha's."

It was heads. He put the coin in his pocket, laughed softly, and rang the bell.

"My bag ready, Hobson?" he asked as the man appeared.

"Quite ready, sir."

Martin Chaloner cut the advertisement from the paper, sat down at his desk, wrote the address, and then handed it to the man.

"This in case of emergency," he said. "I might return to-morrow; I might not be back for a month. If anyone comes you might say that I've gone away, and you haven't the least notion where I am. Keep all letters until my return. If anything very important happens, wire to me. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir." The man hesitated and coughed nervously. "Perhaps I might make bold to say, sir, that I 'opes, if you ain't back before, that you'll 'ave a merry Christmas, sir."

Martin Chaloner laughed. "Do you think I am going away to be merry?" he asked. "I am going to see how other people contrive to be merry, if it's possible. Merry, indeed! Call me a hansom."

The address given in the advertisement was in a quiet street in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park. The house he discovered to be a large, old-fashioned one, somewhat dingy-looking, and with an unmistakable air of faded and down-at-heel gentility about it. He dismissed the cab, and stood for a few moments on the steps of the house, with his bag beside him, looking up and down the empty street. "Well, this is a mad proceeding," he muttered to himself; "if it weren't that Hobson would think I was more off my head than usual, I'd go back again, and dine comfortably, and go to Lady Bertha's for Christmas. No, hang it! I'm sick to death of Lady Bertha and all the lot of them, and I may get some fun out of this."

He rang the bell somewhat viciously, feeling half inclined to run away the moment he had done so. But the thing had to be gone through with now, and he stood his ground. A decidedly untidy servant opened the door, and he mentioned the advertisement; she backed against the wall, and motioned to him to enter He went in, absolutely determined in his own mind to be out of the place within the next five minutes, and speeding back to his own comfortable quarters. For the house was stuffy, and close and sombre, and the room in which he was left was filled with hideous atrocities in the shape of furniture and decorations which filled his soul with depression. But the door opened, and in an instant all his resolutions of flight were gone, and even the depressing, sombre room seemed to take on a new aspect. A young girl had entered, and softly closed the door behind her, and stood nervously watching him, as if waiting for him to speak.

She was small and slight, with an oval, delicate face, and big wistful brown eyes. She was dressed very neatly, in black—a dress which had obviously been worn a long time. Despite her quiet attitude and the gravity of her face, she was so entirely different to anything about her, and seemed so little more than a child, that Martin Chaloner felt the ridiculous nature of his quest and of the situation generally more keenly than ever, and faltered, and hesitated to speak.

"You called in answer to the advertisement, I think?" she said at last; and her voice was just the voice he would have expected to issue from those lips.

"Yes; I only saw the advertisement to-night," he began, lamely. "Are you—are you——" He stopped in confusion, not knowing how to complete the question.

"Mrs. Trigg asked me to see you," she replied quickly. "She is—is not very well." Martin had a vision of the lady of the house hurriedly preparing to receive a visitor, and smiled and nodded. "Perhaps you would like to see the rooms," she added nervously.

"Oh, I daresay they're all right," he replied carelessly; "but I suppose I'd better see them, though I'm giving you a frightful lot of trouble, I'm afraid," he added.

She flushed quickly, and looked at him with something of surprise. "Oh! there's no question of trouble," she replied quietly. "It's a part of my duties."

The rooms proved to be fairly comfortable, although it is probable that Martin Chaloner did not very carefully examine them; the terms he agreed to at once. That night, as he sat in front of a very smoky fire, in an easy chair which belied its name, and which had one castor off, he smilingly communed with himself.

"Well, I've seen Mrs. Triggs—tall, bony, severe, pious, with a quick eye to the main chance; I've seen Master Triggs, of some twenty summers, who lives on his mother, and wears loud clothes, and smokes abominable cigars; I've observed Miss Triggs, who has a general air of curl papers in the morning, and holes in her stockings. I suppose Mr. Triggs has passed into the shades. Happy man! But what—in the name of all that's wonderful—is that girl doing here? She can't be one of the family; perhaps she's a poor relation. But that's not possible, either; I'll swear she hasn't a drop of their blood in her veins. And yet I suppose she *must* be a poor relation, or they wouldn't snub her so dreadfully. I must try and find out."

He lay awake that night a long time thinking about her, and fell asleep at last, to dream of her. He was awakened late next morning by a soft tapping at his door. At first he did not remember where he was; but it dawned upon him quickly, and he cried out from the shelter of the bedclothes to know what was the matter.

"Would you like your breakfast brought up to you?" was the question he heard from the other side of the door; and the voice he recognised as that of the girl who had filled so large a part of his thoughts during the past few hours. He hurriedly sat up in bed, and called out that he would, if it would not give her any additional trouble. Then, as he heard her light feet moving away from the door, he scrambled out of bed, and began to dress hurriedly.

He was just passing out into his sitting-room as the girl entered it by another door, bearing a heavy tray, on which his breakfast was set out. He went forward quickly to take the tray from her; for a moment they looked at each other across it.

"Where's the servant?" he asked.

"This is part of my duty, Mr. Chaloner," she said quietly.

"Well, I shouldn't have had it brought up if I'd known that. Come, let me have it." There was a curious, tenderly masterful way about him, and his smile was so genial and good-humoured, that the girl relinquished the tray, and stood looking at him, and smiling perplexedly as he set it on the table and began to arrange his breakfast for himself.

"You know," he said as he set out the various things —"I've been in the habit of waiting upon myself all my life—that is to say, when I've been travelling especially; and I hate to sit still and see a woman wait on me. It isn't the right sort of thing at all, you know. There—now we're quite straight." He looked round at the girl and laughed. "Thank you very much —by-the-way—I think they call you—what was it?"

"My name is Rogers," replied the girl.

"Ah, of course; please forgive me, Miss Rogers." He hesitated a moment, and then went on more hurriedly with a sudden heightening of colour. "I should like to ask you a very plain question; if you think I'm infernally rude, don't answer it. But what are you doing here?"

She looked at him in some astonishment, and not a little distress. "Indeed, I am afraid I don't understand you," she said.

"No—I'm afraid it's horribly rude of me; but I am a little puzzled about you. You see, I only came here last night, and you—you are so different from these other people. You're not—not one of the family, I suppose?"

The question was so good-natured, and his grey eyes wore so friendly an expression that she laughed, and answered at once:

"No, I'm not one of the family."

"Ah! I'm rather glad of that."

"I am what is known as a lady-help," went on the girl, in a lower tone. "Which means, I am afraid, that I have to work harder than most servants, and am not paid quite so well; but I'm allowed to take my meals with the family."

"Well, that's a privilege, at any rate," said Martin Chaloner; "but why do you do it, Miss Rogers?"

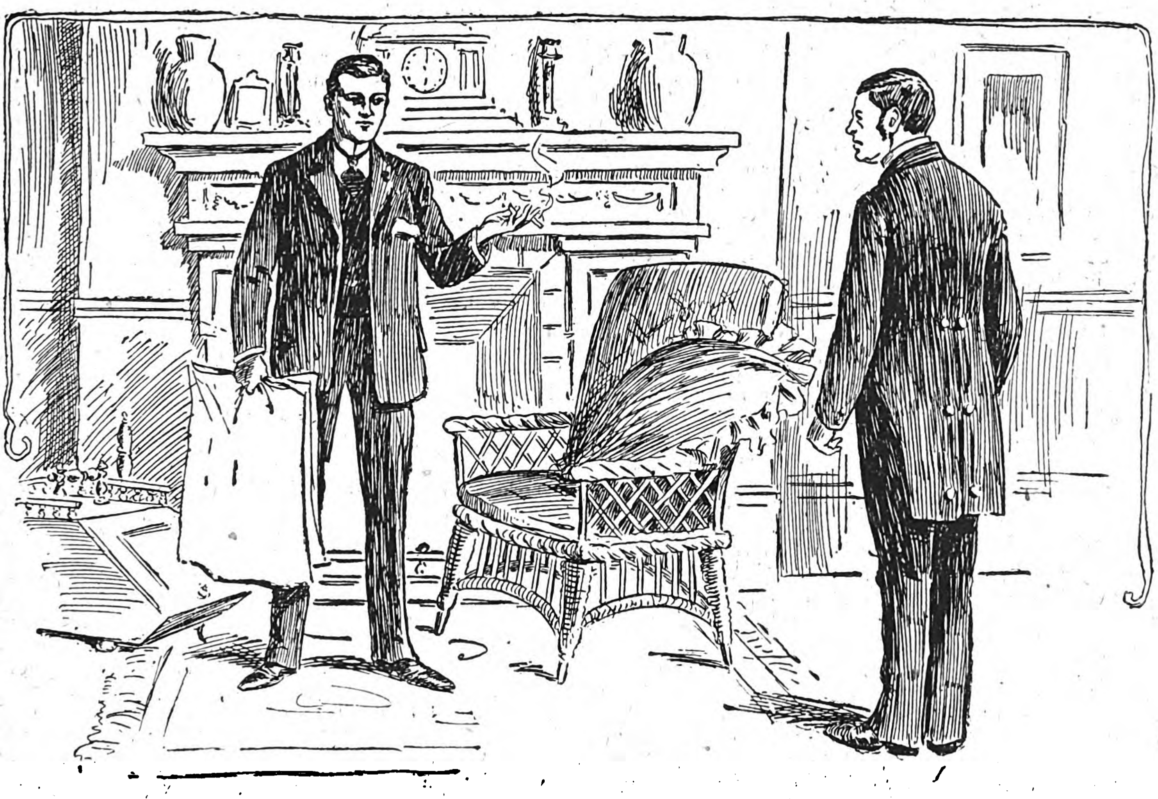
"I have my living to earn, Mr. Chaloner," she replied quietly; and that ended the conversation.

In the days that followed he became more deeply interested than ever. If ever love was born in a man's heart from small beginnings and under commonplace circumstances, it was certainly born in the heart of Martin Chaloner then. His own life had glided on so smoothly and so easily that he had never known, save from a glimpse from the outside now and then, that it had a rough and seamy side to it. And now he came face to face with a frail and delicate slip of womanhood, struggling hard and bravely for mere bread under sordid conditions, the thought of his own lazy strength in comparison put him to shame. He began to believe at last that some curious fate had brought him to the house, and put his purposeless life within the sphere of the girl's influence.

He came suddenly upon her one night, while she was strolling aimlessly, deep in conversation with an elderly man. It was a dark and cold night, with a bitter east wind sweeping the streets, and but few people were about. The two were so deep in conversation that they did not observe him; watching from a little distance he saw the girl's hands clasped upon the man's arm, and saw the man presently turn his head, and stoop and kiss her very tenderly on the lips. Martin Chaloner's feeling that this was some sacred, hidden chapter in the girl's life overcame the strong feeling of curiosity he possessed, and he turned away, wondering what this new mystery might be.

The sound of quick, heavy steps behind him roused him, and he turned swiftly, and ran full tilt against the man he had just seen with the girl. She had disappeared, and the man had been hurrying away without looking where he went. The shock was sufficient to send the stranger's old felt hat from his head; Martin saw, as he uttered a word of apology, that the man was roughly dressed, and had a shrewd, kindly face, and wisps of grey hair pushed back from the lined forehead.

Martin stooped and picked up the hat, and handed it to its owner



"My bag ready, Hobson?" he asked, as the man appeared.

"No offence, no offence, young man," said the other, in a hoarse, cheerful voice. "Thank ye kindly, sir, old Job Rogers ain't the man to take no offence, where none ain't meant. Good night to ye, sir."

Martin Chaloner stood staring after the man as he disappeared up the street. Truly he had not expected to get such an inkling of the hidden chapter of the girl's life as this. Job Rogers! The name was the same as her own; then this man must be a relative—perhaps even her father. But he thought of the girl's gentle and refined voice and manner, and dismissed that idea as absurd.

Meanwhile, with no definite object in view, he lingered on at the house in Regent's Park, with the feeling growing within him more strongly day by day, that he could not leave it and leave her behind to the drudgery of her life. He thought, half-laughingly sometimes, of the change which seemed to have come into his affairs; wondered what some of his aristocratic friends would think if they could know the story.

"Lady Bertha—fairest of widows—you used to be rather fond of me; I wonder what you'd think if you knew that I was spending my days in a lodging-house in London, and my nights in dreams of a lady-help!"

Matters came to a crisis one morning, when Martin Chaloner had risen somewhat earlier than usual, and had gone downstairs to breakfast with the rest. There were other lodgers in the house—called by courtesy "guests"—and, probably from the fact that he had little or nothing to do with them, they eyed him with no particular favour. Moreover, his appearances at the general table were rare, and he was somewhat of a mystery to those in the house.

It happened, on this particular morning, that Mr. Jack Triggs, of whom mention has been made, was in a decidedly bad humour, even for him; Martin noticed that Miss Rogers, who sat in a humble position near the foot of the table, looked somewhat paler and more nervous than usual. As he sat down, with a bow towards the girl, young Triggs scowled at him, and looked across at her.

"Now, then, Rogers, pass the cream, will you?" said that young gentleman loudly. "Why don't you attend to people?"

The girl flushed hotly and hesitated for a moment, and then stretched out her hand towards the cream-jug.

Triggs' strident voice broke in again:

"Oh, you needn't give yourself airs; you're only a servant, you know."

Martin Chaloner got up quickly, and had his hand upon the cream-jug before the girl could touch it.

"Allow me," he said quietly. He walked round to where the youth was sitting, and, before anyone was aware of his intention, had emptied the contents of the jug over that gentleman's well-brushed hair. He set the jug down, and, as Jack Triggs rose up spluttering from the table, faced him resolutely.

"Cream, I think you said," said Martin in a low voice, and looking steadily at the other. "Would you like any more?"

Mrs. Triggs screamed. Mr. Jack Triggs, forgetful alike of his personal safety and his behaviour spluttered out a string of oaths. Martin Chaloner darted out a hand, and caught him swiftly by the collar, and had him out of the room, and into the hall, and was kicking him with much vigour before anyone had fully recovered from their astonishment. Finally, with a last dexterous thrust, he sent him down the short flight of stairs leading to the kitchen, and walked quietly up to his own room.

He did not see the girl until much later in the day, when some little duty compelled her to present herself in his sitting-room. He saw that her eyes were red, as if with weeping; her voice was very low and frightened when she spoke to him. With only the hope to reassure her he sprung up and faced her, and spoke as kindly as possible.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," he said, "that you should have been annoyed by that young blackguard this morning. I really couldn't let it pass, you know. I only hope they won't visit it on you."

"I am very grateful to you, Mr. Chaloner," she said, without looking up at him. "I'm afraid, though, that they will visit it on me, as you say."

Martin Chaloner cleared his throat and came a little nearer to her.

"Look here," he said, "I hate this place, except for you, and I hate to think of your going on working here all your days for such people as these. Won't you let me help you? Won't you let me do something to——"

"Thank you, Mr. Chaloner," she said hurriedly, "but it is quite unnecessary. I am used to the work, and to the people, and such little things as that which happened this morning do not matter; they do not really hurt so much as you would think. Indeed, I shall be all right."

He suddenly put his hands on her slight shoulders, and looked down at her with such a tender smile, that when she raised her eyes quickly to his, the tears flooded them.

"Do you know, little woman," he said, "that I can't bear to think of you having to work for anyone; it doesn't seem right or fitting. Don't be afraid to look at me; I am not such an awful fellow, after all. If I ask you to do something very great and very difficult for me—will you do it?"

"I will do anything that is in my power for you," she replied gratefully.

"This is quite in your power," he said. "Now, don't jump or run away from me, because there's nothing to be frightened at. Won't you leave all this life behind, and let me take care of you? Oh, don't cover your face! I've grown very fond of you; I love you better than any woman I've ever met. And I'm a poor lonely chap, who wants someone to look after him. Won't you at least think about it?"

She tried to escape from his detaining hands, and shook her head. "No—no," she whispered; "you don't understand what you are asking. You don't know anything about me, or about my life. You found me here—a hard-working little drudge—and you're a little sorry for me, and so you say this. I shall never forget how kind you have been to me; no man ever spoke to me before as you have done. But you mustn't think of this again."

"It isn't my pity or my sorrow for you," he said, "although, Heaven knows, I am as sorry as anyone can be. But I love you better than I love anyone on earth."

She turned away resolutely, and held her hand on the handle of the door.

"Indeed, I beg that you will forget that you ever said this to me—that you have ever carried such a thought of me in your mind. There are women in this world whose lot it is to tread one quiet path, and to tread it contentedly to the end; for them are born no tragedies, and love gently passes them by. I am one of them."

"Then you don't believe what I say?" he asked.

"Yes—I believe every word of it," she replied, looking at him steadily. "And I shall remember, with pride and gratitude, all my life, that a good man loved me." She opened the door, and was gone before he could speak.

The next day he missed her; his breakfast was brought up by the untidy servant. On making anxious inquiry of that damsel, she informed him that Miss Rogers had left the house early that morning, and was "never comin' back no more."

"What a brute I am!" he thought as he sat before his untasted breakfast. "I've driven her away; that's what it is. I've persecuted her with my odious attentions, and she's gone away to escape from me. Well, there's one consolation about it, at all events; I'll turn my back on Mrs. Triggs."

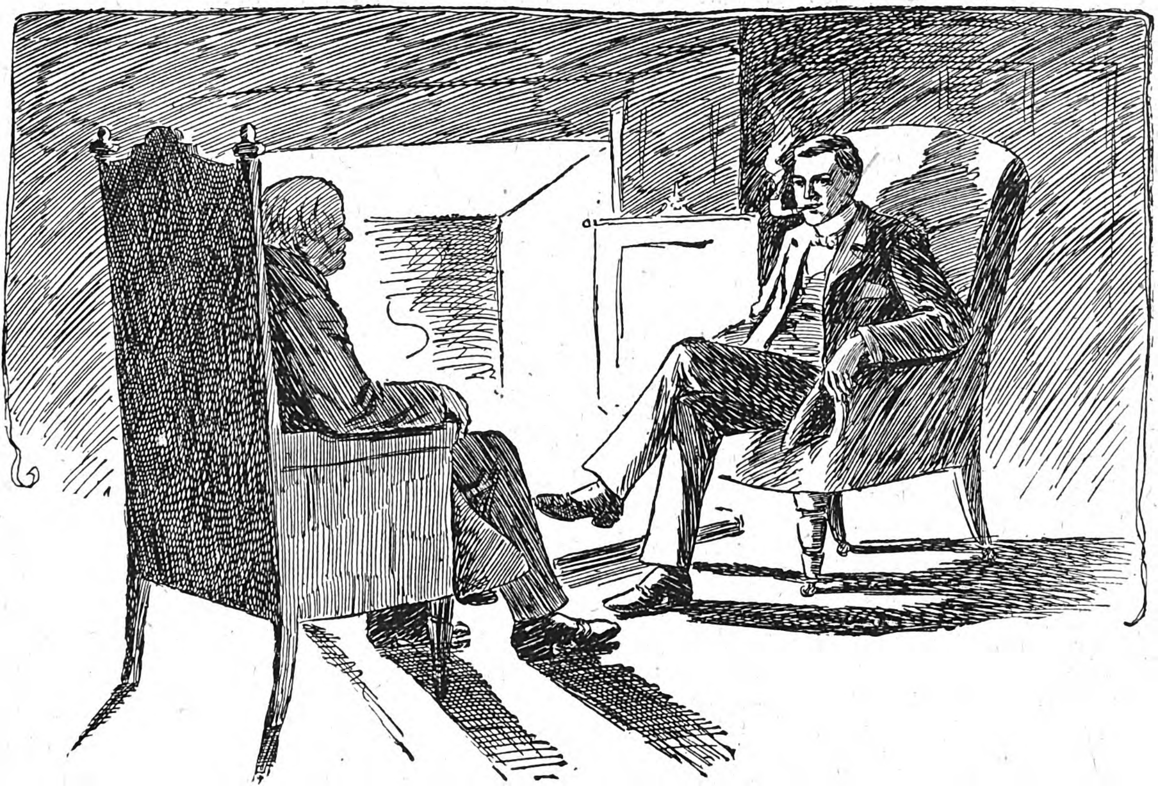
He packed his bag and settled with Mrs. Triggs—quieting that lady's volubility in regard to necessary notice by paying her whatever she demanded—and quitted the house. His stolid man-servant received him as though he had just returned from a walk, and he found that nothing of any importance had occurred in his absence.

"You were right, Hobson," he said that night as he sat before the fire, and the servant was setting coffee and cigars at his elbow—"you were perfectly right. New sensations don't do. A man had better be content with what Providence sends him, and not go crying for the moon. Oh, yes, Hobson, you were perfectly right."

Nevertheless, the next day he felt more restless than ever. Whatever he did, wherever he went, the face of the girl seemed to rise before him hauntingly. He pictured her among coarse and common people doing sordid work, and rewarded by sneers and snubs; he thought of her eyes as he had seen them raised to his filled with tears. To Hobson's complete astonishment, he made up his mind on the second day after his return to go away; and started off at an hour's notice, and without any hint as to his destination.

"Sumthink is up with the master," muttered Hobson dejectedly; "I've never seen 'im like this 'ere afore. There can't be a lady in the case; the master's too cautious; but sumthink's up; 'e don't seem to be able to settle down to anythink."

Fortune took Martin Chaloner on this occasion into the country at no very great distance from London. He had determined as a matter of fact upon going much farther; but the train happened to stop at an old-fashioned out-of-the-way station on a hill, with a pretty village nestling in the winter sunlight below it, and in his usual erratic fashion, he made up his mind in a moment that he liked the appearance of the place,



They drew nearer together over the fire.

flung his bag on to the platform, and jumped out himself. He discovered on inquiry that there was an inn in the place, and set off to find it.

It proved to be an old rambling place, with low ceilings, and heavy beams and sanded floors; with great open fire-places and comfortable roomy beds; one seemed to hear a shadowy blast from the old coach horns that had echoed in its courtyard in bygone days.

"This isn't so bad a place," said Martin Chaloner as he settled down after a plain dinner before the big fire in the coffee-room. "By Jove! I'll spend Christmas here, in solitary grandeur."

Sitting there in the comfortable warmth he gradually fell into a light slumber; when he awoke he was startled to see the figure of a man sitting opposite to him, and spreading out his hands to the fire. Only half-awake at first Martin Chaloner looked at the man from under his half-closed lids for some seconds, while the man looked steadily at the fire; then Martin leant forward and rubbed his eyes, and planted his hands on his knees and stared at the other, trying dimly to remember where and under what circumstances he had met him before. The man's hat was off, and was lying on the settle beside him; he was an elderly man with grey hair, and a clean-shaven, deeply-lined face. Seeing Martin looking at him, he turned about and smiled, and, making a half-clumsy bow, said:

"Which I feels as you'll excuse me a intrudin' on you, sir, but it bein' a bitter night, and a fire the thing that attracts a man in a way, I thought as I'd look in an' 'ave a glass in comfort like afore turnin' in. I arsks yer pardon, sir, for intrudin'; no offence, sir, I 'ope."

Recollection came upon Martin Chaloner in a flash; he remembered, in an instant, that this was the man he had seen talking to the girl in the dark street—the man with whom he had come into such violent collision, and who had given his name unasked as Job Rogers. Quite eagerly, he seemed to see in this again the finger of Fate, and set himself to work cautiously to question the old fellow. His suggestion of another glass was accepted, after some modest hesitation, by the other, and they drew nearer together over the fire.

"Yer see, sir," began the old man confidentially, "mine's a sort of rovin' life, so to speak—'ere to-day, and t'other place to-morrow, as the Scriptures 'ave it. The show business is my line—comes as near to the legitimate, in a way, as don't make no odds in the reckonin'—only *we* does it in pennies and tuppences, an' *they* does it in 'alf-guineas, an' 'alf-crowns. 'Ere we are, sir—that's me—that's old Job Rogers!"

He pulled out from a capacious side-pocket a showy yellow handbill, and spread it out with a look of pride.

"There we are, sir—*the* Great Richardson Show, as performed before Royalty—together with Varieties. The Varieties comes a bit expensive, and don't always pay as well as they might—but they gives tone to the Show—an' it's tone wot we wants."

Martin Chaloner began to get interested. "There ain't a fair in the country but wot I knows the date of it, an' the best pitch when you gits there. It's rough, an' it's 'ard sometimes, sir; but I wouldn't change with the Queen o' Hengland in 'er palace—God bless 'er. An' then, yer see"—he stared at the fire meditatively—"there's compensations."

"Compensations; I'm afraid I don't quite understand you."

The old man glanced round him cautiously for a moment, and then bent nearer to the other.

"Supposin' you was in my place, guv'nor, an' you knew that when you was a-footin' it through the bitter cold, an' the sleet, an' the mud, an' the rain—or a-trampin' arter the carawan on a boisterin' hot day, with the sun a-boilin' the marrer out o' ye bones, so to speak; suppose you could think, while people was a-lookin' upon yer as a wagabond, an' a nobody—suppose you could think as you 'ad someone, far away in London, among the swells, a-'oldin' 'er own, an' a-treadin' it with the best of them, an' a-showin' 'er pretty face for all the world to look at, an' with never a thing to soil 'er pretty fingers, an' never nothink to do the livelong day but play the pianner, and do them delicate sorts of fancy work wot ladies does when the time 'angs 'eavy? Suppose you 'ad someone like that as was a lady, an' could 'old up 'er 'ead with the best of them, wouldn't that amount to compensation?"

"I suppose it would," said Martin, slowly. "Is there someone like that?"

"Is there? I should just think there was! Years ago, when 'er poor mother died, I swore to myself as she shouldn't never 'ave the 'ardships, an' the worry, an' all the rest of it that I'd 'ad. Yer see, sir, I'm old and tough, an' I likes the life, an' I shouldn't feel comfortable-like, if I woke up in the mornin', an' didn't 'ear the 'osses movin', an' didn't know as I was in the old van. But with a woman it's different; an' there she is—Lord love yer, sir—a lady to 'er finger-tips—an' 'er ole father is proud to git a glimpse of 'er sometimes, an' to know as she's well an' 'appy. It costs a bit, I don't mind sayin'; but I don't grudge a penny of it, an' I sends it to 'er reg'lar."

He got up, and emptied his glass and put on his hat. Martin Chaloner rose also, and held out his hand; the other glanced at his face for a moment, and then grasped the hand.

"Do you stay here long?" asked Martin. "Because, if you do—you might come in and see me again."

"Thank ye, sir; I take it as werry kind. I shall be 'ere for a matter of a day or two longer. I'm pitched down at the end o' the village. Good-night, sir."

Martin waited until the old man's footsteps had died away down the long echoing corridor, and then cautiously opened the door and followed him. He heard him pass out of the front door of the inn, and heard his firm quick tread upon the frosted road outside. He threw his big coat round him, put on his hat, and followed.

"I don't know why I should dog the old boy like this," he thought, "but there's some mystery here I can't understand, and perhaps I shall find out what's become of that sweet-faced girl. I can't rest till I find her; she seems to be carrying about with her, in her little hands, wherever she is, all the best part of me—all that's worth anything. Where is she? The old man thinks she is still in London, for there can be no doubt that he spoke of her to-night. He believes her rich and happy, and I found her slaving away to earn her own living. What does it all mean?"

The night was bright but moonless; only a few stars twinkled far overhead. Martin saw the upright sturdy figure of the old man going before him down the road, and cautiously followed, keeping well in the shadow of the cottages he passed. At the end of the village was a piece of waste common land, on which were set a couple of caravans of the ordinary gipsy type, and another covered van. Some horses were tethered near by, and he heard the bark of a dog as he drew nearer.

The old man had almost reached the first caravan, in the tiny window of which a light glowed, when a figure slipped out from behind it, and came forward swiftly to meet him. Martin Chaloner drew back in the shadow of a tree, and saw the old man stop with a little cry of surprise, and then go quickly forward and take the figure in his arms, and bend and kiss the face. It was the figure of a woman.

They drew away from the caravan, and walked slowly together towards where Martin was hidden. As the girl drew away from the man, and looked up into his face in the starlight, Martin saw the face he had fully expected to see—that of the girl he had met in the lodging-house in Regent's Park. It was quite impossible for him to move without being discovered; he stood quite still, and was forced to listen.

"Daddy," the girl was saying, "you mustn't send me away from you any more; it has all been a mistake. You only did it because you loved me—because you thought that you would make me a lady, and something better than you were yourself. Dear—there is nothing, and no one better than you on earth; and I have come back to you, because I am very, very tired, and because I need you. I remember, when I was a tiny child, how I played about on the grass, among the wheels and the horses, and what a joyous life it was; we've been deceiving ourselves, you and I, Daddy, and we've got to begin again. Daddy, you won't send me back again?"

"My dear, my dear!" exclaimed the old fellow tenderly, patting her head, "you'll break my heart. What have I been working for all these days but to make you a lady; to 'elp you, an' see that you were warm an' comfortable, and that nothink couldn't ever come nigh you, to fret or trouble you. The ole show was good enough for me, dear, but it wasn't good enough for you. Come, what 'as troubled you?"

She hid her head upon his breast and sobbed out her poor little story, of how a man—a gentleman—had been good and kind to her, and had told her that he loved her; of how she had loved him with all her passionate heart in return, and yet had had to leave him, and hide herself from him.

"It's no good, Daddy. All the money in the world, and all the pretending in the world, won't ever make me good enough or fine enough to be his wife, or to take my place by his side. I love him—oh! I can't tell you how much. If I didn't love him quite so well I might have tried to forget all the rest, and have listened to him. But I couldn't do that. Let me stay with you, for a little while, at least; let me think that I am a child again, and that I never tried to pretend I was a lady."

Martin Chaloner had made up his mind that he would slip away quietly, and hear no more; but the fear of again losing sight of the girl, especially after the words he had heard from her lips, was stronger than anything else; he stepped suddenly forward from his hiding-place, and confronted them.

The girl, with a cry, clung to her father; the old man drew his arm about her, and faced the other man angrily.

"You must listen to me for a moment, Mr. Rogers," said Martin, huskily, and at the sound of his voice the girl trembled and hid her face. "When I met you to-night I had no thought that your daughter was so near at hand; I had met her in London, and had learnt to love her. I am the man of whom she speaks, and, even though she should turn from me again to-night, I shall carry the blessed memory of her words with me to my grave. I feared that I should never look upon her face again; but Fate plays such strange tricks with us, and Fate sent me here to you, and brought us again together. I am a poor, idle, wandering dog, who hasn't even the merit that you possess of earning his bread by hard work; mine was all earned for me long before I was born. But your daughter, in spite of all she says, is the sweetest lady under Heaven, and I love her; I tell her so now, in the presence of her father. And I'll never give her up"—he laughed in his old, good-humoured fashion—"if I have to take to the caravan business myself."

The old man had by this time recovered from his astonishment. He nodded his head sympathetically.

"Spoken like a man, sir," he exclaimed, "and spoken like a gentleman."

"Daddy, you won't understand," began the girl, in a low voice.

"Forgive me, it's *you* won't understand," broke in Martin. "But I won't trouble you to-night; you're tired and upset. Mr. Rogers"—he turned, in his easy, natural fashion, to the old man—"what are we going to do with this young lady to-night? Will you let me take her back to the inn, and ask the landlady to find a room for her?"

"Thank ye kindly, sir; that's the very thing. Now run along, my dear, an' we'll talk about it in the morning. But Lord love ye, sir"—he turned towards Martin—"I'd like to see yer in the show line."

"Don't you make any mistake, old friend; I'd make a first-rate man at the business. Come along, Miss Rogers."

The man and the girl walked for some little distance down the road without speaking.

Martin was the first to break the silence.

"I met your father by accident to-night," he said, "and he told me the whole story of his darling in London, and all that he had done for her; how he had sent her money, and how she lived as a lady, with never a day's work to do."

She hesitated for a moment, and then turned to him, and put her hands on his arm.

"Oh, won't you understand? I thought of him, working hard in all weathers for me, and I could not bear to use the money that he sent me. It's all saved up—every penny of it; and some day I'll give it back to him, and tell him all about it. When he came to see me, he would never come to the house, for fear of shaming me; I used to meet him—God forgive me—in the streets, and he believed that the big house from which I came was my home; that I lived there as an honoured guest, instead of as a servant. And that is why—because it has all been such a blunder—that I want you to forget the words I said to-night, and which you never should have overheard."

He put his hands on her shoulders, as he had done once before, and looked down into her face in the starlight.

"Are you quite sure you want me to go and forget it?" he said.

She looked at him steadily for a moment, and then suddenly crept nearer to him, and bent her face down, and kissed his hands.

"Oh; my love—my dear love!" she whispered.

He took her in his arms, and put his face down, and whispered in reply:

"Do you think I would let you go now? Do you think I would give you up? You must never ask me that again, dear."

Presently she looked up at him, with a smile flitting across her face. "You don't even know my name," she said softly.

"What is it?" he asked.

"It was a name my father loved; he never thought how foolish it might sound in other ears. My name is Cinderella."

"Oh, wise father!" said Martin, laughing and kissing her. "It's the sweetest name in all the world."

They breakfasted joyously together, the two of them, the next morning in the coffee-room of the inn, and afterwards set out to find her father. All the village seemed astir, and people were coming and going in their best clothes; and the bells of the little church up on the hill were ringing out madly.

"Do you know what to-day is?" she asked, looking up into his face.

He looked down at her and pondered a moment, and then suddenly burst out laughing.

"Why—it's Christmas Day!" he exclaimed. "I've set out twice to try and spend Christmas in a new fashion; I didn't know I should spend it in such sweet company."

It was still quite early, and they went on to the end of the village, and through the trees, and so to the common. But when they got there they stopped, and stared at each other in dismay; the caravans were gone!

Without a word to each other, they went forward quickly, and came at last to the place where they stood in the darkness the night before. Martin's quick eye detected a scrap of paper, pinned to the trunk of the tree which had hidden him. He went forward, and took it down. "It's addressed to you," he said, and held it out to her. They stood side by side, and read it together.

"My deer,—This cums to ope as you will have a mery Chrissmas. You need not wurry about your ole dad. All my dreme has cum true, deer, an the ole show will karry me as long as i need eny karrying. He is a gentleman; no one can look in his eye without knowin that. I am better movin. The old van cums nateral to me, and I carnt change now. Youll find this when I'm gorn, an the Lord knows I karry the lightest hart of eny man this Chrissmas morninge. Send yore old dad a bit of the weding cake, and he'll lay it alongside ov your mother's. Good-bye; you are a lady, arter all.—JOB ROGERS."

The Adventures of an Actress.

XX.—THE ASSASSIN'S HAND.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

On the outskirts of the pleasant city of Norwich dwelt an old couple, John and Martha Lovelace by name. For nearly fifty years they had lived in their little cottage, the home that they loved, humble though it was, the scene, moreover of the one great sorrow of their life.

It had happened twenty years ago, when John was a hale and hearty man, and there were no streaks of white in Martha's hair. The Lovelace family were then four in number, for the old couple had been blessed with two children, a boy and a girl.

Dick Lovelace had always been a wild sort of lad, always fond of playing truant at school, of roaming the countryside like an untamed colt, birds'-nesting, and, it must be confessed, poaching, when he ought to have been more profitably employed over his books. And then he had run away for good, one dark night twenty years ago, leaving an almost illegible, badly-spelt note to say that he could bear the hum-drum country life no longer, but had run off to sea.

As is so often the case with such scapegraces, Dick had been the apple of his mother's eye. She was always ready to find some excuse for his wild pranks, and more than once interposed between father and son, when John had proposed the whip as an antidote to some escapade, more flagrantly outrageous than another.

Since that day nothing had been heard of the runaway. John Lovelace had long ago given up any idea of ever hearing of the boy again. Not so Martha. In her heart of hearts she always carried the belief that some day they would have news of the prodigal.

And the daughter? What had become of her? The same spirit of restlessness that seemed to have infected Dick, had invaded her young life. True, she had not stolen away like a thief in the night, yet she, too, had shaken the dust of the parental cottage off her feet, had gone to London, and had, by dint of the utmost exertion, won a place for herself upon the stage. As Jenny Lovelace she had made her name familiar to many a provincial stage, and now the trend of events had brought her to Norwich, and the proximity of her childhood's days.

Yet it must not be imagined that Jenny had allowed herself to forget entirely the old couple who had been responsible for her existence. From time to time she had sent them presents of money, with a short note to say that she was well and happy. Sometimes too, her heart would tell her that she was doing wrong in not going down to the little cottage in person and reminding the old parents of her existence in some tangible form. And yet she never went. Neither had she confided to any one, not even to Hazel Harlow, her bosom friend, the true story of her parentage.

It was a cold December morning. A bright fire burnt on the earth and threw a cheerful glow upon the simple furniture of the cottage kitchen. In front of the fire, smoking a well-blackened clay pipe, sat old John Lovelace. Martha, like the good old housewife she was, was bustling about, making the spotless cleanliness of the place still more spotless.

Suddenly there came a sharp rat-tat at the door. The next moment the latch was lifted, and an elderly man in the garb of a postman thrust in his head.

"Mornin'," he cried cheerfully, "mornin' John, mornin' to ye, Mrs. Lovelace. I've a letter for ye. A letter from furrin' parts."

Here was a surprise indeed. A letter from foreign parts. The postman disappeared, leaving the old woman peering with an almost frightened expression at the crinkly yellow envelope, adorned with an altogether unfamiliar and novel postage-stamp.

In the meanwhile John had risen from his chair, and had placed a pair of huge horn-rimmed spectacles upon his nose.

"Let's have a look at it, mother," he cried, "Who on earth can be writing to ye from over the sea?"

But Mrs. Lovelace's face had assumed an almost ashen hue. She sank down into a chair, and murmured in a low voice: "It's Dick, John. I'm sure it must be. Who else could it be? I knew we should hear of him again. Can it be true? Can it be true?"

John Lovelace took hold of the letter and gazed with awe at the crabbed, unfamiliar handwriting. Then, with trembling hand, he tore open the cover.

"Sit ye down, Marthy," he said gently. "Let me read it out. Maybe it's from some one else."

But the first words of the letter proved how true the old mother's instincts had been.

"Dear Mother"—a cry fell from Martha's lips. "I knew it, I knew it!" she cried, and the tears streamed down her withered cheeks. "Praise God, it's our Dick. Read on, father, read on."

"Dear Mother," the old fellow went on in a voice that trembled suspiciously. "I expect you will be very surprised to hear from me after all these years. I don't even know if this will find you. I hope it will, and that you and father are still living in the old cottage. For I'm coming home to see you. I've been a bad son to you, but I've never forgot you, and I hope you'll forgive me when you see me and hear my news. I never was much of a letter writer, so I shan't say any more. In a day or so I hope to be with you for I shall be here nearly as soon as my letter, when I shall tell you all that has happened. With love to you both and Jenny, I am your affec. son, RICHARD LOVELACE."

For a few moments after the reading of this somewhat meagre note the old couple sat motionless, gazing into one another's face. It seemed almost too good to be true. Dick was coming back. The silence of twenty long years had been broken, Dick was coming back.

John was the first to speak. "He sends his love to Jenny," he said somewhat huskily. "I wonder where Jenny is, mother. We heard from her not so very long ago. She sent us five pounds. She's been a good daughter to us has Jenny. Only I wish we'd seen something of her. It's a long time since she were here. I should like to write to her and tell her that Dick's coming back."

CHAPTER II.

"I'VE a long confession to make to you, Hazel."

It was Jenny Lovelace who spoke. The two girls were seated in the sitting-room of the lodgings they had taken in Norwich in view of the week they were to spend in that city, before proceeding to London for the final engagement of the *Good Samaritan* Company on tour.

"A confession," answered Hazel gaily. "Well, I'll promise you that you'll find a good father confessor in me. Begin, and let me see whether I can give you absolution."

But Jenny's face was very grave. Hazel looked at her in some consternation.

"What's amiss, Jenny?" she asked sympathetically.

"First of all," came the low-voiced answer, "I've followed in your footsteps and become engaged."

Hazel uttered a glad little cry. "Oh, Jenny," she said, "who to? I only hope he will make you as happy as Eric has me"—for the announcement of Hazel's engagement to Eric Monteith had now been publicly announced—"and when did it happen? And why didn't you tell me before?"

"Because it only happened last night, between the second and third acts of the show. It's to Raymond Venables. He asked me to marry him, and though I've never said a word to anyone, yet, I've cared for him a long time, only I didn't think he cared for me. But I asked him to say nothing about it until I'd had a talk with you. For oh, Hazel—"—the girl's voice was quite the reverse of what would have been expected from a newly-engaged person—"I'm not at all happy."

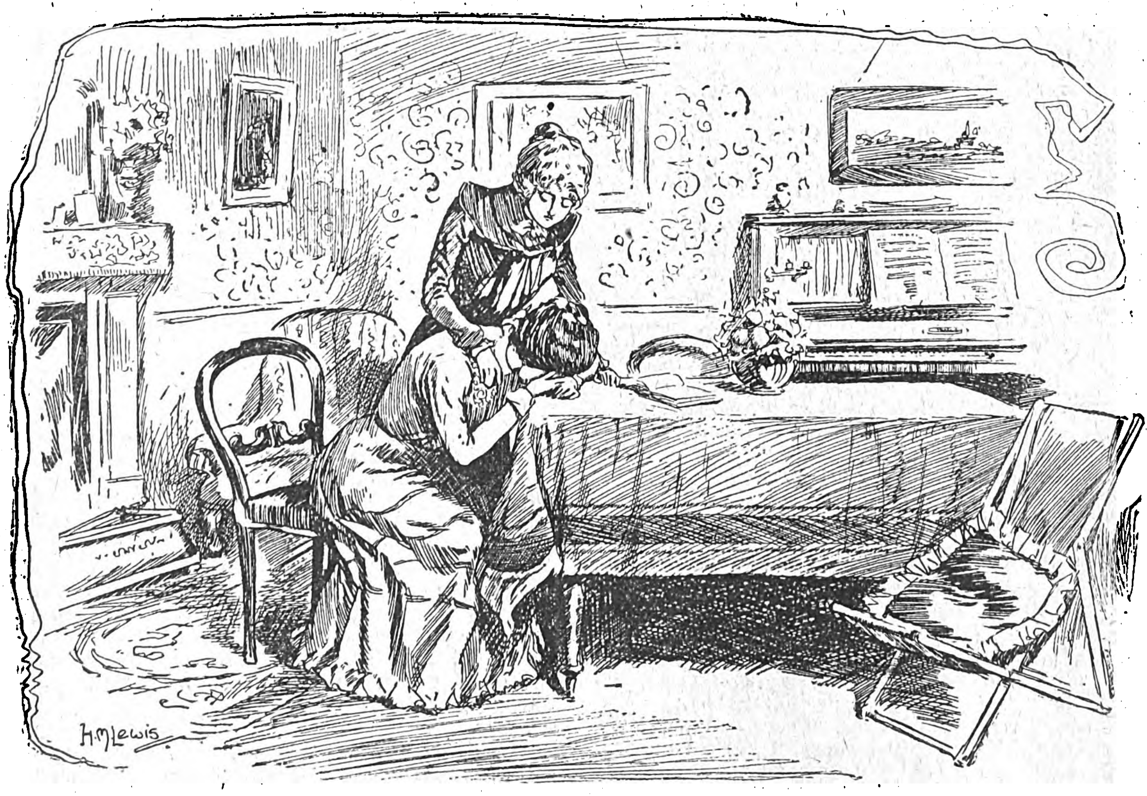
"Not at all happy!" echoed the other in a voice of real concern, rising and crossing to her friend's side. "Why, Jenny, dear, what on earth makes you talk like that? If you care for Raymond Venables, and he cares for you, surely nothing else can matter?"

"But that's not all," came the reply, in a low voice. "I've another confession to make. Haven't you ever wondered why I never spoke of my parents, Hazel?"

"No," answered Hazel stoutly, "It was quite enough for me to have you for my friend without bothering about your private affairs. What has that got to do with your engagement?"

"Just this, that Raymond thinks that I am well-born, and well connected, and I can't bear to tell him the truth that my parents are just simple cottagers, quite poor people. Oh, Hazel, I've been very wicked. And now I feel that I must tell him, and I can't help thinking that it will make a difference, that Raymond will never forgive me for not having told him before. And besides, it has been so cruel and cowardly on my part, to take no notice, or hardly any, of the poor old people that were responsible for bringing me into the world," and Jenny broke down entirely and burst into a flood of tears.

As can be well imagined, Hazel was seriously perturbed at such an outburst on the part of her friend.



Jenny broke down entirely, and burst into a flood of tears.

Little by little she drew the whole story from Jenny's lips, of the old couple living so near to the very place in which they then were, of how Dick Lovelace had run away, and how Jenny herself had followed her brother's example, though not in quite so covert a manner.

Hazel was rather at a loss to know what to say when Jenny had come to the end of her confession, and after a few moments' silence she said softly. "There is only one thing for you to do, Jenny. Tell Raymond everything that you have told me. If he really loves you he won't mind the fact that your parents are what they are. Go and see your parents and try and make up for having neglected them so long. I will go with you with pleasure. And why not ask Raymond to go too?"

"But I care for him so much," sobbed the other. "And suppose he should be angry with me for having deceived him. Supposing his love for me was to go when he found out how heartless I've been. It makes me feel a coward, Hazel."

"Then let me tell him for you?" went on Hazel. "Let me explain the whole story? And then to-morrow we will go and see your father and mother. You'll see that Raymond won't think any the worse of you because of an accident of birth.

True to her word, Hazel went off at once in search of the manager, whom she found in his office.

"Jenny has told me her news," she began, "and I need hardly say how happy I am. I think you are a very lucky man, Mr. Venables. But Jenny is not altogether happy, and I have come here on her behalf."

The manager looked puzzled, and somewhat perturbed. "Jenny unhappy?" he queried. "Why?"

In as few words as possible, Hazel explained the situation. When she had finished Venables held out his hand with a smile.

"If it's nothing worse than that," he said cheerily, "I don't mind. To be frank with you, Miss Harlow, my own father was a respectable cheesemonger in the Borough, in London. He's dead and gone now, poor old chap, and I've never talked about him, not because I was a bit ashamed of him, but merely because I don't see the use of obtruding one's private affairs into undue notice, especially on the stage. So you can give Jenny a kiss from me, and tell her just what I've told you, and we'll go and see her old people just whenever she's a mind. Why, hang it all, I suppose I ought to ask them to give their consent to my marrying their daughter."

CHAPTER III.

It was the second day after the arrival of Dick's letter. John and Martha had just finished their mid-day meal, and were seated before the fire, talking in low voices about the one topic that was now of any interest to them, the unexpected return of the long-lost son.

It was raining in torrents. Suddenly there came a knock at the door of the cottage. John started to his feet. The colour faded from Martha's face. The old couple exchanged glances. Neither spoke a word.

With tremulous steps Lovelace went across to the door, and threw it open. The wet rain blew in upon his face. A man was at the door, a tall well-knit figure, who entered the cottage almost stealthily. It was then seen that he was clad in the blue reefer jacket and trousers of a merchant sailor.

"Dick!" With a cry, Martha rose to her feet, and tottered across the room to fling herself into the sailor's arms. "Dick, my boy, is it really you?"

"Yes, mother, it's I." The voice seemed almost painfully rough. "I'm wet through. Isn't it awful weather? I've come straight on from London, and it's just as bad there."

A sharp stab of pain seemed to penetrate the old woman's heart. As for John, he could only stand as though spellbound, and regard the dripping figure before him. Was this the homecoming? Was this the way to re-enter the home that had been unvisited for twenty years?

The young man, a sturdy, brown-faced fellow enough, and by no means ill-favoured of face, turned awkwardly to his father.

"Hello, dad," he said, with an attempt at a smile, "how are you? You must excuse my coming on to you like this, but the fact is I had an accident in London. I had only just enough money to pay my fare. The fact is"—he spoke hurriedly, as though constrained to talk—"I haven't done what I hoped to do abroad. I'm stony broke. Nearly twenty years knocking about from 'Frisco to Sydney, and from Rio to the Bay of Biscay, is calculated to take the stuffing out of a fellow."

The old couple gazed helplessly at the young man, trying to take in what he meant. Then John, feeling that it was incumbent upon him to say something, remarked mechanically: "Ay, I suppose you're right, them furrin' parts must be something terrible. Why did ye run away, Dick?"

Dick shrugged his shoulders with a ghastly attempt at a smile. Then he went on in a reckless voice: "Hang it all, I don't know. I was a fool. It's a dog's life I've had, a dog's life."

Martha's tears were flowing freely now. She brushed aside the evidence of her despairing disappointment, and faltered out:

"Why, Dick, we thought—your letter said—you—"

"Yes, I know, I know," cried Dick, trying to keep his voice calm, "I wanted to let you down as gently as possible. The fact is, I've come the Dickens of a cropper. I've had a fearful streak of bad-luck! I want money, and I thought that perhaps you'd be able to help me. I'll pay it all back again in a day or two."

Dead silence followed these words. Then John advanced to the younger man's side. "Is that why you wrote to your mother," he said, in a low choked voice, "for money? You ask for money before you've told a word about how you've got on all these years, before you've even given your mother a kiss?"

"I can't help it," the sailor said fiercely. "I'm at my wits' ends. And to whom can a man come when he's down on his luck if it's not to the man to whom he owes his existence?"

This last speech proved too much for poor old Martha. She sank down in a chair, and burying her face in her hands, gave herself up to a paroxysm of weeping.

As for John, he seemed like a man dazed. He stood and looked at Dick with drawn, white face, trying to take in what it all meant. Then he cleared his throat and asked: "What do ye want money for, Dick? What bother have ye got into?"

"I can't tell you. I can only tell you this, that I'm in a fearful hole, and if I don't have a hundred pounds before to-morrow, I shall be clapped into gaol. It's no fault o' mine."

The old man answered him never a word. He turned away, and opening a door that led out of the tiny apartment, left mother and son alone.

The old woman raised her head as her husband disappeared. "Dick, Dick," she wailed, "What does it all mean? Are you really the little Dick that ran away from home twenty years agone?"

The other nodded. "I'm sorry," he began almost shamefacedly, "but Fate's been too hard for me. I can't help it. I'm broke."

"And so is my heart!" moaned the old woman. "This is the homecoming we have looked forward to so much."

"Why won't you understand?" broke in the man roughly, "What else was left for a poor broken wretch such as I to do? It's you who drove me off in the first place, and now you expect me to come back and deceive you about my real position."

"But your letter, Dick, remember what you said in that, how that—" but again she was cut short.

"What's the good of perpetually harping on the same string? It's facts we've got to deal with, not useless sentiment. I hoped when I ran away that I should come back rich, and be able to help you. But I can't, so you had much better do for me what I would have done for you if I had been able, set me on my legs again. It's only a temporary loan I want. I'll pay you back," but the re-entry of the old man cut short any further excuses which the young fellow would have put forward.

Lovelace had a coarse canvas bag in his hands, which he threw down upon the old oak table of the kitchen.

"Here's all the money we have," he said, in a hollow voice. "It's about a hundred and fifty pounds, and I thought as how it would just do to keep the missus and me from the Union. But if it is to save you from disgrace, Dick, well, you must take it, and I must try and make a fresh start."

It was for this, then, that Dick Lovelace had returned after twenty years.

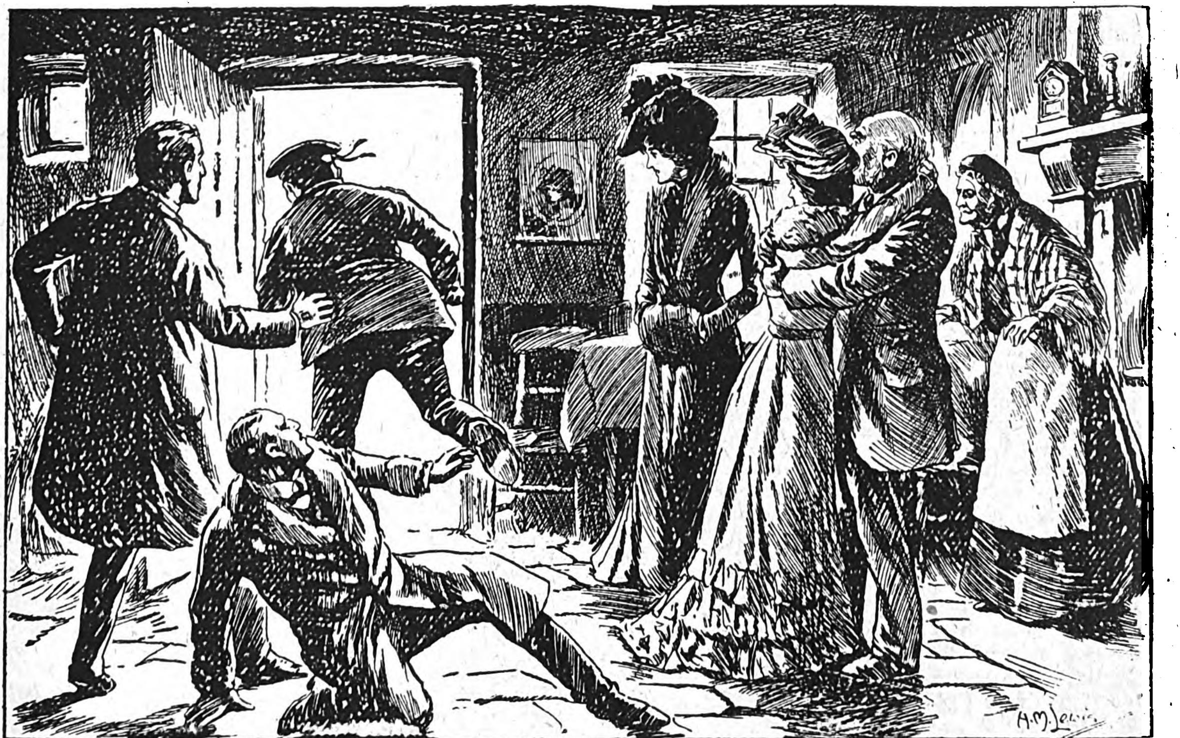
CHAPTER IV.

Upon a bed in the accident ward of the London Hospital, lay the motionless form of a man. So still he lay that the casual observer would have been perfectly justified in believing him to be dead. His grey face was swathed in a bandage, that was bound turbanwise across his forehead. Over him bent a young doctor, beside whom was standing a nurse in uniform.

"A bad case," the surgeon was saying, "and he's been unconscious all night. He's concussed badly, and there's an ugly wound upon his chest that was only prevented from being fatal by the merest accident. He may be unconscious for another twenty hours, or—" he shrugged his shoulders with the air of a man who was used to passing sentence on such desperate cases as these without more ado than that of an expressive shrug. "If there's any change in his condition, nurse, let me know at once."

The 'sister' gazed down upon the motionless figure with compassion. He was quite a young man, with thick chestnut curls behind the bandage, and a clean-shaven handsome face. His arms were tattooed profusely, for he was a sailor who had been picked up in a quiet street off the docks, and brought to the hospital for dead.

"Poor young fellow," the nurse murmured to herself. "How terribly sad to think that he should have been struck down like this." She was only a probationer, and was not yet accustomed to all the terrible scenes that the servants of a big London hospital are daily called upon to witness.



He dashed out through the door, sweeping both Eric and Venables off their feet.

Suddenly a long shuddering cry left the man's lips. He gave a faint movement. The nurse was instantly all alert.

A faint colour came back to his grey face. "I'd better call Dr. Ramsden," she muttered.

By the time the doctor returned to the sick man's bedside there was a distinct change in the condition of the patient. His lips were moving fitfully. Snatches of incoherent sentences left his mouth. The delirium that so often accompanies a bad concussion of the brain had seized hold of him.

"Keep her before it. Let her run—the dirty weather can't last—this is only half-a-gale—there's no beating to windward in this, though—" the poor fellow was evidently aboard ship once more.

Then his voice changed. "I tell you it was my fault, Bill," he murmured and so low that it was all that the doctor could do to catch what he said. "It was all my fault but when I get home again, I mean to make up for all I did—better stow away some of that canvas, sir—we shall have our sticks carried away if not," and so off again into the technicalities of a man before the mast.

Then suddenly his tones changed again, and he plunged into the recital of a story that made the doctor listen with every nerve strained, a story that suddenly gave him a clue to the whole black business that must have been the cause of bringing him into the great hospital.

It was just as if the doctor had suddenly been translated to the forecastle of a sailing-ship. The delirious man addressed him by name, the name of 'Bill.'

"Listen, Bill," he said, "and I'll tell you why I'm going back to England. Then you can judge for yourself, and you've been a good mate to me, Bill. That's why I tell you what I've never told a soul since I made my pile."

The doctor listened to the story with bated breath. Then he took a note-book out of his pocket, and made a note of what he had heard.

"This is a business for the police, not a doctor," he muttered, "but at least what the poor fellow says ought to be tested. And for the sake of what I've just listened to, I'll see the matter through myself."

True to his word, as soon as his duties would allow him, Dr. Ramsden went round to a neighbouring police-station, and laid the case, as he imagined it to be, before the divisional superintendent. The official heard him out attentively, for Ramsden was known and respected in the neighbourhood.

"There's certainly something in what you say, sir," said the superintendent, when Ramsden had finished his story, and I'll telephone to headquarters at once. From all accounts, unless the poor fellow was romancing in his delirium, the matter calls for urgent attention. Anyhow, I'll do what I can to have the matter thoroughly sifted."

CHAPTER V.

"Well, it's no good waiting for the weather to think better of itself," said Hazel. "We've waited two days now. If we go on like this we shall find ourselves at the end of our tether, and on the way to London. What do you say, Jenny? Shall we go and see your parents this afternoon? I'm longing to see them, and I'm sure you ought to be doing the same."

"So am I," answered Jenny in a subdued tone," and yet I can't help looking forward to the visit with a certain amount of apprehension. Ever since I had that talk with you about it Hazel, I've been thinking how almost criminal it has been of me to neglect them so long. And now that you and Raymond have been so good to me about it, why it makes my conduct stand out in all the more horrid a light. And yet I do long to see them and ask for forgiveness. I should like, too, to try and make up in some way for the long years of neglect."

"I'm awfully glad to hear you speak like that, Jenny," replied the other gently, "because I must acknowledge that your conduct has not been all it should have been I can't help feeling how awfully sad and lonely it must have been for them both all these years, with their only son and daughter away from them. I suppose you've never heard anything of your brother since he ran away," for Jenny had told the story of her poor old parents to her friend.

"Not a word, I'm afraid he must be dead. Oh, Hazel, how wicked and thoughtless I've been. Yes, let's go this afternoon. Raymond and Eric will be round here directly. So let's get ready."

Hardly were the words out of her mouth before the two young men were announced.

Hazel at once told them that Jenny and she were desirous of making the expedition to the cottage that had been the former's home, and needless to say, both the lovers were willing to fall in with the plans of their respective brides to be.

"But we can't walk there in this weather," said Eric, "wait till I go and fetch a carriage from the "Maid's Head," a plan, needless to say, that found ready favour with the two girls.

There was but scanty conversation between the quartette during the drive that took them through Norwich, and out into the open country. Each was fully occupied in his or her own reflections. Upon all the feeling lay heavy that they were in a way about to participate in a particularly solemn event, though as is so often the case, the reality was to be far more poignant than the anticipation.

At last the carriage came to a halt. Eric was the first to alight, to find himself standing in a lonely, rain-swept road, opposite a small thatched cottage that was set back from the road, and with a trim little garden facing it.

Giving directions for the carriage to await their coming out, Eric helped the ladies out in silence.

Jenny was very pale. "Come on," she whispered to Hazel, who stood silently sympathetic at her side, "Let us go inside."

They walked up to the weatherbeaten door, with the two men following close at their heels. The sound of voices within caused them to pause irresolutely. A man's voice rang out with startling distinctness, in rough, almost fierce accents: "Thank you, dad, it's only for a day or two. I'll repay it. It's a rum sort of home coming, but—well, what's the use of crying over spilt milk?"

To the four outside the words could be heard as plainly as though they were inside the house itself. They stole furtive glances at each other. Then another voice, a quavering and aged one, evidently a woman's, sent the blood into Jenny's face, and caused her to hold her breath in almost fear.

"But you're not going, Dick?" the old voice wailed out, "You haven't come back after all these years only to go away again?"

The words seemed to galvanise Jenny into sudden action. "Dick!" she gasped out, "Merciful Heaven, it's Dick come back! What can it all mean?" And the next moment she had flung open the door, and stormed inside.

In the centre of the kitchen, with a coarse canvas bag in his right hand, a man was standing, a young fellow with a tanned face, clad in seaman's garb. On either side of him stood her father and mother, both with grief-stricken countenances.

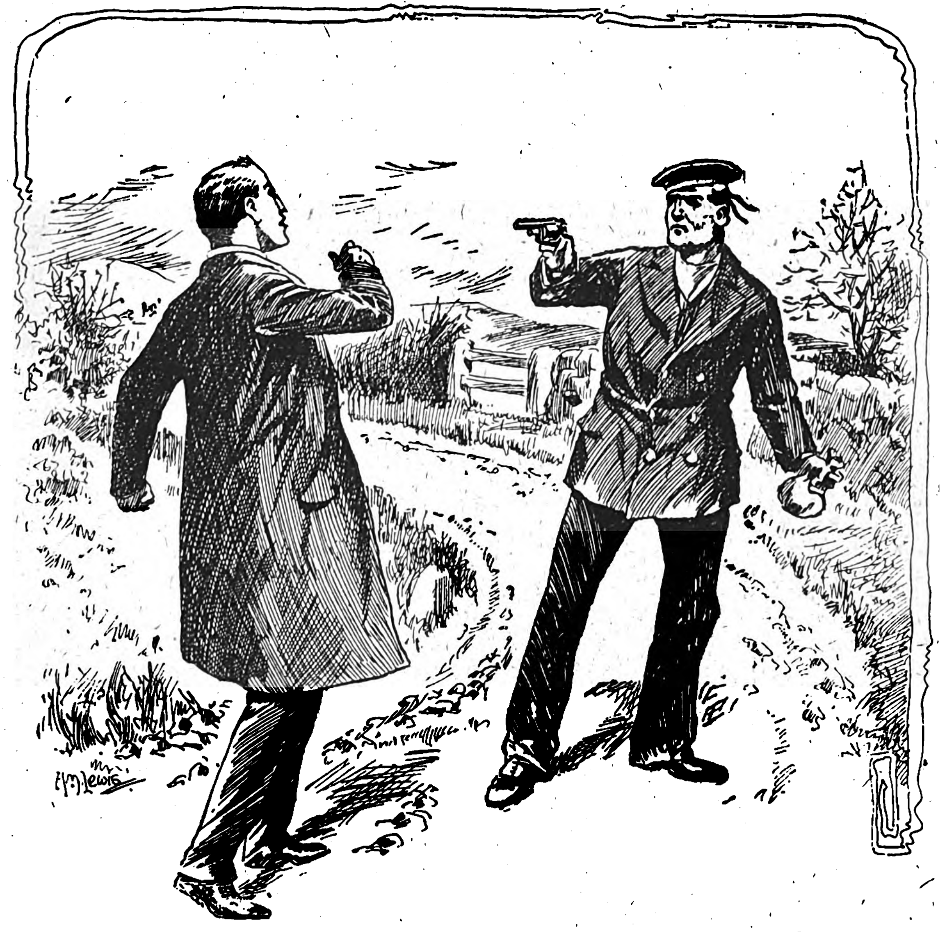
As Jenny entered, the young fellow turned round with a quick lithe action, and, seeing the other three beside her, uttered an exclamation of the purest astonishment.

"What does this mean?" cried Jenny, "Is this Dick? Father, mother, don't you know me? I'm Jenny, your Jenny, come to see you."

"Jenny!" It was John Lovelace's voice. He tottered forward, and held out his arms. The next moment Jenny's head was upon his breast.

Then Dick Lovelace did an extraordinary thing. He gave vent to a cry of rage, and springing forward, the canvas bag still clenched firmly in his right hand, dashed out through the door, sweeping both Eric and Venables off their feet with the impetuosity of his movement.

Eric found his feet in an instant. His quick brain began to have some faint glimmering of the true state of affairs. He threw one swift glance around him. The next moment he had dashed out through the open door, and was away in hot pursuit of the runaway.



The next moment a revolver was pointed at Monteith's head.

The memory of the days when he had first won laurels upon the cinder path at Oxford came back to him, as with elbows against his sides, bounding forward upon his toes with all the elegant ease of a practised sprinter, he set himself to the task of running the other man down.

It was a strange race. Neither was it long before the fugitive discovered that he was pursued.

A glance over his shoulder as he sped along the road heavy with mire, showed him the quick, strenuous figure of Monteith bounding along in his wake with his long, easy, practised stride.

"The going's more heavy than I care about," ran Eric's unspoken thoughts, "and I'm shockingly out of training for a cross-country contest like this. And that fellow can run too. I haven't gained much upon him yet. I wonder what he's got inside that canvas bag. He seems to clutch it pretty tightly. But I think I'm pulling him back slowly."

Slowly the gap between the two lessened. Inch by inch Eric drew up to the runaway. A wild feeling of exultation seized hold of him. He knew that he had worn his man down at last.

Neither was the other slow to realise this fact himself. He threw a look over his shoulder again. Another ten yards, and his unknown hunter would have closed with him.

With a cry of baffled rage and fury he spun suddenly round and faced Monteith. His hand went to his breast, the hand that was unencumbered by the canvas bag that had already aroused Eric's curiosity, and that contained, as we know, the hard-earned savings of poor old John Lovelace. The next moment a revolver was pointed at Monteith's head. But Eric saw the movement in time. He ducked quickly as the shot rang out. A bullet whistled over his head. Then, before the fellow had time to fire again, Monteith's arms were round his middle, and he was thrown violently to the ground.

His head came against a big stone in the roadway, effectually knocking out what little resistance was left in him.

The race was over, the victory was with the trained athlete.

CHAPTER VI.

When Eric got back to the little cottage, after having disposed of his captive at a neighbouring farm, securely bound until he could send the police to apprehend him, with a substantial guarantee to the farmer of his own *bona-fides*, it was to find that yet another actor had appeared upon the scene, in the person of a Scotland-Yard detective.

The canvas bag Eric also brought back. The story he was to hear had best be told in the detective's own words.

Doctor Ramsden was responsible for this, which was in fact the substance of the delirious man's story in the hospital.

"After the poor chap had raved a bit," the detective said, "he suddenly changed his voice. He seemed to think that he was aboard ship again, and talking to a mate named Bill. As near as I can remember, this is what the doctor said came from his lips:

"'I ran away from home twenty years ago, Bill. I left my poor old father and mother, without caring a bit what became of them. I got to South America, and there as you know, I made my pile. Thank goodness that the money's safely banked. We've been good pals, you and I, Bill, and I've told you all about the old folks, and where they live, haven't I? Yes, so sure as my name's Dick Lovelace, I'll get back to Norwich—why, what's the matter, Bill?—what's that you say? ah, my head.'"

"And then the poor fellow set to raving again, but the doctor had heard enough. He saw it all. How that the poor fellow had confided in his false friend, who must have knocked him on the head, and come off to Norwich, to try and rob the people whom he knew would be ready to believe he was their son, as they hadn't seen him for twenty years."

The detective's audience had listened to him spellbound. After he had finished, poor old Martha broke out afresh into a terrible outburst of weeping. It all seemed so unreal, so horribly incredible to her. Small wonder that her simple old mind refused to take in the full meaning of the dark story. Jenny was sobbing in her father's arms. Yet he found heart to whisper.

"Then it wasn't our Dick after all. Thank God for that."

But it was not until many weeks after that the real Dick Lovelace was enabled, when he slowly struggled back to consciousness and health, to supply the full details of the sinister story.

It appeared that the false Dick's real name was Bill Adams, and that he was the mate of the vessel that had brought young Lovelace back to England. Dick had first met Adams in Rio, and his honest heart warming up to a fellow countryman in that far-distant land, he had taken him fully into his confidence, and told him all about the old people towards whom his footsteps were now bent. Apparently Adams was a man absolutely without principle, a man, too, who was heavily in debt. He must, from Dick's story, have retained the impression that the old couple in Norwich were in far better circumstances than they really were.

For it seemed incredible that he should have risked so much for the hope of such small plunder that he could get from old John and his wife.

But Fate, had proved too strong for Bill Adams. He had shot his bolt, and his own villainy had brought him to the ground.

The old couple were rather overwhelmed when Venables told them the real reason that had brought him to see them, how that he had come to ask them if he might pay his addresses to Jenny with a view of early matrimony. It was John who answered him.

"She's always been a good daughter to us," he said after a pause, "and I hope as how you'll make her happy, sir. I'm sure our Jenny's fit to marry the highest gentleman in the land. She ain't rough, like me. She's a lady. I gives her to you, Mr. Venables, with an old man's blessing."

* * * * *

It was a clear cold morning in January. The scene is again the old cottage where John and Martha are alone.

There came a quick rat-tat-tat at the door. With surprising agility for a man of his years, John sprang from his chair and threw it open. A man entered the room, followed by a girl.

"Father, mother, it's I really this time, your son Dick come back to you safe and sound."

"Dick!" The word fell from the lips of the two old people simultaneously. The next moment the young fellow had his strong arms round them, tears of joy were running down old Martha's furrowed cheeks.

Then Dick spoke. "I've brought some one with me, mother," he said gently, "someone I want you to care for very much for my sake. I've brought you a new daughter, the woman who pulled your son back to life after Bill Adams had done his best to kill me. Maggie, this is mother and father. This is Maggie"—to the old people he spoke now—"who was my nurse in the hospital, and who has promised to become my wife."

Then Dick drew his old parents to their chairs in the chimney corner, and with his sweetheart by his side, told them the story of the twenty years he had spent out there across the seas.

"And I am rich, now," he said in conclusion, "there's no need for you to bother any more about the future. There's quite enough for all of us. I'm going to take a farm down here, and you and dad, mother, have got to come and live with Maggie and me. We've settled all that between us, Maggie and I, so you needn't think that you'll be putting us out, or anything like that. You shall have your own rooms in the house, and dad can help me to get straight, and Maggie says she wants you to teach her housekeeping, mother."

Before the end of the month, Maggie and Dick were married, and John and Martha were installed in their new quarters as their son's guests for the remainder of their lives.

The remainder of the week at Norwich passed away uneventfully enough so far as *The Good Samaritan* Company were concerned.

The end of the tour was now in sight. Next week would see the Company in London, to fulfil a final engagement at the Coronet Theatre in Notting Hill.

And after the tour was really over, with the dawn of the New Year, the year that was to bring such sweet content to old John Lovelace and his wife, there was to be a double wedding, when Eric and Hazel, Raymond Venables and Jenny Lovelace, were to enter upon a new life as wedded couples.

(Next week's "Short Stories" will contain the final adventure of Hazel Harlow in her theatrical career. In it Hazel will make her bow for the last time before a public of readers who have evidently followed her adventures with the keenest appreciation and interest, as the numerous letters received on the subject have testified. This episode will be found to be no less enthralling than its forerunners, relating, as it does the last desperate attempt of Hazel's most hated enemy to bring about her undoing.)

Detective Competition.

First Prize . . . £5.

Second to Eleventh Prizes 10s. each.

And Numerous Other Prizes of Books and Pencil-cases.

Conditions.

(1.) The first prize will be awarded to the competitor who sends in the most complete list. The second to eleventh prizes will be awarded to the senders of the ten next most complete lists, and so on.

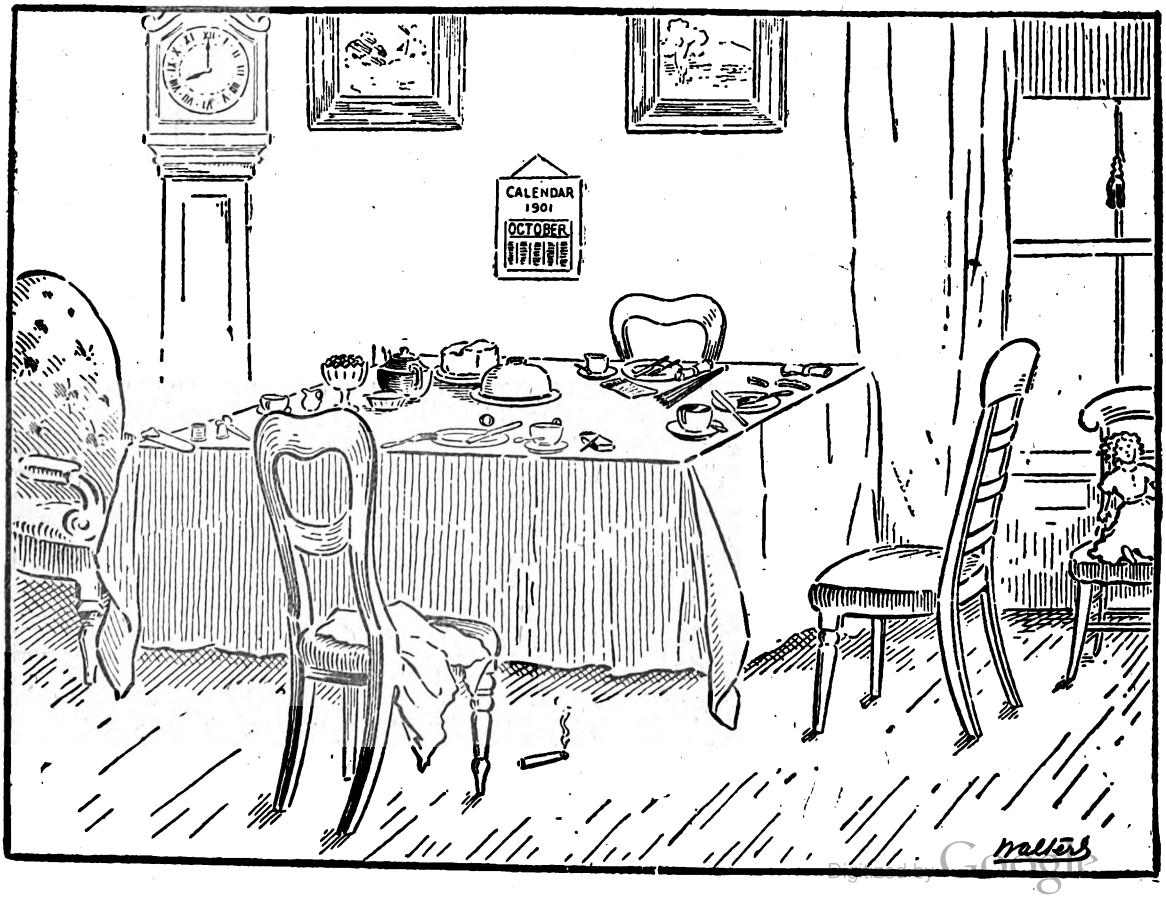
(2.) Send your attempts, written on one side of the paper only, in an envelope marked "Detective," to *Short Stories*, 18 Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., so as to arrive by first post on Tuesday, December 31st.

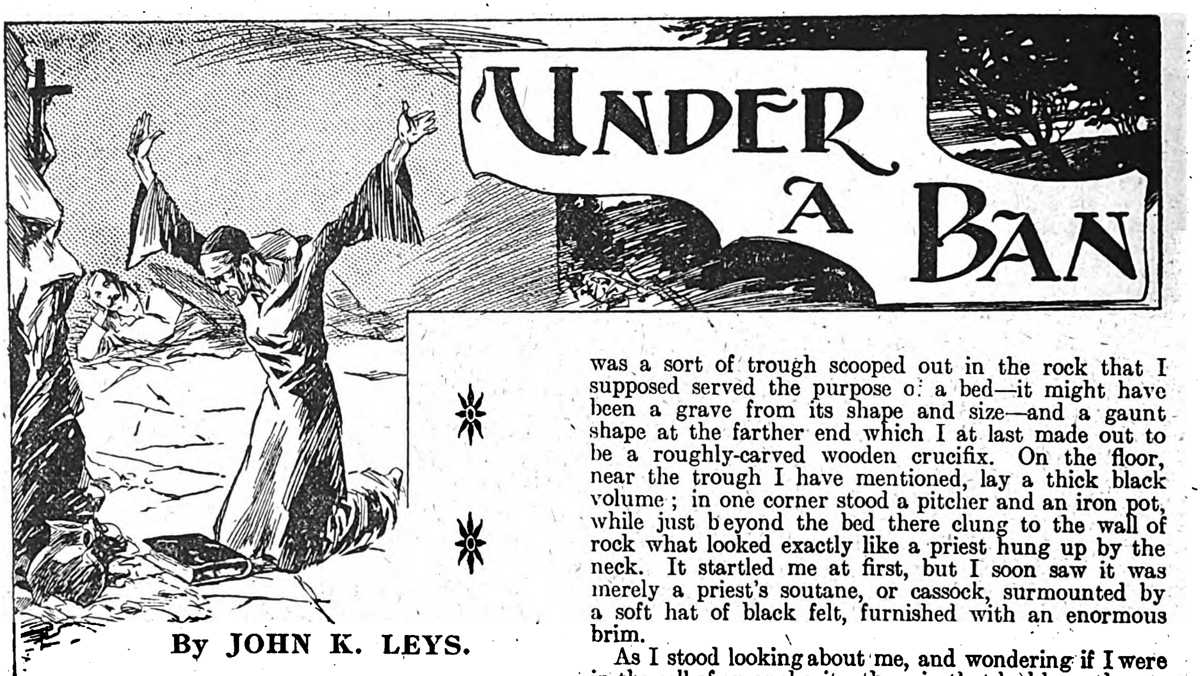
(3.) In the event of a tie, the prizes will be divided at the Editor's discretion, and competitors must only enter on that understanding.

Below is given the picture of a room from which the number of occupants, their habits and peculiarities can be gathered. What you have to do is to write your answers to the following questions.

1. (a) Number of adults, if any. (b) Why?
2. (a) Number of children, if any. (b) Why?
3. (a) Nature of meal. (b) Why?
4. (a) Who of them, if any, is left-handed? (b) Why?
5. (a) Who of them, if any, is careless? (b) Why?
6. (a) Who of them, if any, is very tidy? (b) Why?
7. (a) Who of them, if any, has a moustache? (b) Why?
8. (a) Who of them, if any, has bad sight? (b) Why?
9. (a) In which chair, if any, was a female sitting? (b) Why?
10. (a) In which chair, if any, was a young man sitting? (b) Why?

For example, the answer to question No. 7 should be written: 7. (a) The man who occupies the chair at the end of the table facing the arm-chair. (b) He has a moustache-cup before him.





UNDER A BAN

By JOHN K. LEYS.

SOME years ago I was in Mexico prospecting for silver. Silver mines were more worth having in those days than they are now; and on the whole I did pretty well. The adventure I am going to tell happened to me in the early eighties, when I was wandering, a lonely and disappointed man, among the peaks of the Sierra Madre.

It was growing towards dusk, and I should have lost my way if it had not been for the fact that all ways were much the same to me just then. I knew the direction I was going in, and that was all. I had seen nothing but some wretched coyotes all day, and had no prospect but that of camping out with only a morsel of jerked beef for supper, when I was surprised at seeing a bright flame on the mountain side, a little to the right, and some distance above me.

Without an instant's hesitation I made for the fire, thinking, of course, that it had been made by a homeless wanderer like myself; when I saw to my surprise that it was built in front of an adobe, or mud hut, such as are common in that part of the country.

The strange thing was to see a human habitation in that desolate region, some miles from the nearest village, twenty-nine from the nearest township. The hut was built under the lee of a rock which formed one of its walls. It was, in fact, what is called a lean-to. I peered about as well as the gathering darkness would allow me, but could see no one.

Quietly dismounting, I went forward, holding my horse's bridle in one hand, and a loaded revolver in the other. But I walked right up to the door of the hut without seeing any one.

I was surprised at this, for the state of the fire showed that the man who had built it could not be very far away; but I was yet more astonished when I lifted the sheet of bark that served for a door, and glanced inside the hovel. None of the rude furniture common in camp life was to be seen—no deal boxes made up to serve as tables, no stump chairs, no rough shelving, no mining tools, no whisky-bottle candle-stick. Instead, there was a sort of trough scooped out in the rock that I supposed served the purpose o: a bed—it might have been a grave from its shape and size—and a gaunt shape at the farther end which I at last made out to be a roughly-carved wooden crucifix. On the floor, near the trough I have mentioned, lay a thick black volume; in one corner stood a pitcher and an iron pot, while just beyond the bed there clung to the wall of rock what looked exactly like a priest hung up by the neck. It startled me at first, but I soon saw it was merely a priest's soutane, or cassock, surmounted by a soft hat of black felt, furnished with an enormous brim.

As I stood looking about me, and wondering if I were in the cell of an anchorite, the rain that had been threatening to fall all the afternoon came down in a torrent, a deluge that forced every living thing to seek for shelter. The fire was reduced in a moment to a heap of smouldering ashes, and my horse, poor fellow, nosed his way past me into the hut.

I backed him up against the rock, where there was just room for him to stand, and I had scarcely done so when the dark interior was made yet more dark by a tall figure appearing in the doorway.

I was in the act of forcing my steed to vacate his comfortable corner under the rock, when the owner of the hut—for it was he—stepped forward, placed a wet palm on the creature's steaming flank, and gravely shook his head. It was a sign that the animal might remain where it was.

"I'm awfully sorry I let the brute push its way in," I began; but I got no answer. I heard a fumbling in one corner, then the striking of a match, and next moment the glimmer of a wax candle-end from a tiny shelf lit up the hut.

The man now revealed was tall and spare, so tall that his head seemed to reach to the roof of the adobe—so spare that the candle-light made his thin face seem positively transparent. He wore a stained and patched cloak, now dripping with wet, but he did not seem to mind this in the least.

With one hand he took off his hat, and with the other he made a sweeping gesture, as much as to intimate that the hut and its contents were at my disposal. At the same time his face was lit up by a smile of singular sweetness. But when I began to thank him, renewing my apologies for my intrusion, his eyes fell before mine, and he stood humbly before me, his broad-brimmed hat in his hand, like a servant in the presence of his master.

The only response he made was to smile and shake his head, from which I understood that my entertainer was deaf or dumb—perhaps both.

My host now set about preparing supper. From a corner he produced a dish filled with a quantity of boiled beans, and as he placed the beans on a log which was the only furniture which the hovel possessed, he gave a glance at the ashes of the fire, as much as to say that they must be eaten cold, since the hut had no chimney. It was then, I think, that I first noticed the extreme sweetness in the expression of my host's face. It was not a handsome face, by any means, but it positively shone with what I may call an exalted, an etherealised benignity, that I felt something of the wondering devotion which one reads of the old saints inspiring in their followers. No mere physical beauty, in man or in woman, could have produced the same effect on me.

The beans, with a loaf of coarse bread, and a pannikin of water from the pitcher, formed our supper. I produced my jerked beef, and invited my host to partake of it, but with a bow of acknowledgment he declined. We sat, one on either end of the log, with the beans and bread between us, and ate our food.

During the progress of the silent meal I was struck by the emaciated appearance of my host's face and hands, and of his whole figure—a result which I attributed to the unwholesome spareness of his diet. Tearing a leaf out of my pocket-book, I wrote upon it in Spanish: "You ought not to refuse to eat meat. Your health is suffering for the want of it."

He read the paper when I handed it to him, but merely shook his head with a smile by way of answer.

Again I wrote: "I know something of medicine, and I tell you it is slow suicide," and handed the leaf to him.

For an instant a troubled look crossed the man's face, but in a moment it was gone, and the old imperturbable smile appeared again. With a shrug of the shoulders that must have seemed somewhat unfeeling, I tore up the paper, and, rising from my seat, began to get my horse out, and picket him close to the hut. The rain had now ceased, and the new moon shone through the foliage like the face of a friend.

When I returned to the hut I found that its owner had made what preparations he could for our night's rest. He had lighted a small lamp surrounded by a ruby-coloured glass, and suspended it before the crucifix at the other end of the hut. This gave us light enough to turn in by, for the candle-end had burnt itself out. From the trough-like sleeping-place in the wall my host had brought a bundle of bean-straw, which he had spread on the floor for me. I at once began to gather it up with the intention of returning it to its place: but a gentle, firm hand was laid on my arm, and I desisted, as a child might have done, without a word. Then my host held out his right hand, but suddenly withdrew it, and lay down at full length in his sleeping place.

In the middle of the night I awoke, and looked around me without stirring. At the farther end of the hut, opposite the crucifix, my host was kneeling, his arms outstretched, as the arms of the Christ before him. How long he had been kneeling there I could not tell. But after a time the strain on his muscles became insupportable; he joined his hands, and bending forward till they touched the ground and his forehead rested upon them, he remained in that posture for some time.

And then again the arms were raised, and slowly outstretched as they had been before. From time to time the low sound of a voice reached me, but no form of word, and once at least I caught the sound of a sob.

I could only lie still. To rise, even for the purpose of quitting the hut would have been to disturb and annoy the recluse, who fancied himself unobserved. I lay and watched till I again fell asleep.

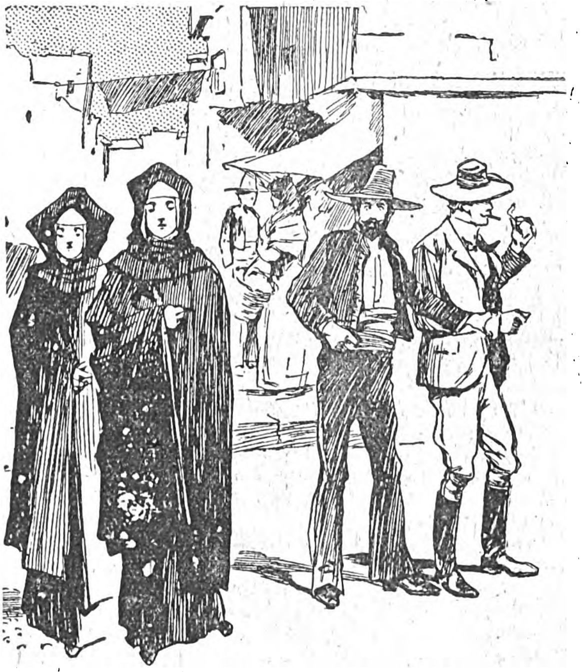
When I next awoke it was broad daylight. I could hear my horse moving about outside. My host was nowhere to be seen. The remains of the dish of beans and the bread were placed within reach of my arm, as if inviting me to eat; but I had no appetite for such hard fare at that hour of the day. I went out, sat down and lit my pipe, and waited for my host. Two hours—three—went by, and he did not come. At length I was forced to the conclusion that he did not mean to return till I had gone.

I saddled my horse, but before I rode away I did a thing of which I felt ashamed while I did it. I looked at the volume I had seen lying beside my host's sleeping-place. It was a Latin breviary, and in it I found a name written: "*Johannes Salvinos, Sacerdos,*" and below the edge of the depression that formed the bed I found cut into the stone in rude letters:

"But I, as a deaf man, heard not, and as one that is dumb, who openeth not his mouth."

• • • • •

It was only natural that, at my first return to the haunts of men, I should make some inquiries about the hermit of the Sierra Madre. But I was met on all sides with looks of aversion and contempt. None seemed willing to speak of a man who was held to be for some reason accursed. And it soon became evident that little or nothing was known of the solitary. He was a priest, all were agreed, who had in some way sinned against his vows, and was undergoing punishment inflicted by his ecclesiastical superiors. None knew where he had come from, except that it must have been from a long way off.



My companion seemed struck with astonishment, and stood staring after them for a moment before going on.

No one had ever heard him utter a single syllable. He never appeared in the village except to purchase bread or beans, and these commodities were generally placed outside the door by the seller at night and removed by the purchaser before morning, so that all personal intercourse might be avoided. My heart rebelled against this inhuman treatment of a man who, my instinct told me, was better, not worse, than his fellows; but I knew that I was powerless to aid him. Indeed, I was convinced that he would not accept any mitigation of his punishment from any one. I was forced to go on my way and leave him to his fate.

Twelve months went by, and I happened to be in a Mexican town many miles distant from the lonely hut amid the mountains.

I was passing through the principal street one day in the company of a friend—Señor Vicayez—when two nuns with down-bent heads and faces, wrapped in linen like the faces of the dead, crossed the street in front of us. My companion seemed to be struck with astonishment, and stood staring after them for a moment before going on. A few minutes later the nuns crossed our path a second time, and again my friend stared at one of them as if in great surprise. As she came closer I observed her with some curiosity. She was tall and graceful, and walked as if with a natural air of command, a few inches in advance of her companion. In spite of the deathlike pallor of her countenance, and the disfigurement caused by her dress, I could see that she must have been a very beautiful woman.

"What makes you stare at that nun, Vicayez?" I asked. "One might have supposed that the brides of the church would have been safe from your all-devouring eyes."

"Don't be profane, Señor Englishman," said my friend, half in jest, half in earnest. "I know that you British have no feelings of reverence, but that need not make you talk like a pagan."

"Tell me, then, what made you stare so at that nun—the tall one—and I will apologise."

"If I looked a second time at the reverend mother, it was with surprise to see her walking in the public streets. It is the first time, I venture to say, that she has been seen outside the convent walls since she took the veil three years ago. And to think that only a short time before that Donna Isabella was the belle of the city, foremost in every gaiety, the best dancer, the most consummate flirt, the most fascinating—but there! I cannot describe her. You should have seen her!"

"And what made the fascinating Donna Isabella bury herself alive in a convent?"

"Ah! That is a strange story, and a sad one, too. Come into my house—it is close by—and I will tell you the tale over a cigar and a cup of coffee."

When the coffee had been tasted, and the cigars lighted, Señor Vicayez began by saying that after serving as an occasion for a greater number of duels than twenty ordinary girls, Donna Isabella had married one of the wealthiest and most popular of cabaleros—Señor Martin del Laguno.

"It was about a year after the wedding that the whole town was amazed to hear that the body of a cabalero of good birth and greatly respected, Señor Galtazar, had been found on the steps of the principal church with a stiletto between his shoulder blades. His pockets were empty, and a finger-ring containing a diamond of great value, which he always wore, had disappeared from his finger. This seemed to point to murder by a thief; but there were some, even then, who professed to think that the murder had been prompted by vengeance, and that the thefts had been committed merely for the sake of keeping up appearances.

It seemed as though the murderer would never be discovered, but ere Galtazar had been a week in his grave the police made a sudden swoop on one of the murdered man's chief friends, and accused him of being guilty of causing Galtazar's death. This person was none other than Donna Isabella's husband, Señor Martin del Laguno. I am safe in saying that not one person in the city had imagined that there could be a cause of quarrel between the two men, and the murder would certainly have gone undetected had it not been for some secret information given to the police. As it was, so great had been the security of the criminal that he had neglected to remove certain traces of his guilt, and proofs of it were found in abundance. It turned out that the husband was jealous—with what degree of cause will never be known. It is enough to say that no one, even among the most intimate friends of the family, had so much as suspected anything in the nature of an intrigue between del Laguno's wife and his friend.

"But the strange part of the story was that del Laguno, while disdaining to deny the accusation brought against him, asserted with angry oaths and bitter reproaches that he had been betrayed by a priest to whom he had confessed the murder under the seal of confession. He declared most solemnly that he had accidentally discovered his friend's treachery only an hour or two before he took his revenge, and that no one, not even his wife, had the smallest suspicion that there was any ill-feeling between Galtazar and himself. But, struck by remorse, he had gone one night to the church, and confessed the murder to one of the priests, who, he afterwards found, had been Galtazar's bosom friend.

"There were one or two suspicious circumstances which seemed to corroborate the wretched man's statement, the principal one being that the priest had been seen in the act of leaving the house of Galtazar's brother, who had sworn to avenge his death, at three o'clock in the morning on the day when del Laguno was arrested. Of course Galtazar's relatives and the police were equally silent, but del Laguno (with whom everybody sympathised) declared so positively, and with such sincerity of conviction, that the priest had betrayed him, that a great outcry was raised against the priest. This was intensified when the criminal declared his belief on the scaffold, reviling the priest with his latest breath. Two days after the execution, Donna Isabella Vicayez sought refuge in a convent, where she has lived ever since."

"And the priest?" I asked, with an agitation I scarcely cared to conceal.

"He disappeared. No one knows what became of him. It was whispered that he had committed suicide, like Judas. At all events, it was understood that he was dead.

"Some, however, said that, as he belonged to the third order of St. Francis, he had been handed over to the heads of the Franciscan Order to be dealt with as they saw fit. Others even asserted that the story of the false priest's death was a mere report, got up to soothe the popular rage, and prevent it from spreading to the whole priesthood."

"And the name of this unhappy priest was——?"

I fully expected the answer when it came.

"Padre Juan Salvinos."

The astonishing thing to me was that any one who had seen and known Father Juan Salvinos should have imagined for one moment that he was capable of breaking the seal of confession. I declare that of those who had condemned him not three, probably, knew him even as well as I did, and also that he had not then been purified and ennobled by years of suffering.

That the priest was innocent, I had not in my own mind the shadow of a doubt, but how to bring his innocence to light I knew not. There was one living person, and in all probability one only, who knew the truth of that story of passion and of blood, and that was the nun whom I had seen that day. To her, if to any one, I must make my appeal.

But how was I to get speech of her? I could think of but one way.

That night I went to the convent of the Companions of Jesus, and asked for the Reverend Mother. I was told that I could not see her; but I was prepared for this, and handed the lay sister an envelope which I had brought with me. It contained a sheet of paper on which I had written:

"I bring you news of Padre Juan."

The parlour in which I waited was lighted by one small lamp, which seemed to be on the point of expiring. Its rays struggled feebly with the moonlight, which streamed in through the window that looked out on the convent garden. At the farther end of the room was a grating, but I could see nothing there, for the room beyond was in total darkness.

Suddenly there came out of the darkness a faint rustle. I rose and went up to the grating. From behind it came a voice, faint, indeed, but clear as a dulcimer.

"What have you to tell me of Father Juan? He has been dead for some years."

"He is not dead!" I exclaimed. "He lives and breathes, though he is dead to the world of men. He is living in absolute solitude in a hut among the mountains, his food bread and beans, his drink water, his couch a hole in the rock. For months together, I am convinced, he does not hear the voice of man. It is life in death. And I am certain he has been unjustly condemned. If you know anything that would tend to clear him——"

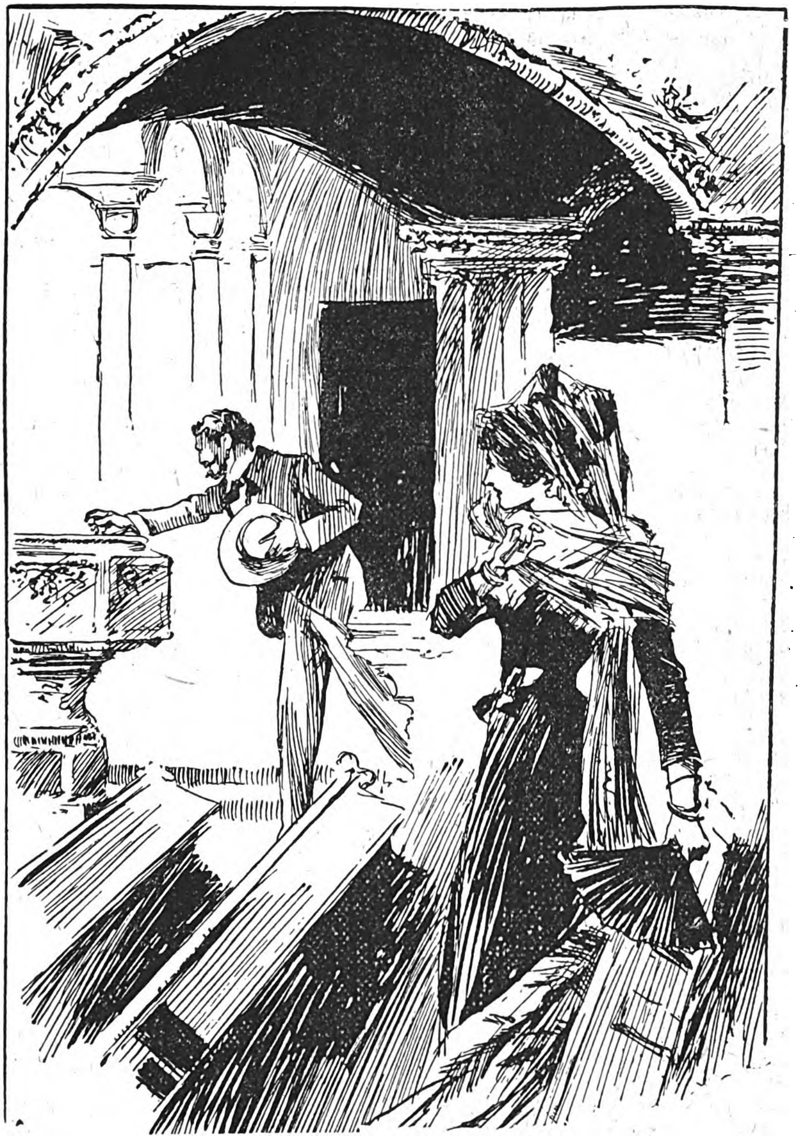
Up to this point there had been absolute silence behind the grating. But now a low moan fell upon my ears. I could see in the semi-darkness the form of a woman clothed in black standing close to the partition. Her white fingers clutched convulsively at the lattice, as though the frail woodwork had been bare of iron. Then I saw the tall figure of the nun sink lower and lower, till she fell on her knees—till she crouched under the lower part of the wall.

"Oh God, have mercy! What have I done?"

The words burst involuntarily from her lips, and I remained silent.

"I thought he was dead—they told me he was dead—long, long ago! But it is not too late. I will make what reparation I can. I will tell the whole truth. When my——"

"Pardon me, Reverend Mother," I interrupted.



"I saw him pause for a moment, and lay something on the edge of the font."

"Perhaps you forget that you are speaking to a stranger. Your confessor would no doubt advise you——"

"The whole world shall know the truth!" broke in the clear, resolute voice of the Reverend Mother. She had risen to her feet, and stood drawn up to her full height, in a sort of proud humility. "The whole world shall know what I have done," she repeated, "though I call Heaven to witness that I believed that Padre Juan was dead. But at last the stigma shall be removed. His innocence shall be made clear.

"Listen! Some days after the murder of Señor Galtazar I was in the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows, praying for the repose of his soul. It was almost dark; there was no light except the lamps before the altar and the shrine, and I was at the east end of the church, where the shadows were deepest.

"The sound of a footstep made me raise my head. I looked up, and to my amazement, I saw my husband come down the aisle. He was leaving one of the confessionals. There is little wonder that I was astonished, for except on the occasion of our marriage, my husband was never known to enter a church. He could scarcely have seen me, even if he had been looking in my direction, but as it was, he walked with his eyes bent on the stone floor of the church. He came along slowly till he reached the porch; and then I saw him pause for a moment and lay something on the edge of the font. The next instant he had passed into the porch and was gone.

"Even as I watched him, a suspicion that had before crept into my mind returned stronger than before. I felt that I must know what it was that my husband had deposited on the edge of the font.

"Softly rising from my place I stole with mute feet from column to column till I reached the font.

"I did not touch the ring. I had no need. I knew it well. It had been taken from Miguel's dead hand to make the world suppose that the murder had been committed by an ordinary thief. And now I knew that he, my husband, had treacherously killed the man I loved a thousand times better than my life.

"Yes, I confess it now! I must confess it. It was I who informed the police against my husband, that I might avenge the dead. I left the ring lying where it was, and in a minute or two I heard the priest leave the confessional, and take the ring from the spot where it was lying. He did not see me, for by that time I had crept back to my place. He believed that he was absolutely alone in the church. I understood it all. My husband had confessed his crime, and had asked the priest to take charge of the ring, and restore it to his victim's friends, seeing that it was of some value. The priest had consented to do this, and they had agreed that the ring should be placed on the font, so that the priest and penitent should not meet face to face.

"Well, I did it. I gave information to the police by an anonymous letter. And no sooner had I done this than I repented. How was it possible that I should feel remorse for such a deed all my life? He was my husband. But my repentance came too late. My husband was in prison.

"On the day of his trial I was struck down with fever. I knew nothing more till all was over. They told me that he had died reviling Don Juan as his betrayer, and I intended to confess that I had betrayed my husband; but it was a hard thing to do. Before I could call up courage enough to do it, Don Juan was removed from the city, and shortly after they told me he was dead. I suppose the bishop thought it better not to contradict the report of his death, so that the scandal might be forgotten as soon as possible. There were some who did not believe him guilty, for they say the seal of the confessional has never yet been broken. But they were few in number. The mass of the people believed him to be guilty, and I—wretched one that I am!—kept silence, and suffered his memory to be defamed. But I will make reparation. I will go to the bishop to-morrow; and this very night I will make public acknowledgment of my unnatural crime before the sisters. But that will not expiate my offence or give back Padre Juan the years he has spent in misery. Ah, me! Ah, me!"

The voice ceased. I looked up and found that I was alone.

A week later I was once more riding over the mountain slope that led up to the abode of the hermit priest. A little behind me rode two men furnished with letters from the bishop and from the Provincial of the Franciscan Order. It was an open secret that the letters contained a decree annulling the sentence and deprivation that had been pronounced against Padre Juan Salvinos, with, no doubt, many an expression of regret for the error that had been committed, and of congratulation that the wrong had at last been righted.

It was a clear morning in early autumn, and the sun shone brightly on cloud and mountain peak, on pine tree and river. I quickly recognised the place, for it had been often in my mind's eye during the months that had slipped by since I had been there. I came upon the track that led to the village, followed it up the mountain side, and at length stood at the door of the abode. I had thought how I would ride up with a laugh and a shout, and tell the patient sufferer that his long martyrdom was at an end. But, somehow, I had no heart for laughing and shouting.

I dismounted and knocked on the rough door with the handle of my whip. I expected that the door would have been opened immediately, but there was no reply. The silence was oppressive. One of my companions suggested that the padrone might have gone to the village to buy food. It seemed likely enough, but something told me that it was not so. I knocked again, and then pushed the door open.

The priest lay on the ground at the side of his rocky sleeping place. He was dead. It seemed to us that he must have died that morning. His weary eyes had closed of themselves, and I thought I could trace on the thin, pallid features the same look of patient resignation I had seen on his living face.

His right hand clasped a crucifix to his breast, and he lay so that his last look must have been fixed on the figure of Christ on the Cross at the farther end of the hut. His left arm was under his head—he lay like a tired man taking his rest.

We buried him in the nearest consecrated ground—in the cemetery belonging to the village where he had been in the habit of buying food. The people who had been accustomed to shun him as a creature accursed, now reverenced him as a saint.

By way of a headstone they put up a wooden cross, after the custom of the country; and when I saw it last I found that someone—a brother priest, probably—had carved upon it, by way of epitaph, the words which the hermit had cut on the rock on which he slept—"But I as a deaf man heard not, and as one that is dumb, who openeth not his mouth."

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We have in our possession a considerable number of photographs of men, women, and children of all grades of society secured for us by our agents, who have scoured the United Kingdom for this special purpose.

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Although the persons whose portraits will appear in this competition are quite unknown to us personally, we have their names and addresses in our possession, and, therefore, a claim can be settled at once, without risk of fraud. Already nineteen claims have been paid since the competition started.

Is your portrait here? If so, drop us a post-card, and get £5.

All claims in connection with the portraits below must reach the address already given above by Tuesday next, December 24th.

Full names and addresses of the correct claimants this week appear on page 831.

HOW TO MAKE A CLAIM FOR A £5 NOTE.

Simply write on a post-card these words:

> *The Portrait No.......... (here put number of portrait) in the current number of SHORT STORIES is mine. Please forward a £5 note.*
>
> *(Name and full address.)*

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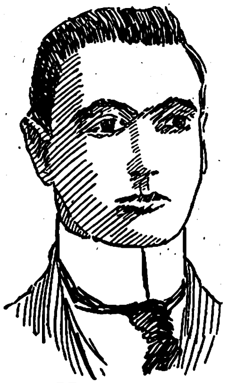

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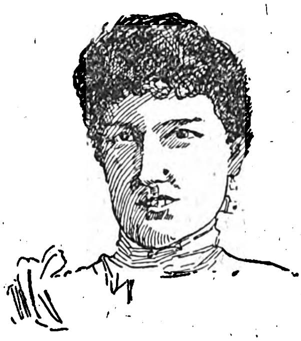

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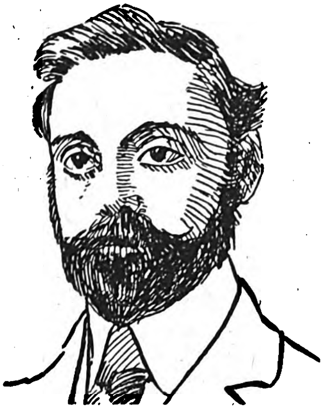

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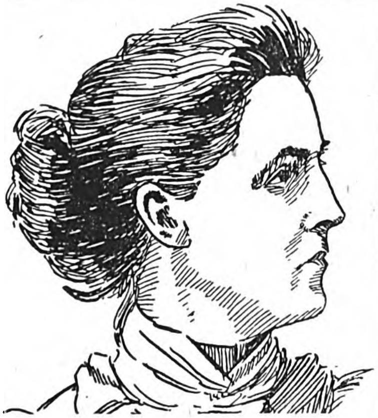

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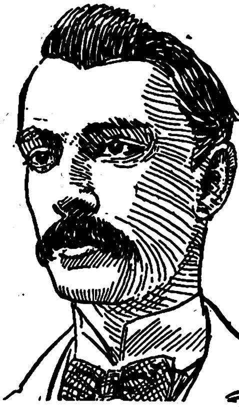

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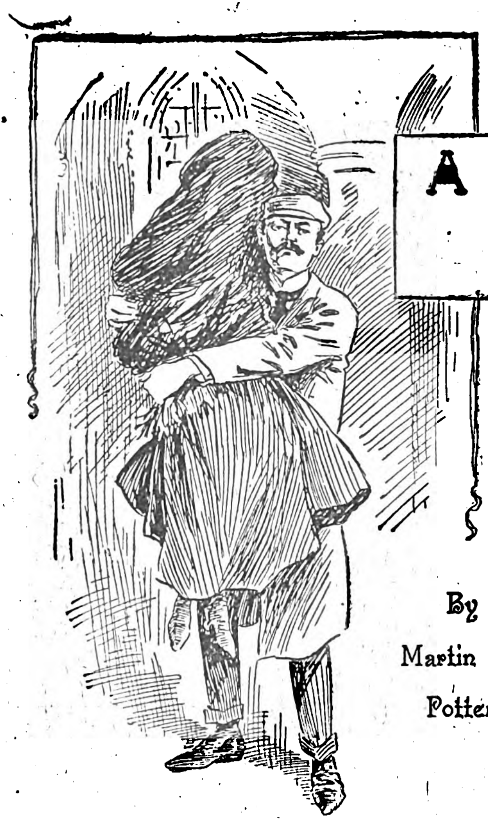


She was in the arms of a man.

A YULE TIDE DISAPPEARANCE

By

Martin H. Potter.

Colonel Aubrey Darlington stood in his own study at Bracken Hall, intently watching the window which looked out on the lawn.

The room was in perfect darkness—just a shade or two blacker than the wintry clouds had rendered the night.

This almost imperceptible difference in the exterior and interior light, enabled the Colonel to detect two upright posts which protruded above the sill of the window. As he watched, the posts quivered; and taking this as a signal to act, he noiselessly moved from behind the curtains which had been his vantage ground and crossed to the opposite side of the room where he stood with his left hand round the little knob which would ignite the electric globes, whilst his right steadily levelled a revolver in the direction of the window.

A slight scraping became audible in the stillness; and then the head and shoulders of a man suddenly appeared outside the window.

Darlington smiled grimly as he saw some sticky substance pressed against the pane of glass just above the catch; but made no movement even when the intruder reversing his hand described a circle with the stone of a ring he wore.

A current of cold air which reached the Colonel would have told him, if he had not already guessed, that a piece of the glass had been removed.

There was a slight pause; then the catch was slipped back, the sash raised, and the man stepped into the room.

As he did so, Darlington pressed down the knob and flooded the room with electric light.

The man staggered back in surprise; then made a movement towards his hip pocket.

"Kindly keep your hands in front of you," came the voice of the Colonel in equable tones.

The intruder allowed his eyes to rest on the menacing weapon pointing directly at him, and, recognising the futility of a struggle, obeyed.

As he stood revealed, there were few signs of the orthodox "Bill Sykes" about him, if one excepted the black crêpe mask which covered the upper part of his face. His hands were small and white, seemingly more fitted to use a pen than to wield a jemmy. The Norfolk suit which covered his slender but well-knit frame was also hardly in keeping with the character.

Darlington took in these inconsistencies before he again spoke. Then it was to give another order.

"Please tip that ladder, by which you made your somewhat unceremonious entry, into the shrubbery below. I happen to know that it is beyond the strength of one man to rear it up again, so your single comrade in the enterprise will not interrupt us."

The would-be burglar hesitated.

"Do as you are told, man," rang out the Colonel's voice, this time in unmistakable menace. "When I remember that a bullet would effectually put an end to all the trouble, my fingers itch to pull the trigger. Remember, any jury would hold me justified in shooting an armed man whom I found entering my house in the dead of the night."

The man turned to the window and obeyed the behest. The consequent noise was deadened by the thick clump of bushes which occupied the surrounding ground.

As the ladder fell a figure came forward.

"You can go," whispered the man at the window, laconically, "the game is up."

He watched until his friend disappeared and then turned again to Darlington and slipped off his mask.

"There was no need to do that, Louis Cademon; I have known who you were from the first," was the Colonel's comment on the action.

"I caught a glimpse of your face at the Red Lion yesterday morning, consequently expected some such visit as this, and made preparations accordingly. Put your revolver on the table, and sit down, I want to talk to you."

Cademon muttered an oath under his breath as he obeyed. The Colonel placed his own revolver beside him.

"You know what I came for," the interloper asserted sullenly, "and that if any other means had been available I should not have condescended to this mummery," indicating the mask with a wave of his hand.

"I know nothing of the kind, Cademon," answered the Colonel sternly. "My dealings with you have taught me that you invariably prefer crooked paths to straight, and I guessed that the lapse of eight years would not have materially altered your character."

"*You* of all men to prate of honesty of purpose," said Cademon in savage tones.

There was quiet dignity in Darlington's reply to the taunt.

"My conduct on the occasion, if known, would bring condemnation from men of high honour, but I am going to make atonement, and whatever else I may have been guilty of I can at least say I never deserted a friend at the very moment of all others when he most needed me. You cannot say the same."

He paused for the other to reply but none came, and he continued:

"I suppose you have found out that my daughter Olive," the Colonel's eyes and voice softened as the name left his lips, "is to be married at Christmas; and have especially chosen this moment to attempt the forcing of my hand. Well, you are likely to be dismayed when you hear the course I am going to adopt. On the day before her wedding I shall place the proceeds of that enterprise in her hands. Being a woman she will in all probability guess its value, but if not I shall tell her. She is marrying a comparatively poor man, and I know that she regrets having to go to her husband empty-handed. When I say here is your dowry, my daughter, she will be rejoiced; but, when I also tell her *how and where it was obtained; and that the real owner is still living*, I think I know what her response will be. She loves me too well not to look charitably upon my shortcomings, but she will insist upon restitution."

"What! you will give back what we risked our lives to obtain!" exclaimed Cademon.

"What *I* risked my life to obtain," corrected Darlington. "Your memory conveniently overlooks the trifling fact that you backed out when the real danger came."

The younger man coloured up at the accusation, but waived the point.

"I notice that your strict honesty is coeval with your coming into the family estate," he said with a taunting smile.

"You are, to a certain extent, justified in saying that, but the estate is seriously embarrassed and many times I have been tempted to sell and use what is in that safe."

The Colonel pointed to one that was let in the wall.

"Then you do keep it here?" queried Cademon, eagerly.

Darlington nodded grimly, as he answered:

"Yes, your visit would not have been unprofitable if I had not been prepared."

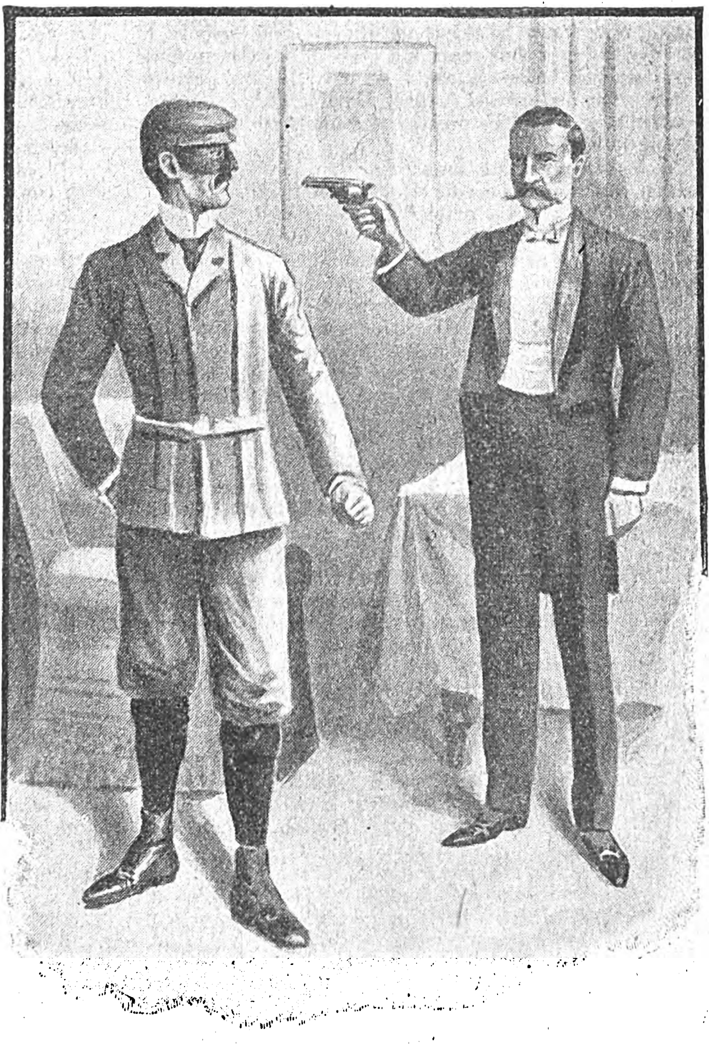
"Come, Darlington. Pray re-consider your decision," urged Cademon. "There is absolutely no need for any such quixotism. Let bygones be bygones. I will grant that your danger was the greater and that therefore your share of the spoil should be larger in proportion, but you will admit that I am entitled to some. Sell it and give me £10,000 and you can rely upon my keeping my tongue quiet about the whole transaction. By these means your daughter will enjoy her dowry; your estate become freed from the mortgages and any little indiscretions of the past consigned to oblivion. It is positively criminal to talk of restitution."

There was no doubt the man was in deadly earnest. His code of honour belonged to a much lower stratum than that of the Colonel; he could not conceive any man wishing to retrieve past peccadilloes at the expense of the present.

His eyes were fixed hungrily upon the safe; greed depicted in their depths.

Aubrey Darlington was too preoccupied with his own thoughts to notice the other's demeanour; or his past knowledge of the man would have warned him against treachery.

In reviewing after events he marvelled that he could



The intruder allowed his eyes to rest on the weapon pointing at him, and obeyed.

have forgotten the conditions under which the interview was taking place. He could only attribute it to the struggle with his own conscience which Cademon's suggestion had reawakened.

For years he had bitterly regretted the indiscretion which had necessitated the enterprise wherein he had fallen from the strict path of honesty; and the resolve to let his daughter be the judge as to whether he should restore his ill-gotten gains had been his only consolation. But now the temptation to let the dead past bury its dead and enjoy the wealth he had gained at the risk of his life, was once more placed before him in a plausible manner by his former confederate.

He longed to be able to give his daughter a fortune to take to her husband, knowing that it would make all the difference to her married life. Moreover he would thus retain her respect and absolute trust in his honour and integrity. As he had told Cademon, he was sure that her love would excuse and forgive his fault, yet she would never again feel exactly towards him as she had done in the past.

Then he had not exaggerated matters regarding the estate; none knew better than himself how heavily it was involved and that years and years of careful nursing were required before it could be clear. Dire poverty in the past had caused Aubrey Darlington's fall, comparative poverty in the present was likely to prevent his rehabilitation.

The battle was short but sharp. Let it be placed to Colonel Darlington's credit that he conquered.

"It is of no use, Cademon," he ejaculated, following out the train of thought. "You know as well as I do that we have no shade of right to utilise it for our own benefit. Any such suggestion is mere sophistry. The suffering and danger we went through were the legitimate means whereby the rightful owner attempted to protect his property from our marauding hands. I shall not waver one iota from the decision already arrived at. Olive shall be my judge. If she considers that I am justified in keeping the ill-gotten gains, you shall have the share you claim. But I warn you, I do not for one moment think that she will."

A still uglier look flitted across the younger man's face as Darlington finished, but it only lasted a moment, and as he rose to his feet he answered:

"I daresay you are right, but it is not of much use preaching morality to a poor wretch who is on his beam ends for a few pounds. At any rate I am unfortunately quite in your hands, so must perforce give in to what you must forgive my saying is a mere whim. Perhaps you will show me the way to your front door, as you have forced me to dispense with my only other way of egress."

The Colonel nodded and they both rose from their seats. Again a malignant look came into Cademon's eyes. He gathered himself together as a leopard does before he makes a spring on his prey. Darlington's hand was on the handle of the door and his head was turned.

Murderous thoughts were coursing through Cademon's brains. He knew the psychological moment had arrived. His limbs relaxed their tension and with a stealthy leap he was on his unprepared victim.

Slim but sinewy fingers gripped the unhappy man's throat. Knees were buried in the small of his back, feet kicked fiercely at the sinews of his legs at the very spot where a sudden blow renders a man helpless.

With a half-stifled cry he sank to the ground. Cademon's knees were now on his victim's chest, slowly but surely aiding his relentless hands in crushing all life from the helpless body.

Slowly the Colonel's eyes started from his head. His face went black and blue, his breath came in thick short gasps, another moment and he would have paid the penalty of forgetfulness with his life; but suddenly a girlish voice broke the silence.

"Take your fingers from his throat, coward, or I'll fire at you."

With an ugly oath, Cademon looked up to find a tall girl, clad in a white dressing-gown, facing him. The unmistakable resemblance to the Colonel told him that he was in the presence of Miss Darlington. She had entered unnoticed during the struggle and had secured her father's revolver from the table.

Olive was trembling with mingled fear and excitement; but the look in her face left no doubt but that she would put her threat into execution, and sullenly, the would-be assassin relaxed his grip and rose to his feet.

Without taking her eyes from Cademon, the girl seized the water jug from the table and dashed the contents in her father's face. Her action had the desired effect.

A long-drawn sigh burst from the purple lips, the eyes returned to their normal position, and in a few seconds the Colonel was once more on his feet facing Cademon.

"It was a treacherous action, but fully in accordance with your past record," he articulated, painfully.

"Shall I call for help, dad?" questioned Olive.

"No, my brave darling. There are reasons which necessitate my letting him go unpunished," her father responded. "Let me rest for a few minutes and we will see him out of the house."

Ten minutes later the three stood at the hall-door.

"You have seen my daughter, Cademon; perhaps even your crime-begotten soul will realise what her answer will be, when I tell her in a fortnight's time," were the parting words of the Colonel.

* * * * *

The remainder of that night Darlington spent on the settee in his study sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion, whilst his daughter kept watch and ward; however, there were no further interruptions.

With the first rays of morning he awoke to a certain extent refreshed and looking but little the worse for his desperate encounter.

Olive was naturally curious as to the meaning of the awful scene she had witnessed, but was too good a daughter to desire to probe into secrets which her father evidently desired to conceal. She had heard what he had said to his assailant and knew that in due course a full explanation would be granted her.

At her father's request she assisted him in removing all traces of their unwelcome visitor, and this was sufficient hint that he did not wish the affair mentioned to anybody.

Shortly before the servants came down, the Colonel completely smashed the pane of glass which Cademon had operated on, and later in the morning let it be understood that he had done so by accident.

Up to now he had been too exhausted to inquire how it was that his daughter had appeared so providentially at the crucial moment of the struggle.

The explanation was simple. Her bedroom was just above the Colonel's study, and she had been awakened by the noise of the falling ladder.

On going to her window she had seen the stream of light proceeding from the study, and rather surprised that he should be up so late, and thinking that perhaps he might be ill, she slipped on her dressing-gown and came down.

Hearing voices she was about to return again, but at that moment she heard her father's muffled appeal for help as Cademon sprang at him, and had entered the room with the result we have seen.

Olive was too busy during the next few days to find time for much thought regarding the strange occurrence she had taken such a stirring part in.

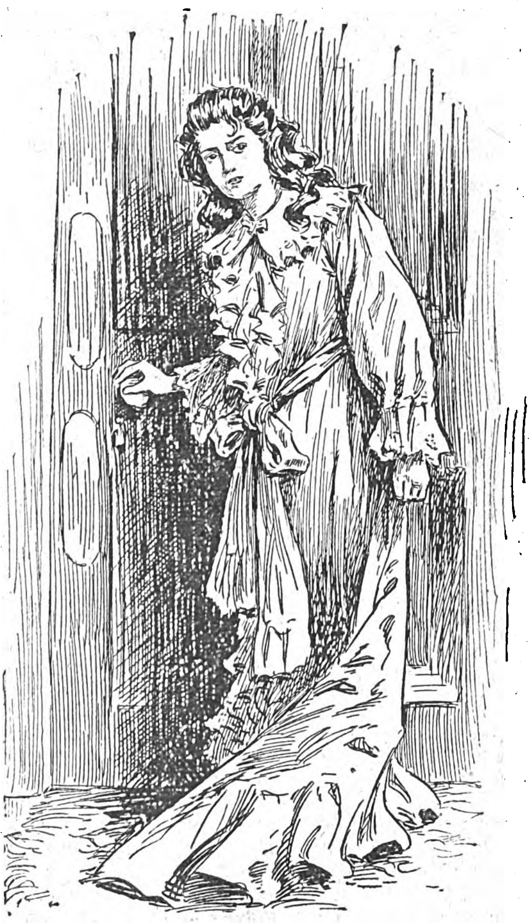
It was close on Christmas—always a stirring time at Bracken Hall—because the Colonel entertained a large house-party at that period and the arrangements principally devolved upon her.

This year would be the last she would superintend, for her marriage was to take place a few days after the usual festivities; which fact did not tend to lessen her responsibilities.

Nothing further had been heard of Cademon, and on inquiring at the Red Lion—the village inn—the Colonel learnt that he had departed with his accomplice on the night after his fruitless enterprise.

This did not cause Darlington to relax any of the precautions which he had taken against a repetition of the objectionable incident. Every night before retiring he personally paid a visit to see that the lower doors and windows were properly secured, and invariably made fast the steel shield which had been fitted to the study window.

The main portion of the guests were not to arrive at Bracken Hall till Christmas eve; but it had been arranged that Gerald Standford—the Colonel's future son-in-law—should come three days previously so that he might arrange the final details of the wedding with his coming bride and her father. In due course he put in an appearance, much to Olive's delight.



A tall girl, clad in a white dressing-gown, was facing him.

For several years it had been Olive's custom to assist in the decoration of the village church, and this year she pressed her lover into the service, and on the afternoon of the day previous to Christmas Eve they set forth from Bracken Hall with this intention.

There was every sign that England was likely to enjoy a typically old-fashioned Christmas. Snow was falling softly, gradually covering up all familiar land-marks with a white mantle.

The lovers chatted merrily as they briskly covered the ground. The conversation—which, needless to say was freely interluded with the sweet nothings which are of superlative interest to lovers, but somewhat *caviare* to those who cannot lay claim to the title—turned upon the old church which they were about to decorate. Olive, who was an authority upon its ancient history, spoke of the troublous times which it had seen in days gone by. Tradition claimed that it was one of the oldest buildings in the kingdom. Certainly there were records in existence which established beyond doubt that previous to its being dedicated to the service of Christianity it had served as a fortress, and in that capacity had stood more than one seige.

Even now, with its quaint old battlements it had more the appearance of a mediæval castle than a place of worship. But long ago its dungeons had been turned into crypts and its dried up moat into a churchyard.

When the lovers reached this ancient edifice, they found the cart, which had been sent on from Bracken Hall loaded with holly and evergreens, had already arrived and the material had been placed in the porch.

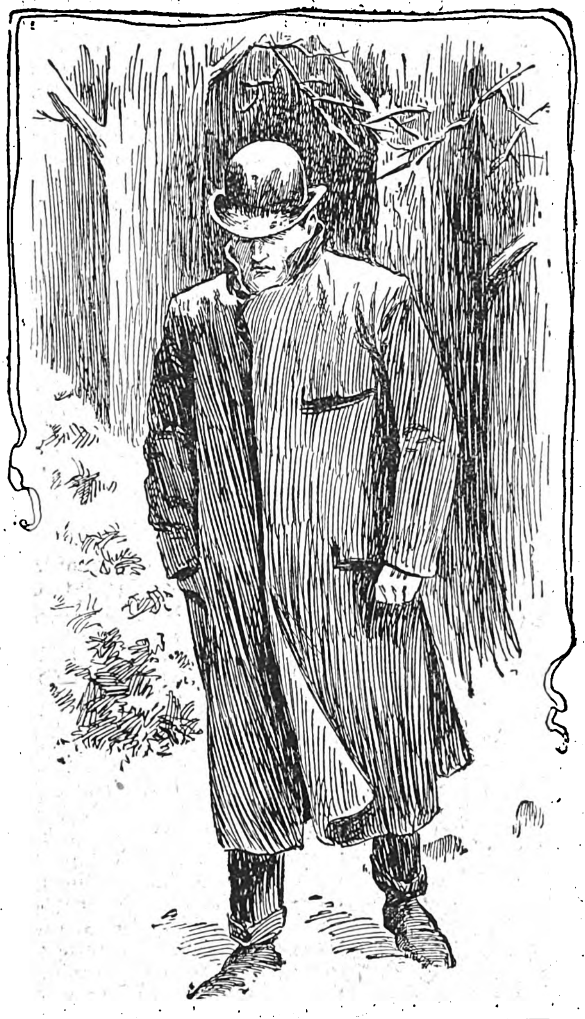
Several other ladies and gentlemen were also present to assist in the good cause. Very soon trailing ropes of greenery, relieved by the scarlet berries, were being fixed to the grey old pillars and black oak which formed the pews.

All the afternoon the work proceeded with unabated zeal until only the pulpit remained undecorated. By this time it was getting late, and most of the others who had got farther to go than Olive and Gerald, were getting anxious to get home in time to dress for dinner. The result was that the lovers, nothing loth to be left alone, volunteered to put on the finishing touches.

They accompanied the others to the door and saw them set forth on the journey. Then they re-entered the church. They had practically finished when Olive suddenly found that she would not have enough wire. They had already run themselves rather late; but she was anxious to finish so suggested that Gerald should walk to the verger's cottage, which was about five hundred yards away, and get a further supply.

He rather demurred at leaving her alone in the church in the partial darkness, but Olive protested that she was not in the least nervous and finally he went to do her bidding.

He was away about ten minutes as the verger could not lay his hand on the wire, but finally it was found; and having arranged to lock the church door and return



Gerald examined the path that led to the bridge.

the key as they passed, Gerald reached the church again.

Passing up the main aisle which was very dimly lighted, he saw that Olive was not by the pulpit, but the fact only vaguely alarmed him. Thinking that she was probably in some other part of the building he called her by name in that lowered voice which one instinctively uses in a place of worship. No response came, and now, really alarmed, he called louder. Still no answer. He systematically searched the church from the altar to the front door, but no trace of her was to be found. The thought struck him that possibly she might have been taken suddenly ill, and made her way home alone. But there were two objections to this theory. Firstly, she would certainly have left some intimation of her intention behind; secondly, her nearest way was past the verger's cottage and she would have in all probability called in knowing him to be there.

Gerald examined the path which led to the bridge over the moat by which the church was approached. It will be remembered that snow had been falling during the afternoon, and he thought that if she had left her footmarks might be observable. But a glance told him that there was not much hope of arriving at any conclusion from this, for already his own footmarks were nearly obliterated.

The snow had perceptibly increased in depth during the last twenty minutes. Realising that he could do nothing without help, he ran as hard as he could to the verger's cottage again.

The two men returned together, and the verger thoroughly illuminated the church and assisted Gerald in another search, but still no clue to the missing girl's whereabouts or explanation of her mysterious disappearance was found.

Almost distracted, Gerald made the best of his way back to Bracken Hall.

Colonel Darlington came to the door with the servant, and his first words struck dismay to Gerald's soul.

"Why hasn't Olive returned with you?"

As clearly as he could the young man explained what had happened.

Aubrey Darlington wasted no time in useless lamentations:

"We must ride back at once, Standford," he exclaimed. "Tell them to saddle horses at once for Mr. Standford and myself; and order one of the grooms to get ready to go to the police-station with a letter."

Whilst his commands were being carried out he sat down and wrote a brief account of the circumstances to the superintendent of police in charge of the district, with instructions to wire it to the outlying stations. He also gave an exact description of Cademon, for he strongly suspected that individual of having some hand in his daughter's disappearance. He bitterly reproached himself for allowing her name to in any way enter the transaction. Remembering that his last words to the man had been an intimation that the whole affair was practically in her hands, he could see what an obvious advantage it would be for Cademon if he had her in his power. If only as a matter of revenge he would know that he could not choose a more fitting way to injure the Colonel than by striking at him through his daughter.

As Colonel Darlington and Standford galloped towards the church as fast as the two best horses in the stable could carry them, the elder man put the younger in possession of the facts connected with Cademon, and they both agreed that whatever steps they took must be started from the place where the poor girl had last been seen.

They stopped at the verger's cottage, and, hearing that he had no news, borrowed a lantern and pushed on.

Once more the church proper was minutely examined but with no result, and then, determined to leave no stone unturned, they made their way to the vaults. Here again it looked as though they were to be baffled. Indeed, they were on the point of re-ascending when suddenly the Colonel gave a low exclamation, and, seizing Gerald's arm, pointed to a part of the wall which looked quite solid.

We say looked advisedly, for, affixed in it, near the ground was a tiny piece of red cloth—Olive's dress that day had been of that colour. Passing the lantern up and down they traced a square outlined patch. It was obvious that one of the massive stones was movable and the assumption was that she had been forcibly dragged through this, and the piece of cloth torn from her skirt when the aperture was closed.

Gerald was for sending for tools and tearing it away, but a little reflection convinced Darlington that there must be some simple way of moving the stone with the added advantage that whoever was behind would probably be taken by surprise.

He examined the stone carefully and discovered a depression in the centre. This he pressed on and suddenly the whole block moved. A little further pressure with their feet and the whole stone moved away bodily, opening up the way to a long, narrow passage. They passed through in silence, Darlington placing the lamp beneath his coat.

* * * * *

To explain the incidents in their proper sequence, it is necessary to return to the moment when Olive was left alone in the church.

Her lover's footsteps had scarcely died away in the distance, when she thought she heard a rustling behind her. She turned quickly, but apparently she was quite alone, and smiling at her mistake, she continued decorating the pulpit. Suddenly there was an unmistakable rush of feet and before she could protect herself or cry out, her head was enveloped in a heavy shawl and she was in the arms of a man.

In spite of her desperate struggles, she was dragged towards the steps and then bodily carried down them. She remembered her skirt catching in something, and then her overwrought feelings gave way and she fainted.

When she recovered, she was sitting in a small cell which was evidently below the ground level, from the dampness of its walls. In front of her was a man whom she recognised as the one whom she had prevented from murdering her father.

"I am sorry to have had to bring you to such a place, Miss Darlington," said Cademon, as soon as he noticed she had recovered sufficiently to understand him, "but circumstances rendered it necessary. I may say that the length of your stay here depends entirely upon yourself.

"I must claim your attention for a few moments whilst I put the case clearly before you. Some years ago your father and I set out to rob a fugitive Indian Rajah, who had got into trouble with the British Government, of a certain rope of pearls which we had discovered he had concealed. After incredible hardships to which I, being the weakest, had to succumb, Colonel Darlington succeeded in obtaining the spoil. On his return to Calcutta he received the news that he had come into Bracken Hall, and instantly was seized with a fit of virtue, and refused to sell the pearls as previously agreed, or to give me my share. You will remember my visit to him the other night; well, he informed me that he proposed leaving you to judge whether he should return the pearls to the Rajah, who, by the way, has made his peace with the Government, or sell them for his and my mutual benefit.

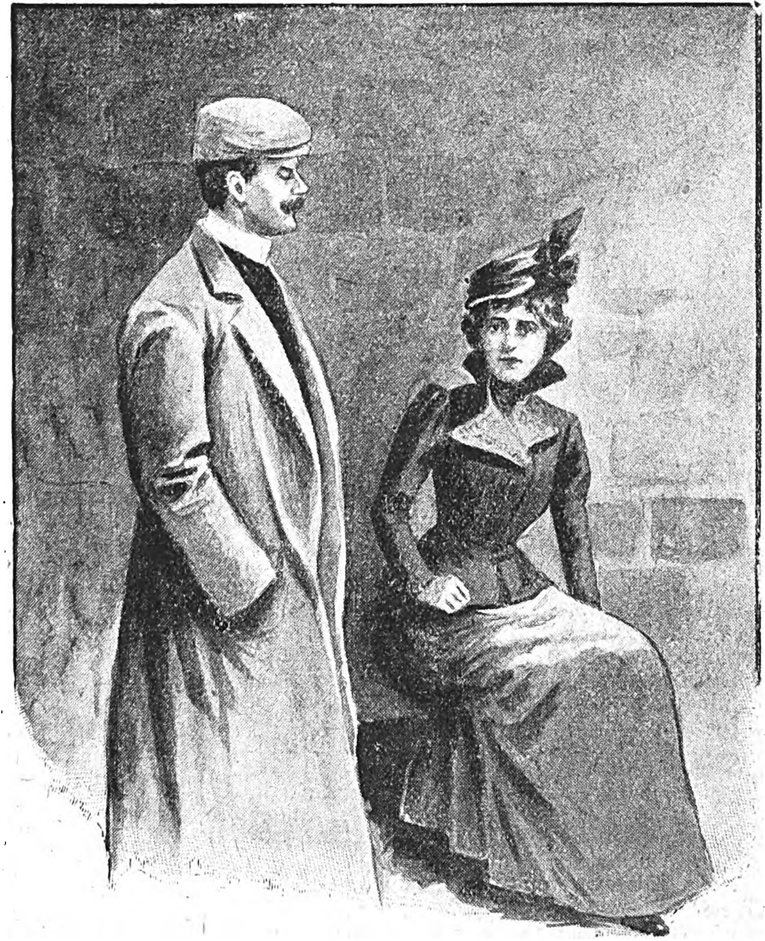
"Now, happening to discover a secret entrance to this charming place, and learning from the village folk that you were in the habit of coming here to decorate the place every year, it struck me that it offered a fitting opportunity to persuade you as to the advisability of giving an answer to his question in my favour.

"My plans were seemingly upset when I found that your lover accompanied you, but fortune was kind enough to get rid of him as you know. Let me assure you that the chances of your being found here by any searchers are quite hopeless.

"I do not wish to frighten you, but unless you take an oath to advise your father as I wish I shall be compelled to take your life for my own protection.

"I will give you half-an-hour to choose which you will do."

Olive never knew how she got through that half-hour.



She was sitting in a small cell evidently below the ground level, and in front of her was a man.

She did not waver for a moment in what her decision should be.

Grieved as she was to hear of her father's fall, she saw how anxious he was to repair his false move, and determined that even if her life was to pay the forfeit no word of hers should persuade him against restitution.

At last Cademon rose from his seat—she noticed that he held a revolver in his hand, and shuddered.

"Time is up, Miss Darlington," he said, mechanically. "What is your answer?"

"I cannot do as you wish me," she replied simply.

"Pause and reflect," he answered. "You are young to die."

"I have done so," she said.

He levelled the revolver at her.

"I shall count ten," he said.

She offered a mental prayer up to Heaven, and closed her eyes.

He had counted five. Each figure seemed to strike her funeral knell.

Six! Seven! Eight! Nine! Ten!

There was a flash and a report, but the bullet flew above her head and the voice of her lover broke on her ears.

At the crucial moment the Colonel and Gerald had burst upon the scene just in time to save her. And Gerald had dashed the assassin's arm up.

In the struggle which ensued, Cademon was mortally wounded by his own revolver and he died a few hours after.

Needless to say, the pearls were on their way to the rightful owner when the marriage bells rang out to signalise the marriage of the re-united lovers.

LOVE AND A LEGACY.

The Story of a Matrimonial Tangle and a Christmas Party that Unravelled It.

By W. NEWMAN FLOWER.

It was a chilly December morning, and a stifling pea-soup fogs wept down Fleet Street, irritating the lungs of all who were not fortunate enough to have mufflers over their mouths. Cecil Langdale, editor of the *Comet*, found his already questionable temper fast becoming worse beneath the atmospheric ordeal, and rushing into his office he bounced up the stairs and into the editorial sanctum.

His sub-editor, Charlie Fraser, was leaning against the window smoking a cigarette and looking out at the blocked traffic in the street.

"Beastly weather outside," he remarked, as Langdale entered.

"So it seems," replied his chief, a trifle irritably. "You don't appear to be very busy this morning," he added.

Fraser turned round sharply at this censure.

"I say, old man, you've got the hump. You look as if you were going to be married."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Langdale, filling his pipe thoughtfully and sinking into his chair. "Do you know any reason why I shouldn't be married?"

"None at all. But you're not——"

"No, no. Don't jump at conclusions, and spare your congratulations. All the same, a very curious thing has happened. I've just found out that I had an eccentric bachelor uncle, and that he's dead."

"And has left you some 'tin,' I suppose?" interrupted Fraser.

"Well, yes, but only on one condition, which makes it impossible for the cash to become mine. He always was a miserly old beggar, and I never saw or heard anything of him unless he could beg, borrow, or steal a stamp from someone to write to me with. However, I certainly must give him credit for laying out a penny a week on the *Comet*, and from what I can gather he was an enthusiastic reader."

Fraser walked across the room to an armchair near the fire, and sat down with his hands behind his head.

"This is getting interesting," he said.

"This morning I had a letter from his solicitors," resumed Langdale, "informing me of his death, and saying that he had left me the sum of £300 a year and a thousand pounds down if I would marry—whom do you think?"

"Give it up."

"Why, the old girl who writes our matrimonial notes under the *nom-de-plume* of 'Mrs. Matchem.' If I refuse, the money goes to the Society for the Preservation of Stray Cats!"

"Then you think the feline race will benefit by the bequest?" inquired the sub-editor.

"Of course. Do you think I'm going to marry—*her!* She must be fifty."

"Probably more," said Fraser consolingly.

"Besides, she may be married already. We send the correspondence to her, and she brings up her copy every week as regularly as clock-work, and her real name is Craig. That's all I know about her. Why, the very idea's too funny for words. Of course I shall raise a protest, or——"

A shrill whistle came at the speaking-tube.

"Who's there?" shouted Langdale.

"'Mrs. Matchem' would like to see you, sir," came the muffled reply from the lower regions.

"Send her up, please," he said, then added to Fraser: "Here she is. Of course I must explain the matter and ask for her assistance."

"In that case I'll leave you. I never have played 'gooseberry' for anyone, and I don't intend to begin it now," replied the sub. caustically, as he swung himself out of his chair and went towards the door. "Good luck, old man, and—keep your pecker up!"

He vanished, and a few seconds later an old lady sailed into the room. Her grey hair was neatly brushed back under her bonnet, and her gold-rimmed spectacles had become dimmed with the fog. Langdale felt a cold shiver run up his spine.

"Good morning," she said affably, as she approached his desk. "Fearful weather, isn't it?"

"Is it? Yes, I believe it is," he replied absent-mindedly. "Will you sit down? You've brought your 'copy,' that's right. Er—if you're not in a hurry to go—I—er—should like to speak to you."

She occupied the chair Fraser had just vacated, and allowed the tips of her boots to rest upon the fender.

"The fact is," continued Langdale with a tremor, "I've got a rather eccentric uncle—at least, he's dead now—and he's left me £300 a year and a thousand pounds down if I marry——"

"How kind. But is this information for our matrimonial page?"

"Yes—that is—no. Pray excuse my asking a pertinent question, but are you married?"

Langdale expected to see her go off into hysterics, but no sign of surprise passed over her face.

"My husband is dead, but I have seven children living," she said.

Langdale groaned.

"The conditions of the will are somewhat peculiar, he went on. "I only receive the money if I marry—pardon me—marry you."

"Me?"

"Yes. 'Mrs. Matchem' who writes our matrimonial notes has been ordained by my idiotic uncle to become my wife. Of course the idea is preposterous. We are scarcely suited to one another, are we? You're so much old—I mean we might lodge an appeal. Now, would you be prepared to see this thing through with me, and if we succeed in getting the money, sharing it without going through the superfluous ordeal of the marriage service?"

"Certainly not."

"Then you mean that I must either marry you or lose the money?"

"If your uncle has made it necessary for you to marry 'Mrs. Matchem' before his bequest becomes yours, why marry her you must. But have you spoken to Mr. Fraser on the subject? I think he could advise you as well as anyone."

"Why do you suggest him?"

"Because it was at his recommendation that this post was given to me. He knows me well."

"Very well. I'll speak to him and let you know. Good morning."

Fraser took his cue from her departure and re-entered the room.

"I suppose I may now look upon you as engaged?" he said with a laugh.

"Don't be an ass!" retorted Langdale. "Look here, I've got into a pretty mess. She won't agree to fight the case out in the courts, and insists on matrimony."

"Then I'm afraid, my dear fellow, you're cornered."

"She told me to talk the matter over with you."

"She did, did she? Well, I don't pretend to be a matrimonial agent because outside interference always ends in quarrelling, but if you'll come down to my place next week and spend Christmas with me, I'll see what I can do for you."

"All right. I'll come."

"And you needn't come alone. Don't forget to bring your sister with you. Girls are always useful in a delicate case of this kind, you know!"

* * * * *

Fraser was waiting on the doorstep to receive them, when Cecil and Mabel Langdale arrived at his suburban villa on Christmas Eve. He took his comrade by the arm, and led him off to change his clothes, for it was snowing fast, and his mother performed a similar duty for Mabel.

"We ought to have a lively time," he said, as he followed Langdale into his room. "'Mrs. Matchem' and two of her daughters are staying with us until after the vacation."

"What?" roared Langdale. "You've asked 'Mrs. Matchem' here?"

"Yes. And why not? I can assure you that the eldest girl, Elsie, is a regular stunner. You'll lose your heart in five minutes—but sorry, old man, I forgot you're no longer fancy free."

"If this is a practical joke you're playing, Charlie, all I can say is that it's rather ill-timed, don't you think so?" said Langdale seriously.

"Oh, dear, no. Christmas with your intended is always the ideal season, is it not?"

He withdrew with a chuckle, and a few minutes later Langdale followed him down into the drawing-room, where mutual introductions ensued. If his treatment of Mrs. Craig was perhaps a trifle chilly, he certainly did not visit the sins of the parents upon the children, for he sat and chatted with her two daughters all the evening, and the following day distinguished himself by monopolising the attention of the elder girl from breakfast till dinner-time.

It was not until he retired to rest that night that the recollection of his position came back to him, and he knew that the £300 a year was quickly slipping from his grasp.

He had fallen in love with Elsie Craig, but to be compelled to marry her mother and acknowledge the girl he loved as his step-daughter was absolutely too outrageous, sacrilege almost. What was more, he speedily came to the conclusion that he would not be driven into an obnoxious union, so decided to think no more of the legacy. But his loss was not destined to be altogether forgotten, for in the middle of the night a cat's concert on the greenhouse below his window woke him with a start.

“And to think that I'm robbing myself to preserve such reptiles!” he gasped. And jumping up he threw open the window, and dashed the contents of his water-jug upon his feline serenaders with more than usual zest. Then getting into bed again he soon tumbled off to sleep.

The dawn of Boxing Day brought no change in his resolve, and without telling Fraser of his decision, he followed Elsie into the small sitting-room that adjoined the conservatory when dinner was over.

“There's a rather pretty poem in there on Christmas,” she said, laying down a magazine as he took a seat on the ottoman by her side. “That reminds me, Charlie says that you're a real live editor. Is it true?”

“I am one of those unfortunate individuals,” he responded, drawing near.

“Why ‘unfortunate’? You have only to sit at your desks all day long and decline manuscripts with thanks.”

“But we have to write a good deal ourselves.”

“That is not work; it's a pleasure.”

“How do you know?” he asked inquisitively.

“Because I write a little myself. Fearful nonsense I'm afraid though.”

“Do you really? Love stories I suppose?”

“No, matrimonial notes. At least, I contribute a page to a weekly periodical on the subject regularly.”

“What!” he cried, starting up. “You're not—who are you?”

“I'm ‘Mrs. Matchem’ of the *Comet*, and you're my editor. I fear I've kept my secret very badly.”

“But I don't understand. Mrs. Craig—who's she?” he asked mystified, and dropping to the ottoman again.

“My mother, of course. But I'd better explain. It was Charlie Fraser who got me the work in the first instance, and we thought you'd think me so young and—and inexperienced to write matrimonial notes, so agreed that mother should take my ‘copy’ up to the office every week. I'm afraid it was very deceitful, but——”

“What a splendid idea! I knew it couldn't be your mother all the time! Please accept my congratulations on sending in such excellent work, and I hope you'll continue to write for us. Do you know, I think you must have brought about many a happy union through those notes of yours.”

“I hope so.”

“And since you seem to be so well up in matrimonial matters I'm going to ask you a question myself. I think you might answer it without waiting to put a reply in the paper. Will you be my wife?”

She inclined her head, and he saw the roses flush up in her cheek.

“But you must tell me what I wish to know first,” she bargained.

“With pleasure.”

“If you marry me do you get £300 a year and a thousand pounds down?”

“Ha! ha! I'm afraid I do! But I had made up my mind to ask you to-night to marry me long before I knew who you really were,” he replied.

“I don't mean to infer that you wished to marry me for the sake of the legacy,” she said. “Only, strangely enough, a similar bequest becomes mine if I marry you, so if you're greedy I must be accused of greed also.”

“A similar bequest?” he repeated.

“Yes, I am a distant relative of your uncle, so I suppose am a cousin—about ten times removed—to you. He knew my secret, and liked my work; indeed, I am conceited enough to say that I was a favourite of his. Nevertheless, I did not expect such a handsome legacy.”

“But are we to keep out legacies, or are the cats to have them? It all rests with you, you know.”

“I don't think the cats want them very much, do they?” she said naïvely as she turned her head away.

* * * * *

Half-an-hour later, as Langdale went in search of Fraser, he collided with him at the dining-room door.

“Come inside a moment,” he said. “Now, I don't know whether to thank you or kick you for the prank you've been playing, but as I've got the girl I'll do the former. Why didn't you tell me in the beginning that Elsie was our real correspondent?”

“Because I wanted some fun, and you can congratulate yourself on having afforded it me. But since I've done you a good turn—if you like to call it so—you must do me one. The fact is I've asked your sister.”

“And been ‘declined with thanks’?”

“No. To tell the truth, with your consent I'm accepted.”

“Girls are always useful in a delicate case like this!” said Langdale, recalling his comrade's remark of a few days previously.

“Except when they've got more important business to attend to!” rejoined the other with a broad smile.

DON FELIPE'S MASTERPIECE;

OR, THE CHANGED FACE.*

A STORY OF SPAIN. By VICTOR LORENZO WHITECHURCH.

OLD Don Felipe da Castro stood leaning upon his silver-headed cane under the shadow of a pillar in the side aisle of the cathedral of Valencia, listening to the deep-toned Gregorians of the choir, and ever and anon glancing at the crowd of worshippers. It was a Saint's Day, and Mass was being sung at the High Altar. Kneeling, or standing with heads bowed in prayer, was a motley group of men and women, the former radiant in the bright costumes of a couple of centuries ago, the latter draped in those graceful mantillas which still characterise the women of sunny Spain.

Don Felipe da Castro, though short and insignificant in stature, was a man to be marked out of many in a crowd. His was the face of a philosopher and an artist, marked by many a deep and thoughtful line, and sweetened by a smile that every now and then broke out around his little white moustache and pointed beard. His deep-set, mellow, dark eyes were those of one who had studied human nature deeply, who knew its faults as well as its beauties, but who had never given way to that cynicism which so often distinguishes the student of humanity. Kindliness as well as judgment shone forth in every glance of his penetrating eyes.

Advanced as he was in years, he was almost the oldest of the throng of worshippers, and he knew them nearly all. As he stood shrouded in gloom, his mind wandered at times from the priest in his rich vestments to those who knelt and stood around him. He thought of a generation that was not his own, that he was to leave behind him upon the earth, to carry on the work of the comrades of his own time. More especially, and with a touch more of pleasure than regret, did the latter thought strike him as his eyes fell upon a young man standing a few paces in front of him and towards the middle aisle. He watched the handsome, black bearded profile of Juan de Villagarcia as a father looks at his favourite son, or, as in this case, the master artist looks upon his favourite pupil. Juan de Villagarcia was a man of about five-and-twenty, in the heyday of health, vigour, and manly beauty; and more than one were the soft glances that stole in his direction from beneath the dark mantillas, in spite of the watchful care of stern duennas.

Juan de Villagarcia, in his turn, appeared to be not so much engrossed in his worship as a good Catholic should have been. His eyes were steadily directed to a point slightly in front of him. The old man followed his gaze, and an expression of pain shone forth in his face as he found the object that was engrossing his pupil's attention, a beautiful face gazing upward in rapt devotion —the face of a girl who could vie with all others in Valencia and bear off the palm of southern beauty—that of Inez Mercator. Delicate ivory hands held a string of beads, the fingers playing with them listlessly: the kneeling posture was one of grace, and it was small wonder that Juan de Villagarcia's soul was not ascending unto Heaven with the prayers of the priest, but was chained down to earth by the spell of a fair woman.

More heavily still leant Don Felipe upon his cane, and listlessly fell the "*Ite Mina est*" of the deacon upon his ears as he bowed his head in thought. As he raised it, Inez Mercator, accompanied by her duenna, was leaving the cathedral, and he noted the quick glance she shot at Juan de Villagarcia as she passed him, and the deep colour rising in the young man's face.

As Don Felipe da Castro stepped out into the sunshine once more he was greeted with many a graceful raising of the sombrero and a soft "*Buenos dias, señor,*" for everyone knew him. Who was he but the greatest painter their city had ever known, the man who made his portraits live on the canvas? Proud, indeed, was the family in Valencia, or even in Seville and Madrid, a member of which had been painted by "*al gran maestro,*" and the gentle hearts of many of his fellow townsmen ached with sorrow as they beheld their beloved artist beginning to totter towards the unknown "mañana" that awaits us all.

Courteous and dignified, the old painter returned the salutations of his fellow citizens, but with less of a smile than usual, nor stayed he to talk with any, but walked back thoughtfully to his house, entered his studio, and threw himself down upon a chair.

He might have been seated thus for half-an-hour or more, when the door of the studio was thrown open and Juan de Villagarcia himself entered the room.

"Good morning, Señor," he said.

"Ah, Juan, is that you?" replied the master. "I had almost forgotten that you were to have a lesson this morning."

"And in truth, my master, I should not have been altogether sorry not to have had one, for it happens that I am in a lazy mood to-day."

"Those who are destined for great things must never be lazy," said the old painter gravely, "and I like not to hear such words."

The young man stood somewhat abashed before this rebuke.

"I meant nothing," he said, "only one does not always feel inclined to work. Besides," he added with a charming compliment, "one never thinks of one's own possible greatness in the presence of Don Felipe da Castro. All that is greatest is his alone."

"Ah, Juan, you should remember I have reached an age when compliments fall flat. Also, I would ask you, does the presence of Don Felipe inspire you with laziness? If, indeed, I am as worthy as you say, it should rather inspire you to emulate such greatness, to make it your own after—after——"

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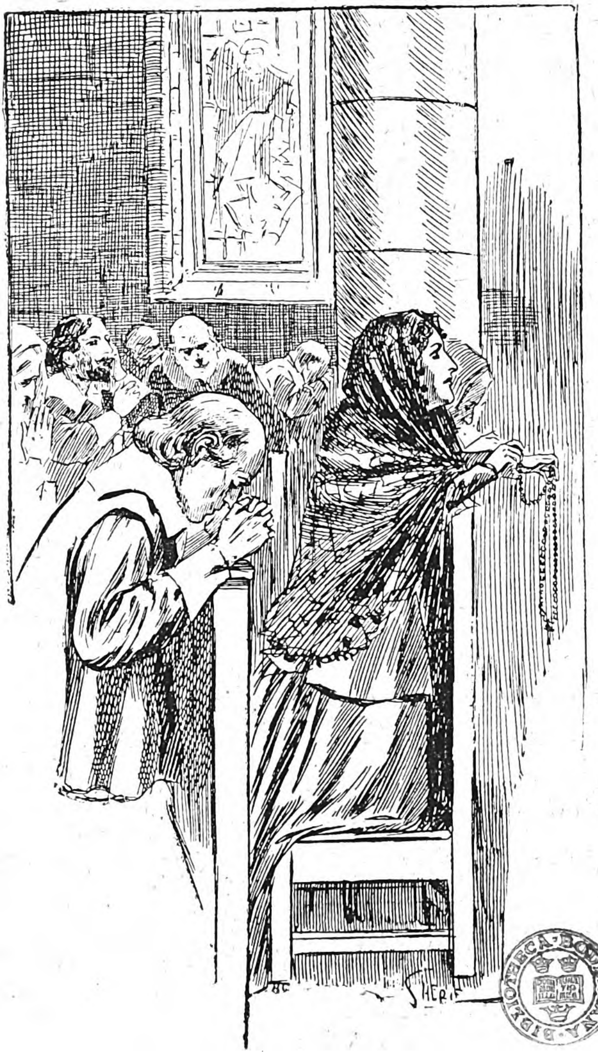
* Such a picture as that described really exists. It is in a house in Scotland. The painter is unknown.—V. L. W.



BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

A beautiful face gazing upward in rapt devotion.

"After what?" asked the young man anxiously.

In answer the painter rose from from his chair and placed his hand on the other's shoulder.

"My son," he said softly, "it cannot be so very long before my brush and palette will have to be resigned, before I, myself, take my journey hence, before——"

"Stop, stop, my master!" cried the young man passionately. "I will not hear you say such things. We cannot lose you."

"Listen to me, Juan," replied the old man. "Listen, and be calm. Do you not see that my greatest consolation would be to know that my work will be carried on? Do you not see the hopes I have placed in you, my son?"

"What—what do you mean?"

"Do you think that I have had no object in teaching you my art? Oh, Juan, it has been my joy to think that you will one day follow in your master's footsteps! I know it is somewhat selfish, but I have loved my work; and I loathe to leave it without the thought that you, my best beloved disciple, will take it up after me."

"Oh, my master—it is too much—I am not worthy—I know so little."

"As yet, Juan. But you have in you the making of a great artist. It will rest with yourself, with your own faithfulness and courage, to make your name great. Confess now. You love your art?"

"Yes, yes. You know I do."

"Then why is it, Juan, that of late your energies have fallen back, that your touch has lost in power and your eye in discernment. I have noted your lack of enthusiasm. Why is it?"

The young man looked in wonder at his master.

"I did not know," he stammered, but the other interrupted him.

"Juan de Villagarcia, I will show you why. You say you love your art, but that is not the only object of your affections. Behold!"

And, striding forward towards an easel upon which was a picture covered with a cloth, the old painter snatched away the covering, and there stood the beautiful face of Inez Mercator.

"You think me a wizard?" said the painter, with a smile at Juan's astonished face. "But no, it is very simple. I have been painting her portrait, and this is a study I made for my own use. The rest is palpable. I have not been a student of human nature all these years without being able to tell when a young man is in love. I could not see you both at Mass this morning without your secret being revealed to me."

The young man blushed violently for a moment, and then said:

"And if you have guessed my secret, I am not ashamed of it. What then?"

"You have made a great mistake. Nay, be not angry with me, but hear what I have to say. Donna Inez is not the helpmate for the rising young master, Juan de Villagarcia."

"Señor, señor, you know her not."

"It is because I know her, my son, that I say so. Do you think I have painted God's image for nigh on three-score years without being able to discern the evils that so often mar that image? Do you think I cannot see the mind—the very soul—beneath each face I study? You need someone who will prove more than faithful to you, faithful to your life's work. Inez Mercator will not prove such."

"It is only from you, my master, that I would hear such words. But they are false."

"They are true. It is because I love you, because I wish to see you great, that I say resign this woman for ever!"

"Señor!"

"Yes, I mean it. Choose not only between her and fame, but between her and faithfulness. She has a beautiful face! Yes. But I know the soul beneath."

The young man drew himself up, his nostrils quivering with indignation, his lips white with restrained passion, and said:

"Don Felipe da Castro, your age and my love for you make me calm. But listen. I love my work, and I love Inez Mercator, and I will be faithful to both. Yes! I take the high destiny that you have marked out for me, and from this day you shall never have cause to reproach me for idleness, nor shall you say that art suffers from love. I do not say that I can ever equal you, but I swear I will follow you. And I swear, also, my master, that I will marry the woman I love, nor shall you, or any other man, come between us."

Don Felipe listened gravely and then said:

"Enough, my son. I take your promise to me. As for the other I have warned you——"

"Say no more——."

"I will not. There is no reason in the prison of love, Juan."

And the two settled to their work. When, after the lesson was over, the young man was about to depart, he turned once to the portrait of Inez Mercator and gazed at it fervently.

"Senor," he said, "may I ask you a great favour?"

"What is it, Juan?"

"That you will give me that picture."

Don Felipe da Castro hesitated for a moment before he answered. Then he said:

"No, I will not give you that picture. It is a mere study—it does not represent her as she is."

"Oh, it is perfection!"

The old man smiled.

"You have much to learn in art and human nature, yet. There is something wanting in that picture that perhaps it is as well you should never know. But, if I am to give you a faithful portrait, I must supply it."

"Oh joy! you will finish it?"

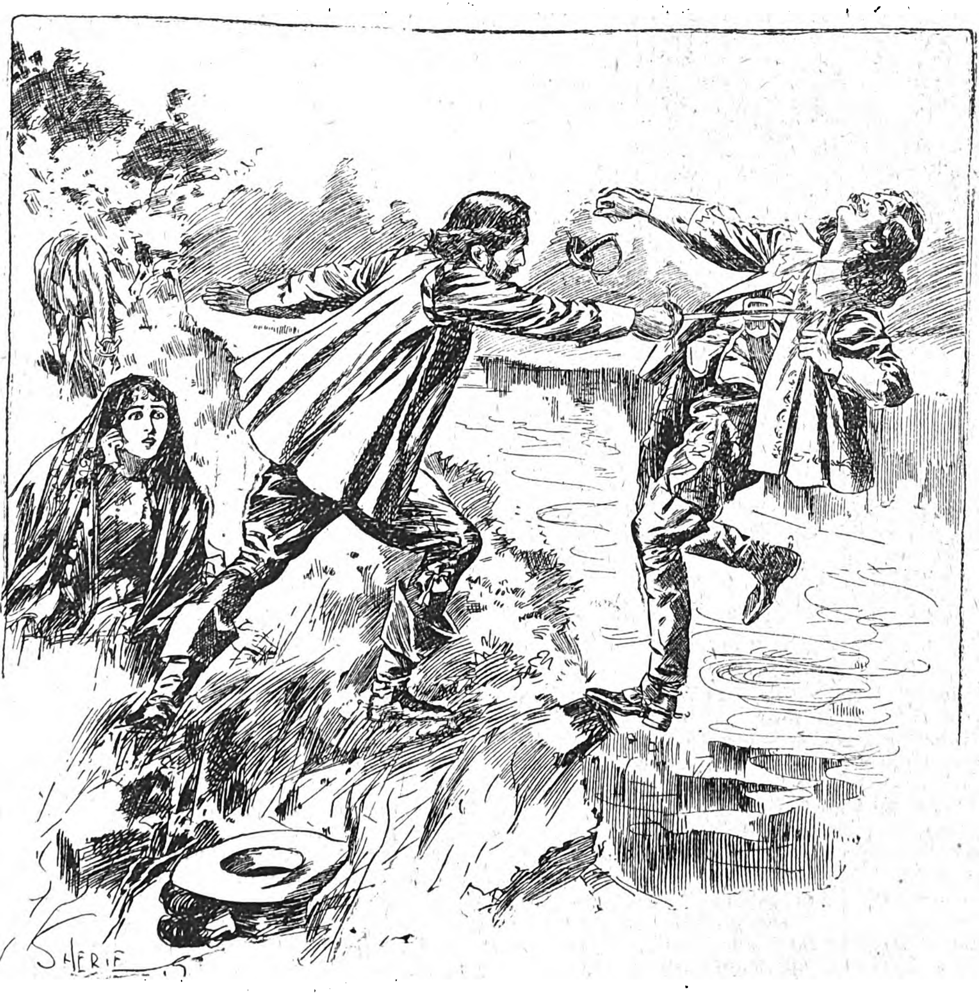
"No. But I will present you with a portrait of Inez Mercator in good time."

When the young man had departed, Don Felipe remained standing, with eyes fixed upon the portrait. Then he shook his head sadly, and turned away with a sigh.

"Alas," he said, "that when beauty is but skin deep, the instinct of man will probe no deeper!"

* * * * * *

Nearly a year had elapsed. Don Felipe da Castro had grown feebler still, and leant more heavily upon his cane as he left his house one morning, followed by a servant bearing a package, and wended his way slowly towards the house of his favourite pupil.



With a stifled moan Guadara fell backwards.

Juan de Villagarcia received him with much affection; as soon as the old man was seated he asked for an easel to be brought into the room, and bade his servant unwrap the package. Having dismissed him, he placed upon the easel a portrait of Inez Mercator.

"I have kept my promise, my son," he said, as soon as the young man had ended his profusion of thanks. "It is your wedding day to-morrow, and I have brought you a gift for it."

"Why, is it not the same portrait that I saw in your studio, Senor?"

"No, Juan, it may seem to you the same, but it is not. Listen, and do not be angry. As long as you love your wife and believe her to be worthy of your love, you will not see the difference; but if you once have cause to doubt or hate her—"

"Señor!"

"*If*, I say. I pray it may never be so; then, look at that picture, and remember the warning of Felipe da Castro. And now, farewell, my son, and forget not your work. As for this picture, it is the last, perchance, that I shall paint. And it may be, it is my best."

When the master was gone the pupil looked long and earnestly at the picture. Then he murmured:

"Ah, beloved! thou art all perfection. There is naught but love, and beauty, and faithfulness in thy face! Some silly phantom of the mind hath bewitched Don Felipe, but he has not reproduced it here!"

And he set his lips to the cold canvas and kissed the picture of his betrothed.

Gay was the scene in the Cathedral on the morrow; and yet there were tears in the eyes of one who watched the bridal pair bow beneath the benediction of the priest. Poor Don Felipe da Castro. Scarce two months passed, and that gay scene had changed into one of mourning as the solemn Mass for the Dead was chanted, and a coffin surrounded by blazing torches stood in the aisle, and was afterwards lowered into a spot close to where he had so often stood to worship. The great master was dead!

One man, who remained long after the crowd of citizens had softly passed out, one man, down whose cheeks the tears were running fast, despite the fact that he had only just obtained man's greatest earthly treasure—the woman whom he loved for his wife—knelt down beside the grave and prayed to God to make him worthy of the master who was no more, to help him to carry out that master's wish in his own work.

* * * * *

Five years had passed, and already Valencia was beginning to realise that the mantle of the prophet had fallen upon his disciple. Long and earnestly had Juan de Villagarcia toiled in the stony paths of art, and now his fame as a portrait painter was beginning to go forth among men. He had sacrificed much to carry out his master's wish, for it was entirely his own ambition that had urged his course onward.

But, if he was wrapped up in his work, there was one, at least, that did not interest herself so much in it. He had never thoughtlessly neglected his wife; he had never doubted her interest in him or her faithfulness for a moment. It was she who was to blame. She hated the constant devotion to work that her husband evinced. It bored her, the painting of all these pictures, the hours spent in the studio. Besides, it was not *her* business. A man must work, but a woman must amuse herself. And she did. Juan did not notice it. Had his been a less exalted nature, he would have experienced the need of her help in buoying him up to his work; but he was so strong, so enduring, so striving in his character, that he did not see his wife's careless attitude because he did not need her attentive one. He laboured in his studio, he gave her his spare hours. And he was happy. Alas, that he was so blind; alas, that he did not notice how she was beginning to spend her spare hours. If a woman will amuse herself, there are always men to be found to amuse her.

Late one afternoon he was standing in his studio before an unfinished picture, studying a mass of drapery arranged on a lay figure, and murmuring:

"Ah, Inez would be able to give me the correct pose. I will send for her."

He clapped his hands and a servant appeared.

"Tell the Señora I wish to see her at once."

The servant bowed and departed. He was a long time gone, and Juan began to grow impatient. When he returned it was with a pale, scared face.

"The Señora is not here."

"Not here?"

"She has gone away. Her maid says she left the house early this morning."

"Well?"

"They say she has gone with the Marquis of Guadara."

"What?"

"Señor, she left this note; they have just found it."

"Give it me. Ha! Leave the room, Carlos."

He tore open the letter and read it. Dazed and staggered, he clasped his hands upon his brow and fell on his knees.

"*Ten listurica, Dios!* Have mercy, oh, God!" he groaned.

In his agony of grief he remained for ten minutes or more. Then he rose to his feet and tottered to the other side of the studio where a portrait hung in the light, the portrait that Don Felipe da Castro had painted for him. In anguish he raised his eyes to the beautiful face, exclaiming:

"Inez! Inez! It cannot be true. Art thou not mine own beloved wife? Speak, and tell me thou hast not proved false—that it is all a mocking dream. Inez—if it *is* so—Heaven, if it is so—I have never doubted thee for a moment until now—oh, God—what is this?"

Gazing as he was upon the picture, he suddenly started back in horror, his face blanched, his eyes protruding. For as he looked upon the outline of those lovely features there slowly grew, as it were beneath and mingled with the face before him, a vision of another face so absolutely hideous that a feeling of loathsomeness crept upon his soul. Long and steadily as he gazed upon the picture, so did the awful face beneath the surface-beauty of the woman grow upon him until all loveliness had vanished from the portrait, and he saw only the *soul*—the dread, realistic soul—that dwelt beneath supreme.

It was the masterpiece of Don Felipe da Castro!

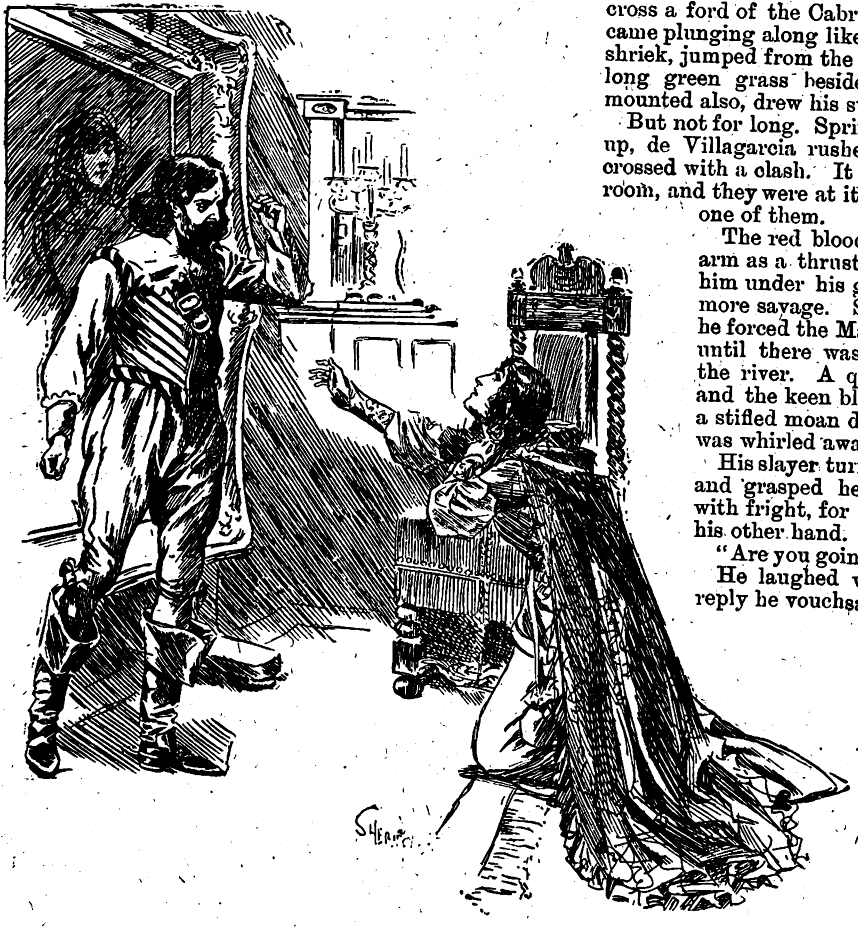
The wretched painter, on fire with grief and distraction, exclaimed:

"Oh, my master, my master, thou wert right! I see it all now. Fool, fool that I have been. Thou hadst eyes to probe where my folly could not penetrate, and thou hast painted the living soul of her I thought I loved. Thy meaning now is clear; that until I looked thereon with doubt or hatred I should never know. Oh, master, master, forgive me!"

He pointed a quivering arm at the picture.

"I see thee, Inez," he cried. "I see thee as thou art! I see thee as thou art!"

The stern implacable lesson of the man who was a master of his art and a master of the human soul besides was entering his mind. The hideous reality that the master had seen when he gazed upon that fair young face had been faithfully reproduced as he had seen it, and doubt had at length drawn it forth for another to see, and that other was Juan de Villagarcia, her husband!



“Oh, Juan! Juan! it is myself; have mercy!”

For a quarter of an hour he wrestled with the dread demons that surrounded him. Then, buckling on his rapier, he bounded into the courtyard and cried for his horse. Once more he was a man of action. The pursuit had commenced.

* * * * *

He found by inquiries they had started for Madrid on the Cuenca road. League after league he rode, gathering fresh traces of them. He had taken much money with him, and was able to obtain fresh horses. He rode all night. In the morning he drew up at a roadside *posada*, and found he was only an hour behind. There had been a breakdown. The Marquis de Guadara's carriage had been upset, the horses injured, and after much delay he and his companion had been obliged to proceed on a single horse, the only one obtainable, she riding with him in true Spanish fashion.

He spurred on. A pistol bullet came whizzing from behind a tree as he rode through a wood. One of the Marquis' retainers, doubtless, but he heeded it not. At length he saw them on their sorry steed, preparing to cross a ford of the Cabriel. They saw him, too, as he came plunging along like a demon. The woman gave a shriek, jumped from the horse, and buried her face in the long green grass beside the river. De Guadara dismounted also, drew his sword, and waited.

But not for long. Springing from his steed as he rode up, de Villagarcia rushed upon him, and their blades crossed with a clash. It was no match of the fencing room, and they were at it at once—fighting for the life of one of them.

The red blood spurted from de Villagarcia's arm as a thrust from the other's blade caught him under his guard. But it only made him more savage. Suddenly changing his ground, he forced the Marquis back with a furious rush until there was only a yard between him and the river. A quick feint, a lightning thrust, and the keen blade drew heart-blood, and with a stifled moan de Guadara fell backwards and was whirled away by the stream.

His slayer turned upon the trembling woman and grasped her by the arm. She shivered with fright, for the reeking sword was still in his other hand.

“Are you going to kill me, Juan?” she asked.

He laughed with scorn. That was all the reply he vouchsafed.

Then he changed the saddle of the steed he had overtaken to his own, placed her thereon, mounted himself, and the keeper of the *posada*, shrewd man that he was, asked no questions when he saw them both return together, for there was something in the man's face that prevented him.

They returned to Valencia. He never left her for a moment. As soon as he could he hired a carriage, sat in it by her side, but spoke no word.

At length they reached the house. Curious servants pried through peep-holes as they entered. But still he never spoke a word.

Dazed, affrighted, worn out with travel, sleeplessness and agony, the fair woman who had used him so ill was dragged into his studio, and forced into a chair before her own portrait.

And then he found his tongue.

“I am going to show you what you are,” he said. “I am going to show you as you appear to me now, to make you understand why I hate you and despise you a thousand times more than ever I loved you, why I love you no longer. I am going to make you see yourself, and hate yourself. Listen!”

And then he told her, slowly and deliberately, how Don Felipe da Castro had warned him years before concerning her, told her the story of the picture, told her how the picture had at length revealed to him the truth.

"And see," he cried, "the soul of you that lies beneath that transient beauty. Watch! I will trace its features."

Her gaze fixed with horror on the picture. At length she too saw what the master had portrayed. Falling down on her knees she shrieked:

"Oh, Juan! Juan! it is myself; I feel it now. I see the baneful lines. Juan, have mercy—don't—don't kill me! I am not fit to die!"

"Fit to die or fit to live," he cried with flashing eyes, "I care not. I only know I shall hate you for evermore. As you value your worthless life, do not leave this room."

He rushed from the room for a moment or two, and then returned with a glass of wine, which he placed on a table.

"That is poison," he said. "You have your life in your own hands. When I return I care not whether I find a corpse, or whether you have gone. I do not wish to find you here alive. You understand!"

People turned to notice the terrible look upon his face as he walked towards the old Cathedral. A priest within watched him kneel before the tomb of the master painter. The same priest returning an hour afterwards found him still there, praying earnestly.

Presently he rose and walked back to his home, with the air of a man dazed and lost to the world. Slowly he entered his studio and gazed around in the fading light.

It was empty! and the glass of wine still stood upon the table where he had left it, untouched.

He took it up, laughed softly to himself, and murmured:

"So she was afraid! Ha! ha! I thought it would be so."

He raised the glass to his lips and then paused.

"No," he soliloquised, "I don't think *he* would have said so. He would have called me a coward. . . . It is hardest *not* to do it. . . . I will *not* be a coward!"

Then he dashed the contents of the glass full in the face of Don Felipe da Castro's picture and turned on his heel.

* * * * *

"You've been in Spain, old chap," said Dick Harris to the friend who was with him. "Now I want you to have a look at a picture I picked up in Tarragon four or five years ago. It's in my study, so let's go there."

In a moment or two the two men were standing before a portrait of a beautiful girl.

"What a lovely face, Harris! Why, it's a perfect masterpiece!"

"It is, indeed, as I'll show you in a minute. Now, I bought that picture at an old lumber shop. No one knew anything about it, but I took a fancy to the thing, and didn't care who painted it. About a year ago I discovered something unnatural about it."

"What?"

"Well, it fell on my head, nail came out or something, and I turned upon it in a temper—you'll think me a fool—and swore at it. Then, suddenly, I saw a hidden face glaring at me beneath the beautiful one, and the strange thing is, that whenever I've looked at it since, I've only seen that hideous face—it's quite shut out the other. Can you see it?"

"No. You've hit on some curious hallucination."

"I haven't. See, I'll trace the outline—so. . . . Do you see it now?"

"Great Heavens, yes—how terrible! Stop a bit, Harris, I've seen that woman's face before!"

"Where?"

"Ah, I remember now. In a monastery near Valencia; it was a painting of Judas Iscariot, and I've often wondered why the face was that of a woman's more than a man's."

"Who did it?"

"A monk, they told me—about a couple of hundred years ago. He had been a pupil of the great painter da Castro."

"H'm! Wonder if he painted this ghastly thing to warn anybody. Let's come back and have a glass of wine. It's enough to give anybody the shudders!"

◆ ◆ ◆

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DEAD TO THE WORLD.

By Henry T. Johnson.

Author of "Cruce Vincit," "The Pride of the Ring," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Settling Accounts.

The blow had fallen, the blow that Morgan Chandler had been apprehending ever since he set eyes upon his present master. Before then he had imagined that he had so "arranged matters" in the books that no one who had not spent years on the accounts and on the estate could lay a finger on one false figure.

But he had to meet a different type of man to what he had anticipated. A man with a brain so strong and clear that no figures seemed too big or complex for it to grapple with, none too small for him to spot them, pick them out, and sort them. And at last the long threatened ordeal had arrived, and it had actually arrived in the most truculent fashion. One evening Ned Fletcher, after a knock at the door that in itself had seemed imperative and insolent, had burst in and blurted out:

"You're to attend the Squire in the library, Mr. Chandler, and to take the balance-sheet, the profit and loss account, and the books and vouchers."

"What do you mean, blundering into my office in that fashion!" he shouted angrily, stung beyond endurance by the very look in the face of the man he hated; the man he had not long ago turned out of employment, out of his very house and home, and the man whose every look told that he had not forgotten!

"What do *I* mean?" asked Fletcher defiantly. "What I want to know is what do *you* mean?"

"Don't argue with *me*."

"And don't try to browbeat *me!* The day's gone for that, Mr. Chandler."

"You insolent vagabond!"

"No names, you're not master here now. My master's your master, and we're man to man."

"Yes, we're man to man, but we're face to face. You can't strike me from behind now," and, as often happens, rage let loose, hurled the bolt of suspicion discretion would have kept back.

"What do you mean, blame me! If thee says I ever hit thee or any other man from behind I'll strike thee face to face."

White and quivering with passion, Morgan Chandler made a blow at the other and in a moment was tripped up and sent sprawling by a neat twist that in earlier days had sent many a keeper and night watcher to grass. An oath escaped Morgan Chandler. From the end of the corridor came an imperious voice:

"What's all this clamour? What are you two men doing here quarrelling, brawling, actually fighting in my house? Confound you! If you don't both desist I'll pitch the pair of you down the stairs," and, meaning what he said, their master strode along and stood between them.

"Silence!" he shouted as each started to urge his own case. "Fletcher, get about your business, and you, Chandler, pick up those books and follow me."

Both men obeyed, Chandler, vaguely grasping at any straw which might save him, on entering the library broke out into a tirade.

"I'll not stop here to be insulted by a lout dragged off the land, to be struck in the face by the very man that I believe had a hand in trying to murder me the other night."

"Very well, my friend, it's a free country—for those who are at large! When do you want to leave?"

"This week—this very day, this very hour, now, this minute!"

"No, no! Not one minute before we've gone through your accounts."

The other in desperation strove to bluster.

"Drop that!" said his master, sternly though quietly, and closing the door he turned the key. "Sit down there," he said, and the other obeyed, though he would have given worlds for the will power to have mutinied.

Then ensued for Morgan Chandler a desperately bad quarter of an hour. Deliberately, methodically, pitilessly, the man seated at the library table went through the accounts before him, placing an unerring finger on item after item that the unjust steward had falsified.

"That is a lie! That is ten pounds less than you received! This account has been paid! The man holds your receipt, don't tell me he's forged it! He's got his cheque with your own indorsement on it, passed through your bank and his own, I've seen the entry in his pass book. You paid on this date forty-two pounds, not fifty-nine! This woman's executors demand to be refunded three quarters' rent, the receipts for which they found among the dead woman's papers."

And so on, and so on. And Morgan Chandler sat there, his heart sinking within him, hearing count after count of the indictment that perchance might mean the broad arrow and the chain gang. At first, feebly arguing and protesting, but at last, listening sullenly, despairingly.

Then his accuser closed the last book and looked him in the face, and so doing hurled like a blow at him one word:

"Thief!"

"But, Squire," the man said at last, the appeal broke from his tongue parched with terror, "you won't put me away, you'll have mercy?"

"What mercy had you on the poor devils you've sold up, lock, stock, and barrel, and turned on the road before—I came back?"

"But, Squire, I did one thing. I tried to save your life—that night I followed the robbers into your room."

"Liar!"

Another word hurled in the man's face made him blink.

"You went into that room intent on murdering me."

A paroxysm of abject terror seized Morgan Chandler. There was something terrible, something suggestive of black magic about this man, who seemed to know everything, who seemed to lay bare Chandler's brain and soul.

"Mercy, mercy, Squire—"

"Squire—Squire!"

There was a loud knocking at the door, and, the Squire unlocking it, Ned Fletcher burst into the room, quivering with excitement.

"They've caught 'em."

"Caught whom?"

"The murderers; the men who broke into Dalehurst Grange and killed John Barker."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Then exclaiming to Chandler: "Wait here one moment," he left the library, following Ned Fletcher out into the hall.

"What—what will I do? What will he do?" soliloquised Morgan Chandler. "Will he charge me? Shall I be dragged through the village to the lock-up, charged before the justices, and sent to take my trial? Oh! how the folks that hate me, and that's most that I know, will rejoice! Shall I make a bolt for it now? No, I haven't the strength nor the heart."

His eyes fell on an open trunk bearing the label of the line by whose vessel Cyril Roylance had returned to England, and the big R. in black letters. Oh! since such things as shipwrecks were, why hadn't that ship of all others been wrecked, sunk with all on board? It was open. Merely to detach his mind from the agony of suspense that was racking it, he walked across the room and looked into the open trunk, crammed with a varied collection, mostly books and papers, toilet incidentals, a cap or two, one with a cricket badge, athletic and other club rules and registers, and other miscellaneous articles. There was a copy of the "Sydney Bulletin," with red ink crosses marking one picture. His eye catching those crosses, he read the underline, "The Banderville Cricket Team who have just completed their successful Tour," and in smaller type under the figures in the front line and above those in the rear of the group were printed their names.

"Mr. Cyril Roylance." Why, the printer had made a mistake! That wasn't the Squire, and mechanically his eye roved over the group in quest of him. But in a vain quest! What on earth did it mean? There it was, in black and white in print, which was regarded in Morgan Chandler's mind with a considerable amount of reverence. It wasn't a bit like him! With a stealthy glance at the door he turned over the miscellaneous collection, which, as a matter of fact, the Squire had that morning unlocked with a view to assorting and partly destroying. What was this? A pack of cards; no, photographs. He scanned them; mostly of young fellows, many in cricket and cycling costume, one or two pictures of actresses, another, cabinet size, of that group in the "Sydney Bulletin," and one carte de visite of the very man labelled in the newspaper Mr. Cyril Roylance.

And diagonally across the right-hand corner was writing. With an exclamation of amazement, of bewilderment, of exultation, Morgan Chandler read aloud, "*Yours faithfully, Cyril Roylance.*" And at that moment the Squire, with a strange, unsettled look in his face and eyes, the look of a hunted savage animal, entered the room, relocking the door.

The news he had heard had for the moment banished Morgan Chandler from his mind. Catching sight of him he snarled:

"Ah, yes, there's you to deal with, I'd forgotten you. Look here, my friend Morgan Chandler, I'll give you just this chance, get from here as fast as your legs can carry you, and, unless I have within twenty-four hours a wire from you that you're one hundred miles away, I'll place these in the hands of the police and——"

He paused significantly.

And the other man, with a change of demeanour, his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, echoed as insolently as possible:

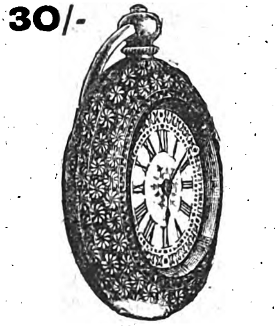
"And?"

"What's your game, my friend?"

"That's my business. Shall I tell you what your game is? It's bluff."

"You scoundrel, what do you mean?"

"What do I mean? I mean scoundrel yourself! It's



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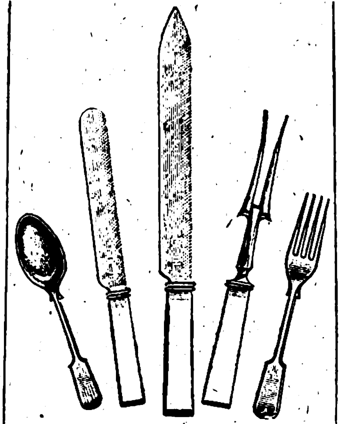

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bluff I say, but I've seen your cards and they ain't good enough, for there's one worth all your hand!"

And he held out for a moment the carte de visite signed by Cyril Roylance.

"No, you don't!" he exclaimed, snatching it away as the other made a dash for it.

In another moment Dick Seldon, like the tiger whose name he had won, sprang at him, but Chandler, avoiding the encounter, darted behind the desk, snatched up a letterweight, and hurled it full at the other. It struck him in the forehead, and in an instant the blood came raining down.

"Curse you! I'll lay you out. You shan't leave this room alive!"

And, knowing that his antagonist meant what he said, Chandler flew from desk to table, dodging the man who chased him, and from the table he snatched up a reading lamp, hurling that, too, at the face, the cruel face, all the more terrible because of the blood streaks lining it, of the man springing upon him.

But this time that man ducked, and the lamp went hurtling across the room, shattering against the embrasure of the windows and falling like a flaming ball, setting the lace curtains in a blaze.

"Help—help!" shouted Chandler, making one more dash, this time for the door.

But Tiger Dick was upon him, had clutched him by the throat and laced his fingers behind his neck, and was closing his thumbs upon his wind-pipe. For a moment they wrestled, then Morgan Chandler went down limp, helpless, whimpering, gasping. And the other knelt upon him.

"You've asked for it, you shall have it!" he said.

And the red mist was in his eyes, the red mist filled his brain and soul, murderer by instinct and by trade, he did his wicked work then and there.

Then he rose up, more like fiend incarnate than man, looked at his hands, they, too, were crimson now, crimson once again, looked with awful dilating eyes at what was lying at his feet; then, turning away, he glanced around him. Why, everything was crimson now, crimson flame!

CHAPTER XXVII.

The End of All.

Ned Fletcher, dispatched post haste from the Hall to the village to bring back the latest and most authentic news, trudged along dutifully, wondering why the Squire should have been so agitated by the intelligence that the detective from London had arrested those two brothers Nubbley and charged them with the murder at Dalehurst Grange, and of the strange rat cure for rheumatism effected by the zealous officer, together with the simultaneous falling off of hair.

"And him generally as cool as a cucumber, never startled by anything, but then, of course, 'twould come all the more home to him, seeing as how they went for him too, not as I can understand that there Chandler having the pluck to follow 'em up, or them clearin' out after sending him to sleep, unless as 'ow he hollered. Hullo! who's that yonder movin' among the bushes?"

He started at a jog trot across the parkland grass, heavy with the night dews.

"Who be you, and what be you doin' here?" he challenged.

"Mind your own business."

"'Tis my business. I've a right to know, and I mean to know."

"But I shan't tell you."

"Won't you. Then I'll take you to those as'll make you."

Dashing over and through a series of clumps of gorse and bracken, he sprang after the figure, now outlined against the grass land gleaming in the night, closed with it, tried the twist which had proved so efficacious in the case of Chandler. This time that back heel failed to come off, and Ned himself went heavily to earth, and his

Thought She was Dying!

DEBILITY, HEART-WEAKNESS AND INSOMNIA.

COMPLETELY CURED BY BILE BEANS.

The marvellous manner in which Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness saved a Bolton millworker's life has lately caused considerable comment in Lancashire. Ten years ago rheumatic fever left Mrs. Elizabeth Hodgson, of 13 Boundary Street, Halliwell, Bolton, with heart-weakness and general debility; and nothing was able to cure her until she took a course of Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness. In fact, more than once she was believed to be at death's door.

To a Bolton Journal reporter who investigated the case, Mrs. Hodgson said: "I have worked as a weaver in Bolton mills since I was thirteen. Ten years ago while on a visit to Carlisle—my native place—I had an awful attack of rheumatic fever, and for a long time I was so weak that I could not lift a teaspoon to my mouth. The fever left me with shortness of breath, heart-weakness, my legs and hands were very much swollen, and I could not put my feet to the ground. Later on I was removed to Carlisle Infirmary, and nobody expected me to come out alive.

Some time afterwards I asked if I could leave, and I was told I might as well, as I should never be any better. At the end of seven weeks I was taken out of the Infirmary, and went to Cote Hill, near Carlisle, but even after that I was very ill. I came back to Bolton, and last August I got a little better and tried to do a bit of work at Messrs. Tristram's mill. It was no use, however, as I became so ill that two weavers had to take me home. They thought I was dying on the way. I really felt myself that I was done for!

I became an out-patient at the Bolton Infirmary, but I did not get better, and I kept lingering on as it were between life and death. I dreaded nights coming. I could not eat, I was always short of breath, and work was quite out of the question.

One day I took a few of Chas. Forde's Bile Beans, and next morning I felt a great change. I was able to walk about and wash-up, and I felt quite refreshed, as for the first time for a long while I had been able to sleep at night. At the week-end I got two boxes of Beans at Waller and Riley's Blackburn Road shop. I continued to take them until, after a comparatively short time, I felt thoroughly fit for work. All the people about were thoroughly amazed at the change in me.

Now I have entirely got rid of my old complaints, and feel as well as ever I did in my life. I can eat anything, sleep well, go up and down stairs without the slightest difficulty, and am weaving from morning till night, as I did before I had rheumatic fever."

adversary was making off when, across the pasture land, a group of men came hastening up. One of them turned the flash of a bull's eye full on the features of Jack Branscombe.

"Surrender!" cried a voice. And another, more familiar as well as more welcome to Jack Branscombe, shouted:

"Yes, Jack, surrender. It's all right now!"

And Jack Branscombe, walking up to the man who held the bulls-eye, said, folding his arms:

"Yes, here I am, what do you want with me?"

"Well, that's a matter to be decided later," said Inspector Rossiter. "Mr. Branscombe, it is my duty to arrest you."

"But you'll come with us quietly, won't you?" said Gerald Hastie, "you'll promise me, won't you, Jack?"

"I'll give you my word, Gerry," Branscombe replied, and the other exclaimed:

"There you are, Rossiter, I'll be answerable for him. He'll come with us, and we needn't turn back on our errand or be hampered in it."

"Seize that man," came another voice out of the darkness, and Ned Fletcher, hastening up, exclaimed: "Who are you all? Why, it's Mr. Rossiter, the very man the Squire sent me to see."

"Yes, Fletcher, I'm going to see the Squire."

"But where's the man who threw me just now? Why, here he is, and it's Mr. Branscombe. Oh! no wonder I met with a fall. But what's this mean? Aren't you going to make sure of him?"

"Shall I slip these on him, Mr. Rossiter," inquired the now deferential Bingle.

"No thanks," said the Inspector, "leave this matter in my hands. Not, however," he chuckled, "that I'm infallible, but there's no crusted port working the oracle this time, Bingle."

And his rural colleague, peace having been restored, replied:

"No, sir, nor yet none of that there Hollands. I shall never look a square-faced bottle in the face again."

"Your master's at home, then?" said the Inspector, turning to Ned, who trudging at Jack Branscombe's heels, determined he should not misuse the liberty so mysteriously given him, replied:

"Yes, sir."

"Then I'll give him a call," and, looking up at the speaker, Ned found himself walking alongside a man whose shoulders towered above his own head, and who went on:

"So that's Fallowfield Hall, the home that Cyril Roylance thought he'd never reach. How red those windows in the centre gleam?"

"By Jove! they do!" exclaimed Jack Branscombe. "And look, there's smoke and a tongue of flame breaking through one of them. They're not gleaming with light, but fire. Come along!"

And the whole party, quickening their footsteps, ran at full speed towards the terrace, and reaching the house they found the few servants on duty, tearing to and fro, setting the hydrants and hose to work.

It was the Oak Room, so called from its panelling, that was on fire, the room appropriated by the Squire as his own private study, and the old carved panelling, black and glistening with centuries, had caught like tinder and was blazing so fiercely that they had in vain tried to get along the corridors leading to the door. And, shuddering with horror, they whispered to each other that the Squire was in there.

Without a moment's loss of time willing hands placed ladders against the windows. Ned Fletcher, faithful and loyal to the man who had given him a chance, and meaning to give him this time one in return, dashed up the rungs, but, half-choked and blinded with smoke and scorched by the volcanic fury roaring from the windows, he was forced back, baffled and beaten by the rampant fire king. All hands were working with a will, Rossiter and those with him as vigorously as any.

"By Jove!" he shouted through the din, "I came out to take him, and I want to take him alive."

"Keep your eye on Branscombe," said Bingle, "mind he doesn't slip," but, turning, he saw the man of whom he had spoken stripped to the waist, clambering, hose in hand, up the ladder, fighting the fire-fiend face to face. And his next words were: "Mr. Hastie, you're right and I'm wrong, and I beg that man's pardon."

Ned Fletcher, darting up that ladder till he stood beside Jack Branscombe, said, too:

"I've done you wrong, sir, I've thought wrong o' you."

"Never mind that," shouted Jack excitedly, "what we've got to do now is to save your master if we can."

"We can't this way, sir," groaned Ned despairingly; then, suddenly, "but I think I know another way. Come along o' me, sir."

They slid down the ladder, together reached a door in the east wing leading to the offices, dashed into the now smoke-filled house, groped their way along galleries, staircases, corridors. At last they reached a room in the same corridor as the Oak Chamber, but on the opposite side. Wrapping around their heads, faces, and hands clothes saturated with water, they flung open one door, dashed pell mell across the corridor, seized the red hot handle of the other. The door was locked!

"Now, lad! Now for it!" shouted Branscombe, and they threw their joint weight against the door. It crashed open into the blazing room. There in the smoke they saw two figures, one groping in the red fog of smoke and flame, the other lying still! Jack, seizing the former, and exerting all the strength that had made him famous in the countryside, half-lifted, half-dragged it across the room back to the door.

"I'm done," his burden groaned, "who's risking his life to save mine?"

Whirling, dragging, halting, lifting him through the door and across that roaring, crackling, smoke-belching corridor into the other room, Jack half-gasped, half-shouted:

"Jack Branscombe!"

For he was not certain whether or not they would get back alive, and he meant that the man whom he knew to hate him, should, even at this last, know what he had done.

But, struggling manfully, he bore him into comparative safety, then looked around upon Ned Fletcher and, missing him, went back for him. At the door of the room he found him, more by touch than sight, on his knees and dragged him out of that raging fire to the gallery wherein his master was lying.

"I couldn't save the other," Ned groaned after a while, "for he was gone."

"Never mind, Ned, you've done your best. I think we can get this one safe away." And between them they lifted the charred, almost senseless, bundle of poor humanity, bore it away from that volcano, and so out of the great mansion so seriously threatened with demolition.

And just as Job Bingle's doubts were returning, he having missed the man so long suspected, that man scrambled down from a ground floor window along with Ned Fletcher, the pair bearing something inanimate between them.

Just then fire engines from different stations came dashing up, the brave brass-helmeted riders ceasing their warning shouts and leaping down to action in their battle with the fire king, that bravest of battles whereby peace wins victories as glorious as any claimed by war.

And, leaving this brave host of peace to fight and conquer, Rossiter and his companions busied themselves doing all they could for the man Jack Branscombe and Ned Fletcher had saved, bore him to a room in another wing unthreatened by the fire, and, having summoned

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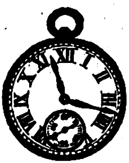

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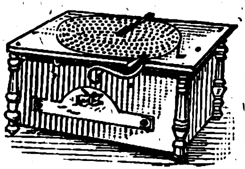

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medical assistance, they gathered round the couch whereon he lay.

"Who is it?" asked one of the frightened servants, and Fletcher answered in a broken voice:

"It's the Squire, the poor Squire!"

But Geoffrey Heseltine, looking down upon the pain-distorted face, said: "No, this isn't Cyril Roylance, whoever it may be."

Swiftly, deftly, they stripped his charred clothes from him. There on the shoulder, in one white space unscathed, unseamed, unshrivelled by fire, Rossiter beheld a long, deep, livid groove.

"No, no!" he said, "it's come back to me at last. I know him now. That's the mark of the bullet I almost downed him with in self defence five years ago. I've got two of the gang. I never dreamt to take their foreman. I thought him dead, that's why I never reasoned how it was his face and voice brought back old times. It's Tiger Dick! Whoever the man was they found in convict clothes dead in the River Dass, this is Richard Seldon."

The dying man's eyelids opened slowly and slightly as his own name fell upon his ears.

"Yes, you've got on the trail at last, Rossiter," he whispered painfully. "You used not to be so slow."

"Better late than never, Dick," said Rossiter gravely, and the other, with a faint flicker of the bravado which had been born in him and was living in him till this last, said, although with a gasp and a smile:

"But I've done you after all, I'm going to slip you; I shall be gone in a few minutes where you can't follow."

"I don't know that I'm particularly anxious to follow where you're going, Dick," Rossiter was saying, when Gerald Hastie raised his hand.

"Hush, hush, man. Those are not words to speed a fellow sinner to the Judgment Seat with. Richard Seldon, you have said what you know, that you are leaving this life; this, for you, unhappy life. Think, even in this last moment, can you do nothing to mitigate the evil you have done?"

"Not in your line, parson. I've been bad from the beginning."

"We're none of us good, and we've all got to go the journey you're going. Few, if any of us, are quite fit for that journey. Tell me, can we do anything to ease your pain of body?"

"No, the pain's gone now." Then, after a pause: "Thank you," and, after another pause, "Hastie you're a sportsman."

"Then can you do anything to ease your soul? Can you say anything that will lift suspicion from an innocent man? Think, man, it'll be something to have that to your account."

"Bah! my book's too heavy for me to hedge, especially now, the race is almost over. But, parson, who was it dragged me out?"

"It was me, master," sobbed Ned Fletcher, "me and Mr. Branscombe."

"Thank you, Ned. But Branscombe! S'truth! did you go in there after me?"

"I did."

"Well, you're a plucked 'un, I always knew you for that, though I hated you. Oh! I am going now. No! no! not yet. Parson, it's too late for me to do any good now, and yet, not too late to try! He dragged me out; he, the man I've tried to put away so. I'll do it with the last breath that's going from me. Listen, I downed Barker, I planted the locket Josh and Barney sneaked from Branscombe's chain. I planted it on the stairs: before that I killed Cyril Roylance in the train, changed togs with him, chucked him into the river when the train went over the bridge. I've been working this district with Josh and Barney, you've got them. I killed Morgan Chandler about an hour ago."

He fell back exhausted with the stress of speech.

"Oh! wicked, sinful man," said Gerald Hastie in tones such as none had ever heard him use before. "Think—think! you are on the threshold! While the life God has given you still burns in you, pray—pray! Utter one word! Think, one word! One supplication to the God you are about to meet for mercy."

"What's the use?"

"Because He died for sinners."

"For sinners, well, then He must have died for me. I'll take your tip, Gerald Hastie, you're a sportsman! Christ, mercy! Parson, stoop down, tell Mary I said that. She believes in him: she was named after His Mother!"

* * * * *

His head fell back just as the door opened and that Mary he had named glided into the room. Without a word, she sank on her knees, raining tears upon the charred and blistered hand. He said no other word, only for a moment the eyelids lifted again, something like a smile flitted over the pain-drawn face, and then those eyes were set in the gaze that sees no more—as we see things from here!

L'ENVOI.

So Tiger Dick cheated the gallows that Messrs. Branner and Plumb went to after all. And people began to put two and two together and relate what misgivings they had always entertained concerning him. Lord and Lady Limberg declared that they had always been certain he was a bad lot, and his lordship consulted his solicitor as to the possibility of recovering the money he was certain he had swindled him out of at cards, but the solicitor in question dashed all hopes by pointing out to him that the fellow had left no estate whatever, inasmuch as that which he had held immediately prior to his death belonged, not to himself, but to the legatee and devisee under the real Cyril Roylance's will, that was to say, Miss Doris Dale, since become Mrs. Branscombe.

For Harcourt Dale had made amends for his past injustice in so far as lay in his power by giving a free consent to his daughter's marriage with Jack Branscome, who at last stood vindicated before all the world, and Gerald Hastie made the man he reckoned the best chap in the world and the girl he considered the best girl in the world, bar one, perfectly happy by joining their hands in holy matrimony.

As for the lady he considers absolutely the best in the world, will he ever make her happy? Perhaps, for he lives up to that good old motto, Nil Desperandum!

And now the shadow has gone from her life. In the corner of the little churchyard a grassy mound marks the place where a turbulent mutineer against God's law rests, wicked though he was, within His Acre.

But there is one man who thinks of him and mourns him as a friend. That one is Ned Fletcher. He is leading an honest life by honest labour on the Fallowfield estate, for Jack Branscombe bore no malice, and Ned thinks his new master the best and kindest alive, but you can never get him to think otherwise of his late one.

And sometimes over the little churchyard wall he casts a regretful glance on that grassy mound, where sometimes there lies a handful of wild flowers, placed there by a little girl whom, once, the man who sleeps there snatched from under the horses' threatening hoofs.

THE END.

"I HEAR your husband is out of a job." "Why, he was never busier in his life." "What is he doing?" "Looking for work."

HE: "Ethel, what can it mean? Last night I dreamed that I proposed to you." SHE: "I should say that you are more sensible asleep than awake."

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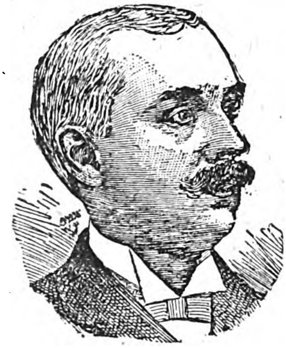
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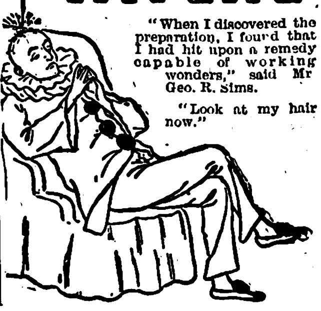

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We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. To those readers who submit storyettes which are used, a six shilling novel will be awarded. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, December 23rd. Postcards only, please.

He Had Already Done So.

THE blushing bride-elect was rehearsing the ceremony about to take place. "I shall expect you to give me away, papa," she said. "I'm afraid I have done it already, Caroline," replied the old man nervously. "I told your Herbert this morning you had a disposition just like your mother's."

Not a Paradise.

WESTERNER: "Goin' ter settle, are yer?" Tenderfoot: "Yes, I have come here to stay, and have already bought a home. I was attracted to this place by an item in the newspaper which said there had not been a lawsuit in your country for ten years." Westerner: "Waal, there ain't. You see there ain't no use goin' ter law when Winchester rifles is as cheap as they air now."

What Followed?

IT was little Tommy Smith's fifth birthday, and, while out for a walk with his mother, he met his Uncle Jack. Expecting a tip, he greeted his uncle with—"Uncle Jack, I am five years old to-day." To which his uncle replied: "Are you really? Well, I wish you many happy returns of the day, Tommy." Tommy being silent, his mother said: "Say 'Thank you, Uncle Jack.'" But Tommy, in disgust at not getting his expected tip, replied: "What, have I really got to say 'Fank you' when he ain't give me nuffink at all?"

Got What He Asked For.

"SAM, can you lend me a sovereign that you have no use for?" said Jim Webster to Sam Seddon one day. "Certainly, Jim; I shall be pleased to accommodate you," said Sam, handing Jim a sovereign. Jim was so surprised at his luck in getting the cash that he bit the coin to see if he were awake or dreaming, and in doing so discovered that the coin was a counterfeit. "This is a bad one, Sam. I didn't think you'd cheat me like this." "I know it's a bad 'un, Jim. You asked me for one I had no use for, and I gave it to you. What more do you want?"

Where It Hurt.

"YOU have a daughter, have you not, sir?" said a minister to an old gentleman with whom he had formed a casual acquaintance as a fellow passenger. The old gentleman essayed to answer, but the question had strangely affected him. "I beg your pardon," said the minister, "if I have thoughtlessly awakened in your mind recollections of a painful nature. The world is full of sorrow, sir, and perhaps my question recalls to your memory a fair, beautiful girl, whose blossoming young life had withered in its bloom. Am I not right, sir?" "No, not exactly," replied the old gentleman sadly. "I have five unmarried darters, mister, an' the youngest of the lot is twenty-eight years old."

Mismated.

MRS. WILTON: "I have not heard from your daughter since she married a foreign count." Mrs. Bilton: "She is very unhappy." Mrs. W.: "Too bad; but such matches usually are unfortunate." Mrs. B.: "Indeed they are. You see the poor girl knows so little of foreign languages that she drops back into English every time she gets angry, and then her husband can't understand a word she says."

Vanquished.

FIRST VENDOR OF OINTMENT: "Gentlemen, I will now illustrate to you the wonderful powers of my ointment. I was present at an accident, and a dog had the misfortune to lose part of his tail. I immediately applied my ointment to the injured member, and a new piece of tail grew, and it resumed its ordinary appearance." Second Vendor: "Gentlemen, I also was present at that accident. I picked up the piece of tail that was cut off, applied my ointment to it, and immediately another dog grew out of the end of it." (Collapse of rival.)

Advice Not Wanted.

A YOUNG man was standing at a corner of a street, peaceably smoking a cigar, when an elderly person stopped and asked him: "How many cigars a day do you smoke?" "Three," patiently replied the other. "How much do you pay for them?" continued the inquisitor. "Threepence each," was the reply. "Don't you know, sir," continued the sage, "that if you would stop smoking and save up the money, by the time you are as old as I am you might own that big building at the corner." "Do you own it?" inquired the smoker. "Well, no, I don't," admitted the old man. "As it happens, I do," said the young man. And the sage walked on.

Her Eyes Annoyed Him.

FARMER HODGE (reading novelette): "I'm out of all patience with that Gladys Fitzallwyn in the story—the way she's abusing her beautiful eyes. She doesn't deserve to have none." Mrs. Hodge: What she been doing now?" Farmer Hodge: "This book is full of it. First she threw her eyes up to the ceiling, and then let them drop on the floor; then she darted them down on a long corridor, and rested them on the cool waters of the lagoon. Then she must have called them back somehow, for it says she bathed them in sad, salt tears, wiped them, and swept them with long lashes. Once she was fool enough to rivet them on the dome, and when I left off she was fixing them on a mantlepiece."

PHOTO COMPETITION.

THREE correct claims have been received this week, and £5 notes have been sent to the following:

MISS LLOYD (No. 48),
care of W. Branscombe, Esq.,
Cintra,
Walker Road,
Harrogate.

MR. DAN LENO (No. 49),
Springfield House,
Atkins Road,
Clapham Park, S.W.

MISS E. WALES (50),
39 Gilbey Road,
Tooting, S.W.

The Brain Gymnasium.

In these competitions a prize of £1 1s. will be awarded each week to the competitor whose attempt we receive giving the correct solution of all the puzzles. If more than one is absolutely correct the prize of £1 1s. will be given to the first correct attempt dealt with.

If no lists of absolutely correct solutions are sent in, the first prize will be awarded to the competitor whose attempt is first dealt with showing the fewest mistakes.

Each week we shall award, in addition to the above, either ten of our gold-plated pencil-cases or ten popular novels, to be distributed amongst the competitors whose attempts are absolutely correct and have failed to win the first prize, or, if no complete lists of correct solutions are received, to those whose attempts show the fewest mistakes.

Write all your solutions on one side only of the paper, putting the number against each. Post the batch in an envelope marked "Brain Gymnasium," to reach the Editor, *Short Stories*, 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., by first post on Monday, December 30th, 1901.

Readers are invited to submit puzzles, acrostics, conundrums, word-squares, etc., for publication on this page. A gold-plated pencil-case will be given to each reader whose attempts are used. All attempts must be vouched for as original, and, of course, it is distinctly understood that the sender of a puzzle must neither compete in the competition nor divulge to anyone the solution. Any reader found infringing this rule will be severely dealt with.

No. 1.

ACROSTIC.

The initials of the words filling the blanks spell the name of a beautiful bird:

1. The —— river is found in South America.
2. The town of —— is situated on the Thames, near London.
3. Queen —— had more faith than the others who surrounded Columbus.
4. The —— was much too hot.
5. —— —— —— was the flower of English girls, and had a sad fate.
6. —— was the name of an early English Queen.

No. 2.

PROVERB.

My whole is a rhyming proverb containing 38 letters:

My 4, 12, 23, 19, 33 is the country where it originated.

My 18, 29, 27, 11, 24, 25, 7, 20, 9 is a holiday named in the proverb.

My 7, 4, 5, 6, 19, 22, 25, 15, 26 it is pleasant to find within doors on this holiday.

My 9, 21, 34, 28 it is pleasant to see without.

My 32, 37, 5, 25, 26, 31 is another holiday named in the proverb.

My 14, 35, 19, 30 often brightens the first holiday named, and on that day we expect to find plenty of my 1, 13, 30, 22, 17.

My 36, 2, 16, 3, 19 is a character who can 10, 4, 38 no favour on either day.

My 8 is found near the close of the first holiday and just as near the beginning of the second.

No. 3.

WORD SQUARE.

From the five words described below form a word-square:

My first, 'tis said, had power to charm,
But her enchantment led to harm;
A form of language is my second.
My third unsafe for boys is reckoned.
Stop always where my fourth you see,
And do my last if wrong you be.

No. 4.

WORD FORMING.

Form the name of the author of the last quotation from:

1. The second letter of the author of the first quotation.
2. The fourth letter of the author of the second quotation.
3. The first letter of the author of the third quotation.
4. The sixth letter of the author of the fourth quotation.
5. The sixth letter of the author of the fifth quotation.
6. The second letter of the author of the sixth quotation.

1. "The way was long, the wind was cold
The minstrel was infirm and old;
His withered cheek and tresses gray
Seemed to have known a better day."

2. "And Ardennes waves above them her green leaves,
Dewy with Nature's tear-drops, as they pass
Grieving, if aught inanimate grieves,
Over the unreturning brave—alas!
Ere evening to be trodden like the grass."

3. "In vain we seek a heaven below the sky;
The world has false but fluttering charms."

4. "Oh that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch thy cheek!"

5. "No more surveying with an eye impartial
The long line of the coast,
Shall the figure of the old field-marshal
Be seen upon his post."

6. "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me."

7. "When the British warrior queen,
Bleeding from the Roman rods,
Sought, with an indignant mien,
Counsel of her country's gods."

No. 5.

CHARADE.

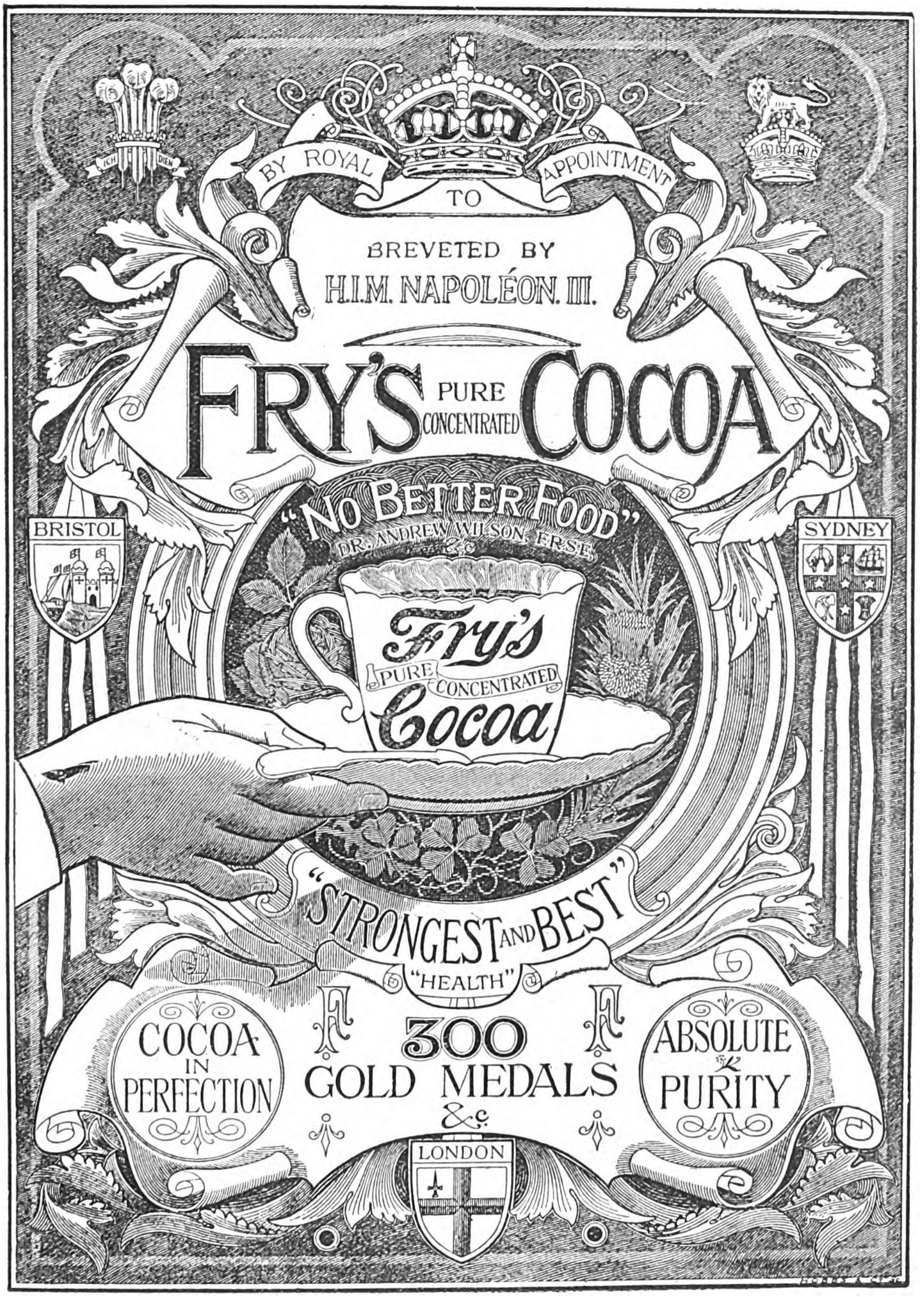
My FIRST sticks closer than a friend,
But is not half so much desired.
The poet hies him to my NEXT,
To be alone with frenzy fired.
My WHOLE most carry day by day;
Heavy or light, prove as it may,
They still would throw it quite away.

BROKEN WORDS.

No. 6.

1. Curtail a Moorish saint, and leave a bird with ornamental feathers.
2. Curtail a sweet drink, and leave a valuable wood.
3. Curtail a pitcher, and leave a sheep.
4. Curtail a conflagration, and leave an evergreen.

Printed by Horace Cox, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.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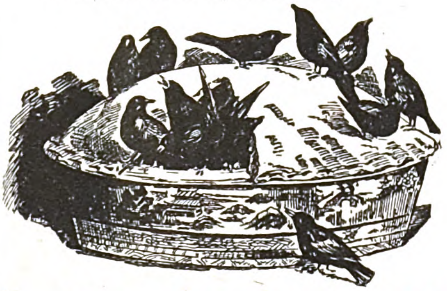

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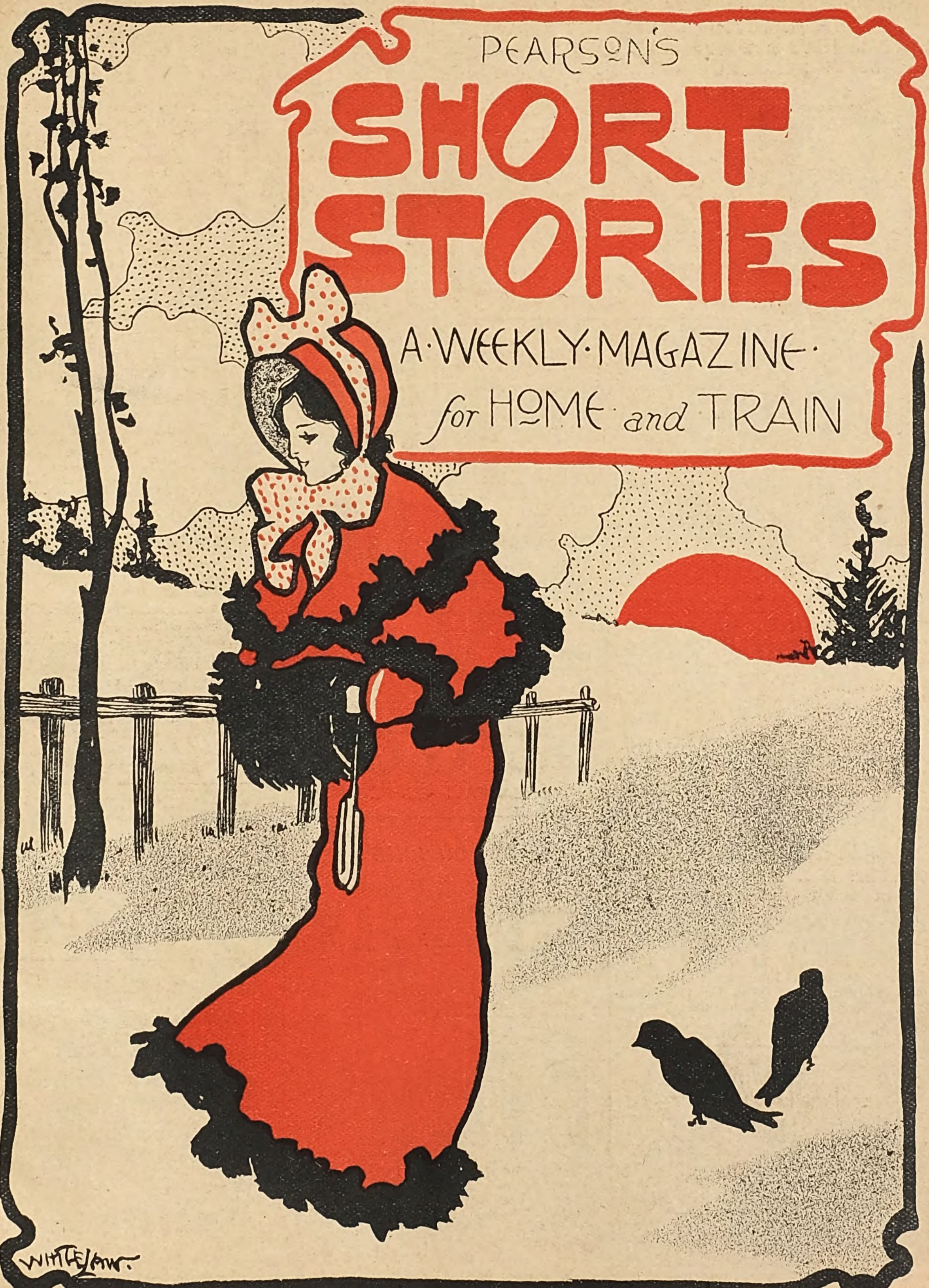
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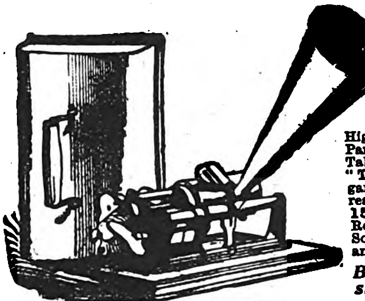

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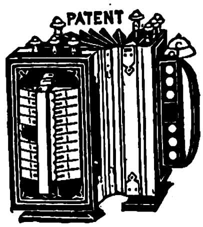

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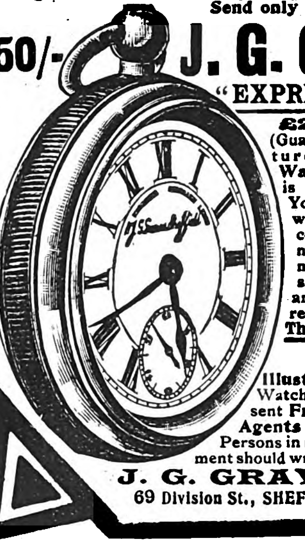

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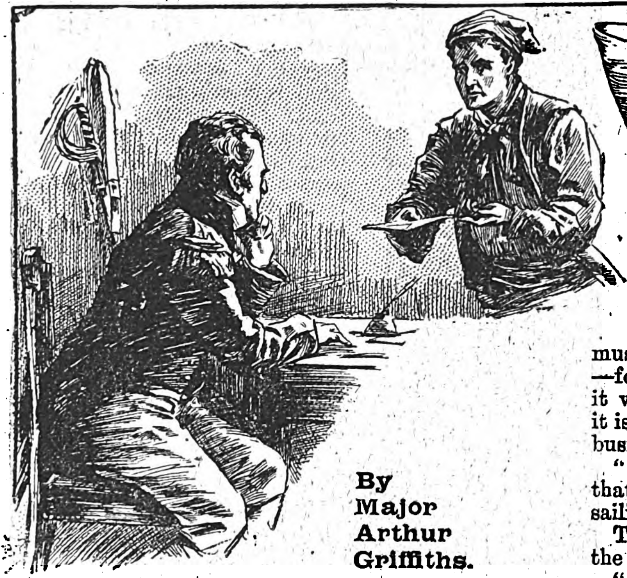

By Major Arthur Griffiths.

ONE day late in September, 1813, a smart brigantine flying British colours was approaching the rock-bound coast of northern Spain and seeking the narrow cleft that leads into the little harbour of Passages. This picturesque town lying upon the water's edge, at the foot of rounded hills covered with hanging woods, was just then the base of Lord Wellington's army campaigning in the Pyrenees. It was crowded with shipping, for although the neighbouring fortress of San Sebastian had been captured, its more commodious harbour had not yet been utilised. So everything still came to Passages including the good ship *Flaming Sword*, Crunden master, deep laden with military stores, but carrying also a couple of passengers of a kind not often seen at the seat of war.

They were ladies, English ladies, unmistakably of good birth and high breeding. Something more than idle curiosity had brought them to Spain.

One was of uncertain age, although still a brisk, alert matron; her eager look and sharp voice, the keen, black eyes under dark, level eyebrows denoted obstinacy, self-will, a managing and masterful spirit. The other—young, pretty, fair-haired, and violet-eyed, soft of speech and gentle in manner—had that clinging, appealing trustfulness that wins so readily upon the sterner sex. Both were in deep mourning, for Lady Oldham, the elder, had but lately lost her husband, and the dead lord had been Ethel Hayter's guardian and her father's dearest friend.

The brigantine rounded to, and anchored a stone's throw from the shore. Presently the Commandant of Passages came off in person, answering thus courteously a letter from Lady Oldham. She had begged him to find her accommodation in the town, but he now strongly urged her to stay on board the brigantine.

"This is but a dirty, slipshod place at best," he pointed out, "and terribly crowded. Besides, the army must move forward; we shall soon leave this country—for good and all—and then your ladyship would find it very uncomfortable. Here you have a home, such as it is, and can return in safety to England when your business is completed, whatever it may be."

"I have come out to see my son; to arrange, in fact, that he should go back with me in this or the first ship sailing. He is now Lord Oldham."

This statement had less effect than she expected, for the Commandant shook his head doubtfully as he said:

"No officer can obtain leave, I fear, at this moment. The army is engaged almost daily, and there is some sharp work in prospect over there—" he waved his hand up to where close at hand the commanding range of the Pyrenees showed snowy peaks high among the clouds.

"Then he shall go without leave," cried Lady Oldham petulantly. "Don't you see, sir, that you are talking nonsense? He must attend to his new duties; take his seat in the House, marry—" she indicated the fair-haired girl, who blushed vividly and turned a little away. "He must return to England without delay. I will see the Marquis of Wellington himself. I have letters for him, the strongest recommendations, I know his mother, Lady Mornington, intimately, and all the family. I have been assured that there will be no difficulty."

The Commandant was still unconvinced.

"I question much, nay I feel sure that your son, Captain Oldham," whom I have the honour to know—she made a swift gesture lost upon the speaker—" as an officer of this army would never consent to turn his back on it at such a time as this, even if permitted. He is too good a soldier."

"You are mistaken, sir, in more ways than one," said Lady Oldham darkly. "But I will not bandy words with you, sir. The point is when and where can I see the Commander of the Forces?"

"I understand that his lordship is to be at Oyarzum, Sir Thomas Graham's headquarters, to-day. It is only eight or ten miles distant; I can provide your ladyship with mules or horses."

"Horses, please, and a guide. We will ride over at once. You will, I think, find I have some influence, and that when I have spoken all obstacles and difficulties will speedily disappear."

Two hours' pleasant ride along the slopes of the wooded hills brought them to Oyarzum, a little town of picturesque aspect, the houses white with projecting balconies and external staircases of carved wood. The

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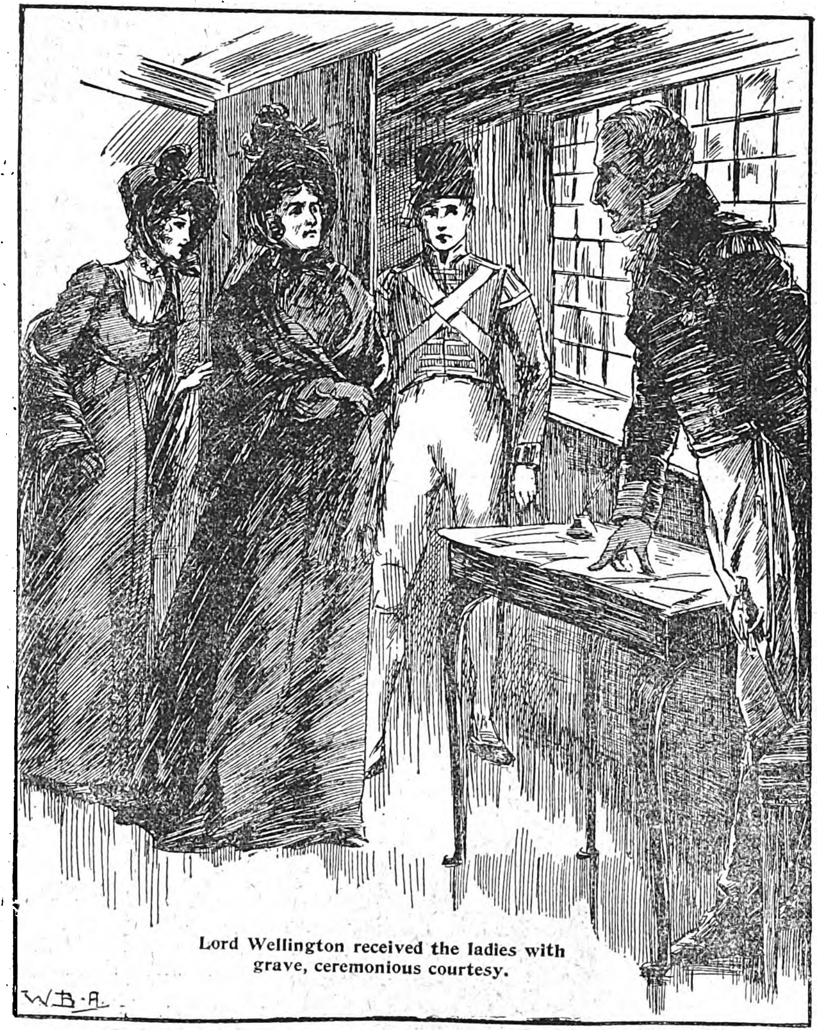


Lord Wellington received the ladies with grave, ceremonious courtesy.

guide halted at one of the houses, where a crowd of orderlies, infantry sergeants, and mounted dragoons stood around the doorway, while numbers of officers coming and going with much bustle and stir of business showed that it was a centre of interest. This was the Headquarters.

An aide-de-camp came out and made his bow civilly to the ladies. What could he do for them? To see the Commander of the Forces? Oh! but, really, his lordship should know presently—well, as soon as possible—that Lady Oldham had arrived, and that was all the aide-de-camp could promise.

"Sir Thomas Graham is with him now. Mr. Larpent, the judge advocate, is waiting, and has a formidable bundle of papers. There are numbers more. The Marquis has many pressing calls on his time. I do not feel at all certain——"

But Lord Wellington, when informed, gallantly gave the ladies the preference, and soon received them with grave, ceremonious courtesy. Yet he laughed his laugh—loud, long, harsh, but cheery—when he asked Lady Oldham what on earth had brought her to Spain? He laughed again, but not so pleasantly, on hearing the answer, and spoke out his mind with decisive abruptness.

"I can give no officer of this army leave of absence now, my lady, not for a single hour. My mind is clearly made up on that point. Of course, if Captain Oldham, I beg his pardon, Lord Oldham, chooses to send in his papers I cannot stop him, but I can tell him what I think of him, what all his comrades will think of him, and, by George, I do not think he will like to hear it at all!"

"But, my lord, I am not speaking of Captain Oldham," pleaded the mother. "He is only my second son. The eldest, now Lord Oldham, is not—not an officer. He is in the ranks, a soldier—a private soldier."

"Whew! What is this? A most extraordinary story."

"He was wild, my darling Rudolph; foolish, extravagant, a spendthrift, and he angered his father beyond pardon. Do not ask me to tell you more. But now he has at last come into his own, he is righted, and I have hurried out here to rescue him from his degradation."

"It is none, Lady Oldham, to wear the King's uniform in any grade, if he carries it honourably," said the great soldier correcting her.

"But as a common private man. Oh, Lord Wellington, surely you will spare him—now? You will set him free, give him back to those who love him so devotedly, to his fond mother, to this sweet girl who has waited for him for such long years?"

Ethel Hayter had the trick of blushing deeply under any strong emotion, and now she flushed crimson, then paled as quickly, and seemed greatly distressed.

"You are certain of this? You know for a fact that your son—Rudolph you said I think—is with this army?"

"The report reached me from a sure source. A comrade lately invalided home brought me letters from my dear son. They had been in hospital together, somewhere in Portugal."

"His name and regiment, please?"

"He called himself Crouch as I understand, and he was serving in the King's Royal Rangers."

"Ha!" cried Lord Wellington with a sharp note of surprise, and he turned quickly to finger some papers lying before him, and abruptly threw them down again. There was a long pause. His lordship looked ill at ease, distressed, and when he spoke, it was in a cold, hard, constrained voice.

"I think, Lady Oldham," he said, "you had better see your second son, Captain Oldham. I will have him sent for; he is on the staff of the 1st Division, near Irun, not fifteen miles away. An excellent young officer, by the way, very well spoken of. He can be with you at nightfall."

"I do not wish to see him—I will not see him. He has never been a good son or a good brother. It was he who set my lord against darling Rudolph; he was the cause, I know, of their terrible estrangement. Besides all this time out here campaigning, why did not Harry befriend his brother?"

"Are you sure they ever met? They have been serving in different parts of the country."

"I believe that if Rudolph had sought his brother, Harry would have repelled him. He would have been ashamed of his unfortunate brother. It would have been like Harry——"

"Indeed, it is not fair to say that, Lady Oldham!" interposed the girl, speaking for the first time, and, of course, blushing crimson.

"Can it be possible, Ethel Hayter, that you wish to take Captain Oldham's part? You, the affianced——"

"Stop, please stop, Lady Oldham! I pray you will not bring me into the question," said the sweet girl, so evidently distressed that his lordship looked at her in surprised sympathy. But he had his reasons for wishing to end this scene, and he again urged Lady Oldham to see her second son.

"He will no doubt take your tidings to your eldest son, Lady Oldham. And after all he is the proper person to do so."

"Oh, no, no. Let my darling Rudolph come himself. Do I beg, beseech, implore you. You have only to give the order. One word from you would bring Rudolph to me."

"If he were within reach, yes; if he were—were—in a position to go to you."

"What can your lordship mean? Tell me, for Heaven's sake tell me. Has he come to any harm? He is not wounded, not ill, not—surely he has not been killed?"

"On that I can positively reassure your ladyship. He is alive; I am certain of that, alive, and for the moment well; none of us can boast of more than that, from hour to hour. But the rest, the details, you must hear from Captain Oldham."

"But you will give him back to me, dear lord, Rudolph, I mean? May I count upon that? You will promise that?"

"You shall hear from me to-day, to-morrow, soon; I can say no more. But now you must really pardon me, I cannot prolong this interview. I am much occupied, I have many people to see. I would strongly urge you to return to Passages, stay on board ship, and wait for Captain Oldham's arrival. He will prove a comfort and support to you, I feel sure. Good day."

The moment the ladies had left, Wellington summoned his military secretary, the most trusted and confidential member of his staff.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish, Fitzroy. A Lady Oldham has been here—oh, you know all about it, hey? But you do *not* know that this precious son of hers, is one of the five deserters we took inside St. Sebastian. Crouch, of the Royal Rangers. I have his papers," he rapped his knuckles upon the table. "Here are the proceedings of the general court-martial which has sentenced him to death."

"My conscience, how horrible. That is if your lordship means him to be shot?"

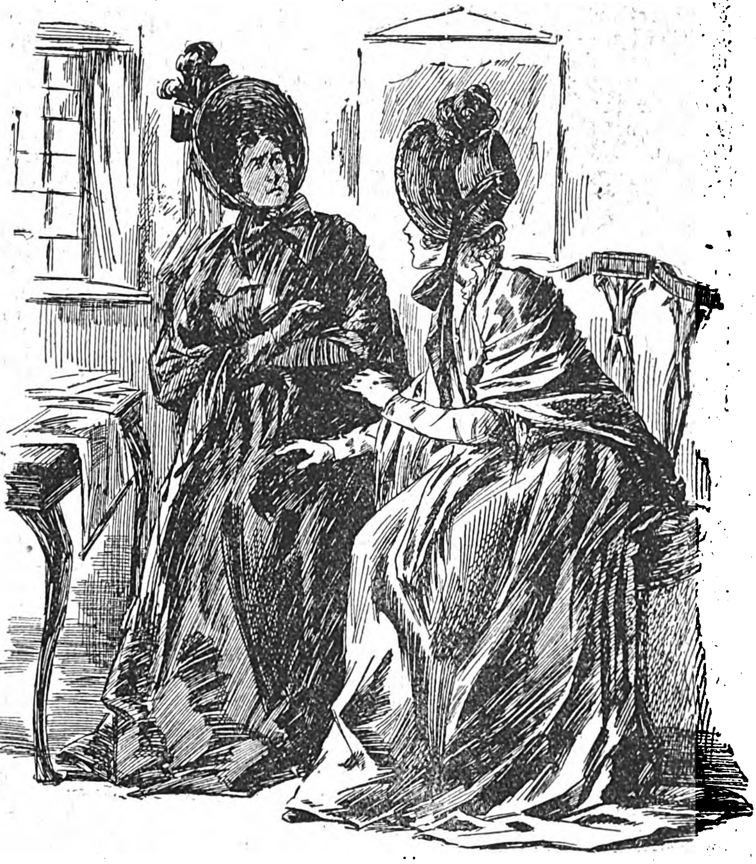
"It is my duty to confirm these proceedings. An example must be made. His was the worst case of all. Besides, I could not pardon him, alone. They must all suffer, all or none, and I repeat the example is necessary."

"Does *she* know?"

"How could I tell her, man? Faith, I have enough unpleasant things to do as it is. No. She has another son out here, of the 105th. It must be his business. Let him be fetched from Irun; send off a Dragoon, and when the fellow comes tell him the whole story."

"Yes, my lord. But I am deuced sorry for him," said Lord Fitzroy Somerset in a tone that also showed he was sorry for himself. "There is no hope, no chance, I suppose for these men?"

"No, Fitzroy, none. They were traitors all, and



"Stop, please stop, Lady Oldham. I pray you will not bring me into the question."

must abide by their own acts. Do not speak of it again. You only annoy me. The law must take its course."

As the shadows were lengthening from the broad-eaved houses of Oyarzun, Harry Oldham rode into the town. A summons to Head Quarters in the Military Secretary's own hand bore urgency on the face of it, while behind was the pleasurable forecast of something good in the wind. Selection for some special service, some hazardous adventure with a new opening for distinction.

The reality was a shock, as painful as it was surprising. His father dead, his mother in Spain, with Ethel Hayter, his old love, from whom he had been long estranged; chief of all, his brother Rudolph, the plague of the family, reappearing after years of absence, and under the bane of death for a degrading and disgraceful crime.

But Harry Oldham showed no weakness when Lord FitzRoy broke the news to him as gently as he could. He had something of his mother's nature, but in the best sense; where she was self-assertive, he was firm and strong. He favoured her too in his looks, had her dark flashing eyes, her dark hair. Rudolph, on the other hand, was like his father, who had been rather yielding and invertebrate. By the strange rule of contraries, each took to his or her opposite; Lord Oldham was fonder of his second son, as Lady Oldham was of the elder brother.

"Can I see him, Lord Fitzroy?" Harry asked quietly, showing infinite self-control.

"I thought you might wish that, and have here an order for the Provost-Martial in whose custody he is. Pray do not thank me. I wish I could have done more for you. But the Marquis is like the nether mill-stone. He refuses positively to pardon. Do not, I beg, entertain any false hopes, and impress that, painful as it must be, upon your mother."

They had fitted up a small building on the outskirts of Oyarzun as a temporary prison. There was a sergeant's guard near at hand, and a sentry at the door, and the Assistant Provost, who was in charge of the place, recognizing the Staff-officer in his cocked hat and voluminous cloak, bowed before the order signed "Wellington," and at once admitted him.

"Captain Oldham to see the prisoner Crouch, alone. Certainly, sir, step this way," and unbolting a door ushered in the visitor.

"Rudolph. Don't you know me? It is I, Harry."

The figure that lay half-blotted out in the far off shadowy corner, rose with the stiff slow movement of one benumbed or half-asleep, and rubbing his heavy eyelids, staggered to his feet to come within the radius of the lantern light.

"Harry! Oh, Heaven! is this how we meet?" he groaned in a low, hoarse voice.

"It is no fault of mine we did not meet sooner. Why did you not send to me? You must have heard my name; but I, for my part, knew nothing of your being with the army."

"How come you to know now? I wish you had left it so. I wanted to go out of the world without recognition, as Crouch the deserter, in these mountebank clothes."

He was still in the uniform of a Frenchman—dark green with an edging of yellow, and epaulettes of coarse yellow worsted.

"What brings you here?" he went on. "Is it to preach at me, to upbraid me as you did so often in the old days? You should have left me to bear my shame alone, my good and virtuous Harry."

His brother laid one hand affectionately on Rudolph's shoulder and took the other in his, saying quietly:

"Rudolph, the mater is here; in Spain, at Passages only a few miles off."

"Hurrah!" shouted the prisoner with a sudden outburst of frantic hysterical joy. He caught at the news as a certainty that now his life would be spared.

"Hurrah! I shall be pardoned. She will see to that, dear, darling, old mother. And you, Harry, it is good of you to be the first to tell me this. When shall I be released? Will they send me back to the Rangers? I swore I would never be a soldier again under that upstart Whittingham. It was he who drove me to desert. Let me go to some other regiment, and I will serve honestly and faithfully to the end of the war."

"Rudolph, the mater has brought sad news. Our father is dead——"

"And I am Lord Oldham. Aha! Now I know I am safe. They could never shoot me, a peer of the realm—it would be absurd. Lord Wellington would not dare."

"You must not trust too much to that, Rudolph. They tell me he is determined to stop desertion, he intends that every deserter shall suffer——"

"Death or such other punishment as by a general Court-Martial may be awarded. I know the jargon. But psha! That cannot apply to me. Lord Wellington would never do it; not if he knows. But does he? Harry, are you playing fairly? You would gain much—everything by my death."

"I will not condescend to answer that, Rudolph. Even if I were so dastardly a cur as to think of it, I could not possibly conceal your new rank. The mater has already applied to Lord Wellington for your discharge."

"She knows then?"

"Not your present situation, and that I have been sent for to—to—break it to her."

Harry's faltering words were too full of ominous meaning to be misunderstood. His brother caught at his hands convulsively, stared into his face with passionate inquiry, then breaking away threw himself upon the ground in a frenzy of grief.

"Come Rudolph," said Harry Oldham at length, "the case may not be quite hopeless, I see a chance, I can at least save your life I believe."

The condemned man looked up gloomily and unintelligently, little encouraged. But when Harry threw off his heavy cloak, and held it out with one hand, offering him his glazed cocked hat with the other, Rudolph understood.

"Escape! Are you in earnest? Do not trifle with me in Heaven's name."

"Yes. Are you prepared to face the risk?"

"There should be no risk; the disguise is perfect. I shall surely get past unless they examine me, and they would not suspect a Staff-officer."

He pulled the hat over his eyes, drew the great cloak around him, and made for the door.

Harry watched him with a grim smile, believing, half-expecting, that his brother would go without a word. But Rudolph remembered and paused, looking first at the door wistfully then at his brother.

"No, Harry, I ought not, I cannot accept this sacrifice. I will stand my ground. It is of my own making—this. You shall not bear the burthen which is mine."

"Nonsense! What can they do to me? Try me, cashier me, that will be the worst. I do not risk my life, and yours will be saved. If I fail in my duty to my cloth, it is to serve the head of our house."

"You should be Lord Oldham, not I, Harry. You are the best, noblest, truest of men."

"Come, lad, time presses. Hurry away. You will find my horse outside. Mount and ride down to the coast, it is a straight road to Passages. If any of the picquets or patrols try to interfere, remember the parole "Fairfax," countersign "Durham," and say you are Captain Oldham. Go straight on board the brigantine *Flaming Sword*, and ask for the mater. She expects me and would far rather see you. Now, Rudolph, go."

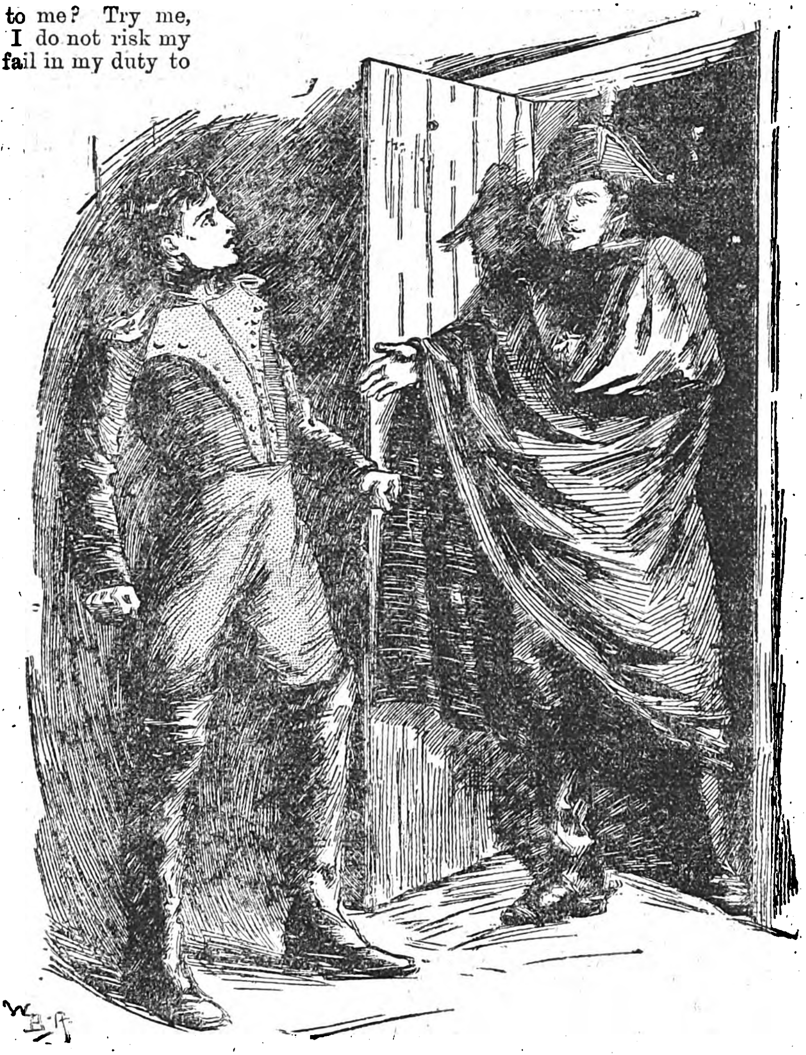
"May God bless you, Harry, for this. I will take my life at your hands, and as Heaven is above will never forget the obligation."

Then he passed out, erect and fearless, in his borrowed plumes, out into the night air and rode away, a free man.

* * *

Two or three hours later the anchor watch of the brigantine heard the hail, "*Flaming Sword* ahoy!" in good, clear English, and the ship was presently boarded by an officer who asked for Lady Oldham. Someone took him aft towards the cuddy, where, having sent in his name, Captain Oldham, he waited, and waited, as it seemed an age.

At last a slim form in loose drapery crept out of the cabin door, and came towards him, at first slowly, shyly, and then, under some sudden, overmastering impulse, rushed forward, and fell upon his neck with a torrent of tears.



"Rudolph, don't you know me?"

"Oh, Harry, Harry, my darling!" she moaned, as she kissed and fondled him. "Dearest sweetheart, can you forgive me? I cannot forgive myself, for I have always cared for you. It was her doing. I was misled; she told me what was false to put me against you, and force me to take Rudolph, whom I hated. But you were my love, my first and only love——"

It was not exactly the greeting that Rudolph Oldham expected, but he made no movement, gave no sign.

"But she will not see you, Harry. Your mother is quite implacable. I have argued and argued with her. She wants Rudolph, only Rudolph, and until he comes——"

"He has come, Ethel, but he wishes he had stayed away," said the other bitterly as he drew aside the folds of his cloak. "Perhaps you will let the mater know as there is much to settle. The night is drawing on, and I should be far from this by dawn. I have only just escaped—thanks to Harry."

But the girl, crushed with shame and surprise, stood there, wild-eyed and agape muttering indistinct words.

"What does it mean? Escape? Where? Why? How?"

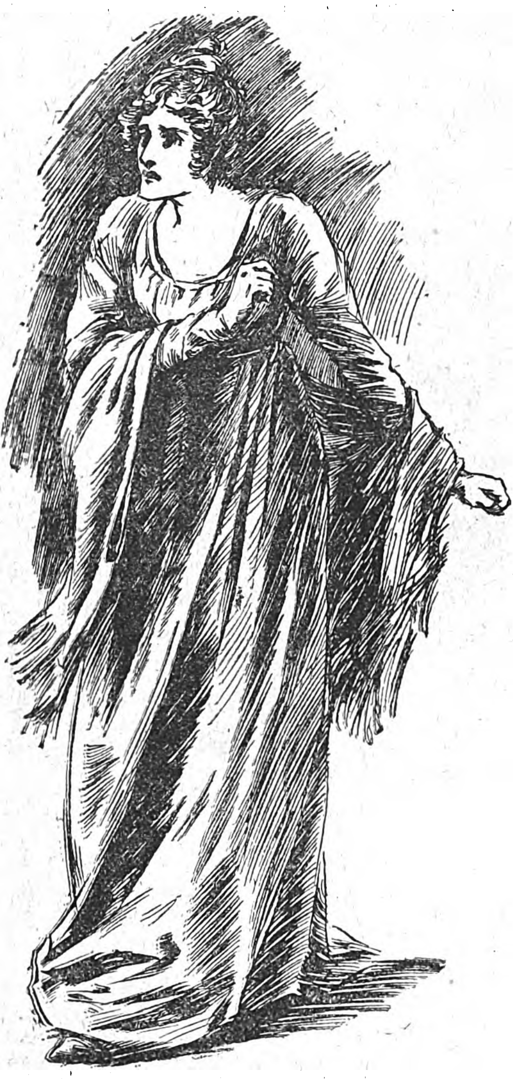
Then Rudolph in a few brief words told his story, never sparing himself, and doing rich justice to his brother's devotion.

Meanwhile Ethel Hayter had recovered herself somewhat, and touched by her lover's chivalry and the near peril it entailed, she could think only of Harry. It was an occasion that changes woman's nature at one stroke. The soft, shrinking girl had developed all at once into a tigress, fierce and terrible, and she broke into fierce reproaching.

"And you were mean enough to accept this sacrifice? You, Rudolph, Lord Oldham, whose forbears were gentlemen of honour and courage, who served the Sovereign and State faithfully, you who have been a traitor to your colours, you whose life was forfeited and justly, you have stooped to take it at the price of your brother's dishonour? Faugh!"

Lord Oldham, with eyes downcast, and wincing as though his shoulders were being whipped, made no attempt at excuse.

"But it shall not serve you. You shall get no further. I myself will put the pursuers on your track. I will give you up—I will——"



The girl broke into fierce reproaching.

"What is all this?" asked a fresh voice, and Lady Oldham appeared upon the deck. "Do you still insist, Harry Oldham, upon forcing yourself on my presence—Heaven! Rudolph!"

"Mater dear, I cannot waste time," said the newly recovered son, tearing himself from her fond embrace after he had hurriedly explained all.

"I am still in great peril. I may be retaken at any moment, and if I am, Heaven help me, it will be all over with me then. This is my only chance, I must make the most of it. Can you not hide me, here, anywhere, until I get a passage to England, in the first craft that sails?"

"Yes, yes, we will all go home together by the first opportunity," said Lady Oldham, gleefully.

"I tell you, Rudolph Oldham, you shall not go scot free," broke in Ethel, hysterically. "I will give the alarm, call any passing boat, send word on shore, do anything to prevent it."

"Are you mad, girl?" cried Lady Oldham. "Are you lost to all sense of shame? Go into the cabin, instantly, go, before we carry you there by force."

"No, mother, let her be," Rudolph interposed quickly. "She takes Harry's part; it is natural; she likes him and loathes me. He has acted like a hero, while I—I—my conduct has been dirty and despicable. I cannot blame her, but I will not trust her. Give me money—all you can spare, and let me be gone. I will get back to shore and make shift somehow in some new disguise. God bless you, mater; we shall meet again soon. And you, Ethel, do not think too hardly of me."

* * * * *

Captain Oldham was immediately placed under close arrest when his connivance in the condemned deserter's escape became known. Lord Wellington read through the lines, seeing the true reason, and in his secret heart would have forgiven Harry; but openly he swore that an officer guilty of such a heinous breach of duty must assuredly be sent before a general Court-Martial. But now active operations were about to be resumed; he was on the point of invading France by forcing Soult's strongly fortified line on the river Bidassoa, and Harry Oldham was left to languish in durance until there was a little leisure to deal with him.

Wellington's plans were still uncertain when his scouting officers brought in some important information. They had picked up a loafer in the locality, half-sailor, half-fisherman, who knew the lay of the land, and who declared there were fords in existence along the mouth of the river. He knew them, these narrow stretches of firm, hard sand, left at low water, and could pilot any number of men safely across. There was risk in such a movement, but the gain would be great, and to attack on this side unobserved meant turning the French flank. Was it feasible and safe? Lord Wellington summoned the man to his presence.

"Who and what are you?" he asked in English, when the man was brought before him, and was surprised to find that this nondescript creature spoke the language fluently.

"Is that necessary, my lord? I have done many things, I ran away from an English ship last. But I can guide the troops, I swear it, for I have often crossed those sands; surely my name is immaterial."

"I do not always trust those I do not know. However, I suppose you have a price. How much? You shall be paid handsomely."

"My terms are in this envelope, my lord. I beg that it may not be opened until the business is done, or I have met my death, for I ask not only to guide but to join the attacking columns. If I may have a musket and a red coat, I will promise not to disgrace it."

Lord Wellington looked at the man keenly for a moment, then with a brief "very well" ordered that the guide should be taken to General Cole, who was to be in chief command of the left columns.

This guide was Rudolph Oldham. On leaving the *Flaming Sword* he had wandered, disguised now as a seafaring man, along the coast consorting with the villagers, mostly fishermen, and seeking a chance of getting away to sea. In this way he learnt the secret of the fords and that the Bidasso was passable at low tide, and he took the information where he hoped it would be marketable.

History has already told how splendidly Wellington and his brave men crossed the river, stormed the French settlements, and carried them at the point of the bayonet. But there is no mention of the nameless guide who fell fighting in the ranks of the Royal Rangers who were the first up the slopes of the Sans Culottes Redoubt, where he met his death.

His was a hero's death, seen and admired by his officer, who reported all to General Cole, who, in turn, informed Lord Wellington on the following day of all the facts.

Lord Wellington asked the guide's name, and was reminded of the sealed envelope. He opened it, and was surprised to find the guide was Rudolph Oldham, and that the condition asked was the instant release of his brother, Captain Harry Oldham. He was released, and returned to England, and shortly afterwards married Ethel Hayter.

Magnetism of Death.

"Forward!"

The horses have a hard ride, and a moment ago all showed signs of weariness. They press forward now as eagerly as if food and rest were close at hand, and their demeanour soon convinces every old veteran that he will shortly smell powder. We are within half-a-mile of the timber when boom! boom! boom! go the guns of a battery under cover, and the shrieking shells explode over and above us.

"Left wheel—right wheel!" and down go the fences, and cavalry and infantry spread over the meadows, and form a line of battle. As fast as the troops come up they file to the right and left, and our batteries come up and reply to those along the edge of the forest. An exploding shell wipes out a set of fours among the horsemen. Four troopers and three horses go down, while the fourth horse escapes even a scratch. He gallops away to the rear, with stirrups flying, and no hand seeks his capture, but it is scarcely three minutes before he reappears. Ah! but he presents a fine sight now! With head and tail up, nostrils showing a bright red and eyes fairly glowing with enthusiasm, he dances along our front with all the grace of a thoroughbred.

Watch him! His head is turned to the enemy and the magnetism of death is strong upon him! He has but to gallop away to save his life, but he has no thought of doing so. A shell screams over him, and he flings his heels high up in the air. A solid shot tears up the earth across his path, and he rears up and paws the air. We are going to advance. As our skirmishers rush to the front they try to save the horse, but he defies them. We can hear his shrill neighs above the sound of the guns, and as the smoke lifts we see him galloping to and fro—wheeling, rearing—courting death on the field of battle. It comes as he suddenly halts and faces the foe. A solid shot strikes him fair in the chest, and bounding high in air with a shrill neigh he falls dead, and next moment a skirmisher is using his body as a cover!

Not at Home.

Mr. Minks: "That girl was decent enough to black the stoves before going, I see." Mrs. Minks: "No, I blacked them myself, and it's lucky I did." "Lucky?" "Yes, indeed. Mrs. de Fashion and Mrs. de Style called right in the midst of it, and so I just put a little more blacklead on my face and went to the door and told them I wasn't in. They said they would call again."

Poor Medicine.

A workman, while repairing one of the outer Venetian blinds of an aristocratic establishment, missed his footing and fell into the street. A crowd very quickly gathered together from all sides and raised him up, when it was found that he had received only a few slight contusions. Meanwhile one of the servants brought him a glass of water. Making a wry face, the man said: "Only water! From what height should I have to fall to get a glass of beer?"

A Very Pretty Name.

Some years ago a clergyman, in baptizing a baby, paused in the midst of the service to inquire the name of the infant, to which the mother replied: "Shady, sir, if you please." "Shady!" said the minister. "Then it's a boy, and you mean Shadrach, eh?" "No, please your reverence, it's a girl." "And pray," questioned the pastor, "how happened you to call the child by such a strange name?" "Why, sir," responded the woman, "if you must know, our name is Bower, and my husband said as how he should like her to be called Shady, because Shady Bower sounds so pretty."

From Experience.

A gentleman received a visit from an acquaintance, who asked him if he would kindly lend him a certain work he was anxious to see, and which he felt pretty certain his friend had in his library. "Yes," said the gentleman in question, "I have it. But I am sorry I can't lend it to you. I make it a rule never to lend books." "But why?" said the visitor. "Because no one ever returns them," replied the other. "And to show you how true this is, I would ask you to cast your eye over the shelves before you. You see there my library, containing 3,000 volumes. Well, they are all borrowed."

The Open Window.

Disagreeable Passenger (to commercial traveller sitting by open window): "Excuse me, sir, but that open window is very annoying." C. T. (pleasantly): "I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid you'll have to grin and bear it." D. P.: "I wish you would close it, sir." C. T.: "I would like to accommodate you, but I can't." D. P.: "Do you refuse to close that window, sir?" C. T.: "I certainly do." D. P.: "If you don't close it, I will." C. T.: "I'll bet you won't." D. P.: "If I go over there, I will." C. T.: "I'll give you odds you won't." D. P.: "I'll ask you once more, sir, will you close that window?" C. T.: "No, sir; I will not." D. P. (getting on his feet): "Then I will, sir." C. T.: "I would like to see you do it." D. P. (placing his hands on the objectionable window): "I'll show you whether I will or not, sir." C. T. (as disagreeable passenger tugs at window): "Why don't you close it?" D. P. (getting red in the face): "It appears—to be stuck." C. T.: "Of course it is. I tried to close it before you came in." And then the other passengers chuckled.

The Indiscretion of Mr. Brown.

"So you are in want of a young lady typist, are you?" said Mrs. Josiah Brown to her husband the other morning, as she served out to him his breakfast rations.

"Yes, my dear, that's so," he replied. "But how the— "

"How did I know?" she interrupted. "I have just seen your advertisement in this morning's paper. And I should like to know what *you* want with a lady typist. Goodness knows, there are enough men clerks out of work, without having a young woman frisking about your office. You won't get much work done when you get your lady clerk in. She'll be flirting with all the other clerks, and for all I know she'll be flirting with you."

"What nonsense you do talk, Clara. I find I must buy a typewriter to cope with my correspondence, and I can't afford to employ another man clerk, so I must engage a lady. I can secure a lady typist at a much lower wage than a male, and one is just as reliable as the other. And as for your talking about flirting with her, the sooner you get that tomfoolery out of your head, the better."

"So you think it's tomfoolery, do you, Josiah? Well, I don't. Perhaps you'll explain to me why you advertise for a *young* lady typist?"

"Because—er—er—because——"

"Because you like to have nice pleasant little chats with ladies when you are away from your wife—like you had last night, for instance."

"Last night, Clara! Whatever are you talking about?"

"Oh, yes! It's all very well for you to pretend to look innocent, but I should like to know what business you had over in Mrs. Paulton's garden last evening, chatting away to that hussy, Violet Paulton?"

"I suppose Jane has been telling you some cock-and-bull story," said Mr. Brown, looking a trifle uneasy.

"Oh, no, she hasn't," his wife replied. "It was somebody else who saw your goings-on."

"Oh, who was it then?" he inquired.

"Your wife."

"You! I thought you——"

"Yes—you thought I would not be home till late, but I came back earlier than I expected and was watching you from the bedroom window. And I suppose you thought as I was out, you would climb over the garden wall, and have a nice little chat with the hussy?"

"Bah!" he exclaimed angrily, taking up the newspaper.

"I want a better answer than that," said Mrs. Brown, snatching the paper from him.

"There's nothing to explain," he replied, with an air of injured innocence. "Miss Paulton had a little difficulty in turning off the garden hose, so I jumped over the garden wall, and did it for her."

"And how long did that take you, pray?"

"Well, about half-a-minute."

"But I saw you chatting to her for over a quarter of an hour. What on earth were you talking about?"

"Nothing in particular, my dear."

"Whatever it was, it appeared to be vastly amusing, as she was giggling like a young school-girl all the time. Oh, yes, Josiah, you can be extremely pleasant sometimes, especially when you are away from your wife. For a man of forty-five I think the way you carry on is disgraceful."

"Do for goodness' sake stop talking all this rubbish, Clara. But there—the clock is just striking nine, and if I stop to listen to you any longer, I shall miss my train."

* * * * *

When Mr. Brown reached his office he found a great pile of letters from lady applicants in answer to his advertisement. Before he had time to open any of them, his office-boy came into his sanctum and said that a young lady wished to see him.

"What's her name?" he asked.

"Miss Violet Paulton," the boy answered.

"Whatever can she want?" said Mr. Brown to himself, after he had directed the boy to show her in.

"I am so glad I have managed to catch you in," said the young lady, looking a perfect vision of loveliness.

"Has anything happened at home?" he asked, beginning to wonder whether his wife had been having a wordy war with the young lady about the incident of the previous evening.

"Oh, no! I have come about your advertisement," she replied.

"My advertisement!" he exclaimed. "Oh, I suppsoe you know of a young lady whom you wish to recommend, eh?"

"Yes—I am the young lady," she replied archly.

"You don't mean it surely, do you, Miss Paulton?"

"Yes I do—why not?"

"Well, I always thought——"

"I understand, Mr. Brown. You have always thought my mother and I were fairly well off, but I am sorry to say that is not so. In fact mother told me a few months ago that she really couldn't afford to let me remain at home idle any longer. So I learnt typing; and when I saw your advertisement this morning, I thought I had better come to see you at once about it?"

"I am sure you would suit me all right," said Mr. Brown, gallantly. "But I fancy the work here would be too hard for you. You ought to seek for some lighter occupation—say, for instance, as an amanuensis."

"I don't mind hard work," she replied, bravely. "Perhaps you could see your way to give me a trial."

"Yes, that wouldn't be a bad idea," he answered.

"Then can I come?" she asked, pleadingly.

"Well, I think I had better speak to Mrs. Brown about it first," he replied cautiously, suddenly remembering his wife's discourse that morning on young lady typists in general and Violet Paulton in particular.

"Speak to Mrs. Brown! Surely she has nothing to do with your business affairs," the young lady exclaimed in a tone of pretended surprise. She was fully aware that Mr. Brown had to do exactly what his wife told him, and that there would not be the slightest chance of her obtaining the post if Mrs. Brown had any voice in the matter.

"You must be joking, Mr. Brown, surely," she continued playfully. "I don't believe you would allow your wife to meddle with your office affairs."

This little piece of flattery pleased Mr. Brown mightily.

"No, of course I wouldn't," he replied with an air of bravado that would have astonished Mrs. Brown if she had been within hearing distance.

"I do wish you would let me come on Monday—say on trial for a week," pleaded the young lady.

"Very well then, you shall," he replied. "Come here on Monday morning at ten o'clock."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Brown!" she cried, with real gratitude.

"But please understand, Miss Paulton, I give you the place on one condition."

"And what is that?"

"You mustn't let Mrs. Brown know I have engaged you. I will tell her myself later on. So please do not speak to anybody about it, except of course your mother."

Miss Paulton assented; and after Mr. Brown had explained to her the duties he required her to perform, she took her departure.

* * * * *

At the same time that the interview just related was being held, another interesting conversation was taking place between Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Paulton over the garden wall.

"It was very kind of your husband to help my daughter, Violet, with the hose last night," remarked Mrs. Paulton.

"M'yes!" Mrs. Brown replied indifferently.

"She has gone up to see your husband this morning."

"Gone up to see my husband!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown, quite unable to conceal her annoyance at the very idea of such a thing. "Whatever has she gone to see him about?"

"Can't you guess, Mrs. Brown?"

"No—I haven't the slightest idea. But I think my husband ought to have told me of this before he left this morning."

Mrs. Paulton was beginning to feel alarmed at the unpleasant attitude her neighbour was adopting.

"Your husband did not know beforehand that Violet was coming to see him," she replied meekly. "It's about the advertisement he put in this morning's paper for a lady typist. I was hoping that you might speak a word in her favour to your husband."

"Oh, yes, I'll speak to him about her. I'll call at his office this morning."

Mrs. Paulton, understanding this as a promise of help, thanked her neighbour warmly.

"She won't thank me to-night when she finds her daughter hasn't got the place," said Mrs. Brown to herself as she stepped indoors. "Oh, yes, I'll speak to him about the minx—especially if he has been brazen enough to engage her. I think I'll send him a wire so as to make sure of catching him in when I call."

Five minutes later a telegram was on its way to Mr. Brown, stating that she would call at noon that day.

"I wonder what she is coming about?" thought Mr. Brown to himself, as he read the telegram. "I suppose it's about this advertisement. I wish now I hadn't engaged Miss Paulton; but I haven't got the pluck to back out of it. Whatever will Clara say when she finds it out? She'll be sure to want to know whom I have engaged.

"Ha! ha!" he chuckled, after a few minutes deliberation; "I know what I'll do," and leaving his room he went upstairs to his housekeeper—a buxom lady of fifty summers.

"Mrs. Crummles, I suppose you haven't got such a thing as a photograph of yourself handy, have you?" he asked.

"Oh, yes I have, sir," she replied.

"I wish you would lend it to me for a little while," he said.

"You can have it; but, lor! sir, whatever can you want with my photo?" she asked.

Mr. Brown answered by slipping a half-crown into her hand, and promised her he would return the photograph within an hour.

"Ha! ha!" he again chuckled, as he returned to his room. "Clara does not know my housekeeper. I'll just show her this photograph, and when she thinks that this good woman is going to be my lady typist, it will put her clean off the scent."

"Yes, my dear," he said, to his wife half-an-hour later as he showed her the photograph. "That's the lady I have employed. I suppose you have no objection to my engaging her?"

"No, Josiah," she answered, quite taken aback with surprise.

"I thought my selection would meet with your approval," said he, feeling quite happy that his little ruse was likely to be successful.

"Did you have many applicants after the place?" she asked.

"I should think I did," he replied, showing her the batch of letters he had received."

"And was Miss Paulton one of them?"

"Er, er—yes! But how did you guess that?"

"I didn't guess it at all. Mrs. Paulton mentioned to me this morning that her daughter had gone to see you about the place. I suppose she didn't suit you?"

"I told her that the work was likely to be too hard for her," he replied, glad to be able to give a truthful if not a direct answer.

"Well, I am glad you had the good sense not to engage her," she said. "I really thought—— But whose voice is it I hear outside? Surely it's that minx, Violet Paulton. And why do you look so pale, Josiah? Have you been playing a trick on me about this photograph?"

At that moment the office boy came in.

"Was that Miss Paulton's voice I heard just now?" Mrs. Brown asked the lad.

"Yes, mum," the lad answered. "She wants to see Mr. Brown again."

"Just ask her in."

Then a happy thought occurred to her. "Wait a moment, boy. Do you know this lady?" she asked, showing the boy the photograph.

"Yes, mum," the boy answered promptly; "that's Mrs. Crummles, our housekeeper."

Mr. Brown, on hearing this, sank back in his chair and gasped.

"Oh, it's Mrs. Crummles, is it?" exclaimed Mrs. Brown, casting a withering glance at her husband.

"Yes, Clara," said Mr. Brown dejectedly. "You know everything now."

"Oh, no, I don't," she replied. "I want to know why Miss Paulton has come back to see you again. Boy, just ask her to come in?"

Violet Paulton came tripping into the room, smiling; but when she saw Mrs. Brown her countenance changed. She had really come back to ask, in the innocence of her heart, what colour blouse Mr. Brown would like her to wear in the office; but Mrs. Brown's presence caused her to feel rather puzzled what to say.

"I know all about your appointment as Mr. Brown's typist, Miss Paulton," commenced Mrs. Brown. "I suppose you have come back to ask him one or two more questions about it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Brown," replied the young lady, concluding for the moment that Mrs. Brown had approved of her appointment. "I came back because I quite forgot to ask Mr. Brown if he had any particular wish as to the sort of dress I should wear in the office."

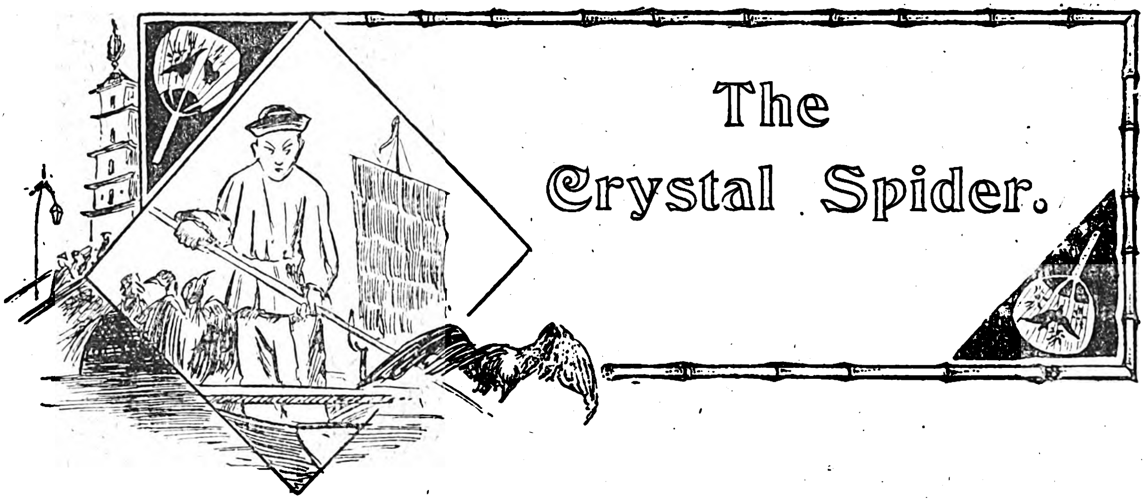
"I don't think you need trouble about that," said Mrs. Brown.

"I don't understand," said the young lady; but when she noticed the terror-stricken look on Mr. Brown's face, she guessed what was the matter.

"I will call in to-night and explain to you," replied Mrs. Brown. "I don't think I need detain you any longer now. I want to have a little talk alone with my husband."

Mrs. Brown's "little talk" lasted for quite a quarter of an hour, and, sad to relate, it was the warmest quarter of an hour poor Mr. Brown had ever experienced. What was said need not be recorded here; suffice to say that Mrs. Brown took upon herself to cancel Violet Paulton's appointment.

The post of typist to Mr. Brown is still vacant. No ladies need apply! Henry E. Cocks.



The Crystal Spider.

"It is of a veritabyll report and attested by so many learned, that there be nowe of wyse men none to gaynsaye it, that there be certain crystals which must not be worn upon ye person; for ye crystal hys frame hath a magnetick propertie that draweth whomsoe falleth into hys svasion into itself, in despyte of hys will, and ye thing becometh thereon a creature who liveth with ye life and ye spirite of ye body on which it has rested."

I remember when I first read that quaint sentence in Morryster. Perhaps there was something uncanny in it that attracted me, but I read it over and over until it was in my mind just as it is now, with all its quaint phrasing and old-time spelling. I was a geologist for the big stamp-mill people, and in a small way was something of a chemist, and crystals were my forte. I had spent much time in the study of them, and possessed possibly the finest private collection in the country. I had lately taken up a new line of research which sooner or later must fascinate one who studies the crystal formation deeply enough—this was the seeming vitality of certain crystal formations. I had come to reconstruct my theories of the inorganic, and to study the artifices which molecules of steel assume, and in the way in which iron grew "tired" with continued labour. This had brought me to the idea that metals, as well as men, possess life—a more elusive and subtle sort, but nevertheless life. This was my first step.

I had come now to distinguish that same effort in quartz. In my experiment I utilised one of the heaviest stamps of the mill, which, after hours, by concentrating the power which ran the entire plant, I could transform into a crusher, so nicely graduated that I could calculate its pressure almost to the pound. Here, month after month I put crystals under the huge plunger, and hour after hour, day after day, increased its weight, watching with my most delicate instruments the variation of structure which the molecules of crystal assumed to resist me, and to protect the substance which they form, from annihilation.

But this is not interesting except to scientists, and scientists will of course not be interested in what I am writing—in what is the real story I am telling. They will sneer at it, being scientists. So would I have done then!

One day the foreman in one of the drifts brought me a specimen of a crystal which I had never seen. At first glance it looked like a piece of bull-quartz which by some curious freak had found lodgment in a vein of schist. On closer examination, however, I detected a difference. Its molecular structure changed without stress and with extreme rapidity when exposed to different colours of light. I became greatly interested in this, and showed it to several experimenters like myself, who professed themselves unable to see anything in it, and, I think, put me down for a visionary. Finding this the case, I laid the crystal on the shelf of an open cabinet in my study, and finally forgot all about it.

It was there when Leila first came to me.

* * * * *

I can see her now when I close my eyes, as she first came into my dull rooms. I can hear her footsteps coming up past the guard in the corridor just outside—I can see her little golden head like the sun in a corner of this dark cell. I can feel her arms go around my neck as she tried to draw me from my book or my calculations.

One day I came in and found her bending over, looking at my forgotten crystal intently. She was so absorbed that she quite started when she heard my step. "What is there in that queer stone?" she cried.

I brought my glass and looked. Its transparent white had become a peculiar milky opalescence, and in its depths again I had the impression of vibration. "I held it in the hollow of my hand a minute ago," she said, "and I fancied that it moved. I almost dropped it."

I put the stone away and laughed at her, but as soon as she had gone out, I took it again and studied it. The opalescence I had noticed was fading, but it shifted fitfully. That night I told Leila my experiment with the coloured lights, and she would have me show her the same thing. We began to study the stone together. I found that I could get better results when she was with me. It was then it seemed to possess its greatest brilliancy. When I pored over it alone, its activity dulled, its shimmer died out. In those days I would not have sold that little crystal for any sum that I could think of, and I am sure that Leila would not have traded it for the biggest pearl on the neck of an Indian princess. Nothing would satisfy her finally, but that she must wear it.

I had a friend whose passion was the cutting of precious stones, and under my direction he carved from the fragment a spider. It was a beautiful piece of workmanship. I remember how delighted Leila was with it when I gave it to her on the first anniversary of our marriage. She wore it suspended from a fine gold chain from about her neck, and it lay against her breast.

Day by day it gained in beauty. The bewildering sense of movement beneath its polished surface became more noticeable than ever. It began to attract attention wherever we went. We could scarcely go out of an evening when its peculiarity did not attract the attention of some connoisseur or another who dogged with offers for it. I think it grew to be a sort of passion with both Leila and myself—a passion which did not demand the admiration of others—and to avoid annoyance she lengthened the chain and dropped the stone beneath the level of her corsage.

It was not very long after I had given her the white spider, that Leila's strange, baffling illness began. She had no disease—nothing that physicians could discover. But she suffered from curious attacks of giddiness, which came apparently without cause, and disappeared as they had come. It was long before I took fright, thinking that this was just a woman's weakness and would disappear in time. Instead of getting better, however, she became steadily worse, and her fainting spells became more frequent. She was dear to me—more dear to me than anything in the world.

I gave up my studies; I put on a substitute at the mills, and gave all my time to watching her. I brought experts from the city, and they shook their heads, prescribed, and went back again. But she showed no improvement, and one day later in the spring, the end came. I was away at the time, and was called home by a special messenger. It was the same old story, faintness and a fall, and inability to regain her strength again. Before I got home she had died, very quietly, and without recovering consciousness.

When I saw Leila lying still and white in the room where I had left her only a few hours before, I could scarcely believe that it was she. Her face was thin and drawn like that of one who had gone through a long illness.

It could not be my Leila—she with the round cheeks and smiling eyes—my dear little gold-girl! I think I was mad then, mad with the loss of her. As I looked at her the white spider lay brilliant in the rounded hollow of her neck. Every atom seemed to be dilating with motion. It was as though microscopic hosts were marshalling and counter-marching in elaborate evolutions in the stone, seen dimly through a half-opaque veil. Rays of light flickered across it. I drew the shade and hollowed my hands so no ray could fall on it, but down in the shadow it sparkled and scintillated and shone.

There seemed something uncanny about it. It maddened me that it should laugh while Leila, my love, my only one, lay there silent like that, and in my madness I snatched it from her, snapped the chain, and threw it against the wall, where it rattled and fell to the floor.

It was not till after they had taken Leila away that I thought of it again. Then I groped for it under a piece of furniture where it had rolled, and placed it on its shelf in the cabinet.

* * * * *

Helen Lylburn was the daughter of one of the mine superintendents, and I suppose I turned to her as any man turns to a woman when he needs comfort. I know she was nothing to me of what Leila had been, but she cared for me, and drew my mind away from itself, and tried to get me to live again. To take up life after a man has been so hurt is so very hard. It is easiest to bury one's self. But, after a time, I began to work again, and, to some extent, to forget. Perhaps it was mostly out of gratitude that I asked Helen to marry me—me, who was only a husk of what I had been and whose heart was in the ground! And there were those, no doubt, who thought that it was through pity that she did.

At any rate I brought her home one day to my rooms to take the empty place. Till we entered the little study with all my dusty books and cabinet, I had not realised what it meant! Then it came to me like a blow. The room was full of Leila. I saw her face in the mirror, I heard her sigh in every sound. The smell of her hair was in the window curtains. I started back with a horrible feeling that she had come to life and I had affronted her by bringing Helen where she was. It was a ghastly feeling and I felt the sweat come out in the palms of my hands.

Helen noticed it, I think, for she came to me and put her arms round my neck and kissed me. While her mouth lay on mine I heard a sound from the cabinet. I turned and saw that the white spider had rolled from the shelf and had fallen among a huddle of glass retorts beneath it.

Helen ran and picked it up. "Why, it's the stone charm your wi—you used to have," she said. "I used to hear so much about it!" Suddenly she dropped it with a little scream. "Oh!" she said, "how curious! It—it crawled in my hand!"

I laughed at her and put it back on its shelf: but Helen would not touch it or look at it again. As for me, I would not have parted with it for worlds. Every night I peered into it with my glass with fascinated interest.

Our bedroom adjoined my study, and when the warmer weather came on, we opened the folding doors between for the sake of air. One night I was awakened by a cry from Helen. She was sleeping, but moaning and tossing as though struggling with something. She was talking brokenly, too, and, raising myself on my elbow, I leant over her, trying to make out what she said. For a moment I caught nothing. Then she said quite distinctly, but in a voice of agony: "No—no! My husband! Not yours—any more! Jean—Jean!"

I stretched out my arm and touched her to wake her up. As I put my hand on her breast, it touched a hard, prickly substance which seemed to shrink from my clasp as I grasped it. I sprang out of bed, trembling and loathing, and struck a light, but I knew already what it was. I did not tell Helen. She was sobbing nervously when I crept back into bed, and I felt her awake and stirring all through the rest of the night.

I could scarcely look at the stone next day for the repugnance that possessed me, but by night the feeling had disappeared.

A fortnight after this occurrence, Helen and I were spending the day up on the mountain where one of the new shafts was being sunk. She complained of nausea, and I left her lying down in the overseer's shack while I sorted specimens. An hour or two later I was called in alarm. She was in a delirium when I got to her and I drove her straight down to the doctor's and thence home, the overseer's wife going with me all the way. After she was settled in bed, and had grown calmer, the woman brought me something wrapped in paper. It was an ornament, she said, that had dropped out of Helen's skirt when she undressed her. It was the white spider.

That night I brought out my needle drill and started the wheel and drilled a hole through the tip of one of its legs. In this I set a steel ring and through this I drove a wire staple, pinning it to the shelf of the cabinet. I watched it closely as the drill worked, going slowly so as not to shiver the crystal. When I had finished I blew the dust off the drill plate. It had collected in a spot of damp underneath the needle. I touched this with my finger. I swear to you it was blood.

I watched it for three nights and it lay there sparkling. Sometimes it was milky, and more often now a flush-rose, and lovely and iridescent. But its look was hateful to me—hateful, though I loved it. In some such way must a man love a woman whom he loves despite himself, knowing she hates him. The old madness of despair came back to me in these days—the longing for Leila, for her singing, and her whisper, and her yellow hair. And this was while Helen, my wife, lay asleep or waking in the next room.

The fourth night I slept, worn out. Even in my dreams, the uncouth horror of that thing chained to the shelf of the cabinet, was with me. I woke suddenly, wet with perspiration, feeling unable to breathe. Something smooth, leprous, tingling, was on my lips, sprawling on my beard. I screamed and dashed the thing away, and it struck stonily against the wainscotting.

Helen held me but I would not stay. Rage was in my soul, and shuddering, I threw on my outer clothes and seized it and rushed in the dark to the silent mills. I could feel that one of its legs was broken, and it seemed to stir and turn in my palm.

I reached the deserted stamp room and turned on the electric lights in my engine room. The huge crusher stood upright. With all my force I hurled the thing straight into the dark chamber below the plunger and pulled the lever that dropped the great hammer. It came down slowly, slowly, slowly. I could see the thing throb and sparkle just under the edge of the hammer. I saw it flash and dilate, startled as the steel nipped and held it—saw it shrink and shiver and cower. Then it cried out in a woman's voice: "Oh, Heaven, Jean, Jean!"

It did! I tell you I heard it! How did I know it was Leila, my little golden girl? I couldn't reach it, though I thrust my hands clear in to snatch it out, and the ponderous tons' weight came down on them. That is why, as you see, I have no fingers—why, I am writing this with a pen tied to a stub that was once a hand.

But, hands or no hands, they're afraid of me. They say I killed Helen, and the guards talk about it in whispers, but I hear them, I hear them!

HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES.

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MARY AND JOHN.

Mary Scott sat down to a cold supper. She had been working hard all day, copying an old picture. The baby was asleep on the sofa, but Mary was not thinking of him.

To-morrow was the fateful day at the prison. She thought of it with a shudder. The cold, forbidding, hateful place! But John was there.

"Oh, you poor fellow," groaned Mary, as she proceeded to wash the few dishes after putting away the eatables. "And you never harmed anybody in all your life. Heaven help us all! My poor boy! My poor boy!"

The woman sat down and folded her hands helplessly. She was not beautiful, perhaps not even pretty, with the exception of glorious eyes that of late were often dimmed by weeping. She occupied one room. It was large and simply furnished, but comfortable. One section was used for a studio. A curtain hung in shadow now, hiding the large bay window, but under it were her easel and painting things. Before her marriage she had been well-known as a copyist, and did good work for very small pay.

When she had married John, some three years before, he was bookkeeper for a large commercial firm, and the young couple had managed to save a little money. A cottage in the country, more than large enough for them, the free air of Heaven, the wild flowers painting the garden and grounds, fruit trees budding and blossoming, green hills on every side, the wide wealth of teeming nature, scattering beauty and grace in all directions—these were their surroundings. They were buying their little home.

John was a German by descent, but a British citizen by choice, possessing a burning love for the Union Jack. When his little lad had come his happiness had been complete. They could have asked nothing more, Mary and John, and both had seen only the brighter side of life.

Then the trial came. One of the company's employés was found on the morning of a holiday senseless from a brutal blow. Hundreds of pounds were missing, and suspicion pointed to John. The man who had been so cruelly dealt with died a week after without having given a sign. So John was arrested, and was now in the city gaol awaiting his trial.

She sold the furniture, the cottage was locked up, and with the little money they had saved she took a room in town. She set about finding work, and in that work put all her strength. The knowledge that John was innocent, in spite of the seeming sounds of guilt, buoyed her up. Some of her former employers gave her work. She knew that for the boy's sake she must keep up. So she nerved herself to labour, while the bright colours on her palette scorched her very sight, and she could have thrown the brush away and wept tears of blood.

But on this day she was to spend an hour with John. She rose early. The baby was washed and dressed and their frugal meal eaten, when there came a knock at the door.

Mary answered it, A showily-dressed woman stood there smiling. Mary both recoiled and was glad. She had known this woman before her marriage.

"I thought I'd come," said the visitor, her manner deferential, and at the same time friendly. "I've been where you are, you know. But you mustn't give up. I'm all right now, and very happy, as you may be in time."

"Yes," said Mary, "if I heard right, you married again."

"Oh, yes," was the reponse.

"And he—he," trembled Mary.

"Is still serving out his sentence. Why, you don't suppose I'd be tied for life to a criminal."

"But John is not!" Mary cried chokingly. She longed to fly—longed to tell the woman to leave her alone.

"Oh, not guilty, of course! They all say that. They'd be fools if they didn't. Mine was for forgery; yours for murder; both bad enough. Now, you keep up a good heart. If worse comes to worse, there's no need for you to die a daily death; there's no need."

"Oh, stop!" cried Mary, struggling no longer to suppress her sobs. "I would die rather than leave John. I would die a thousand deaths rather than marry again. He knows it, knows that I will follow him wherever he is sent, if only to see him and cheer him for an hour—or only a moment."

The woman recoiled before such terrible grief.

"It's time to go to—the prison," Mary said. "I can't afford to waste a moment," and with unmistakable coldness she sent the woman away. Then she sat down and dressed the baby, all the time cooing tender words in his unheeding ears of "papa's sweet" and "papa waiting to see his boy," and soon after that the prison doors shut upon her.

"Mary, you must cherish no hope," he said, as they parted. "I'm going to be a man to the end. I am innocent, Heaven and you know it. But the boy"—his lips quivered—"bring him up, Mary, to believe in his father's innocence," and he turned and hid his face.

The sentence was passed.

It was a gloomy day. It rained, hailed, blew—all the elements were at war. Mary held her own, she felt a wild longing to die then and there. She looked at the prisoner's face, clear, quiet, full of a lofty beauty she had never seen there before. "He will go straight to Heaven," she said, "while we—oh, Heaven! be merciful!" she cried.

When the sentence fell it was not death, but imprisonment for life.

A year passed. Mary was only a stone's throw from the prison to which John had been committed. She was industrious, and neither she nor the child had suffered.

"Baby," she said one night, "my left hand tells me I am going to get some news. And to-morrow we shall see papa." The baby took toddling steps now. He looked in her face and laughed while she spread out the evening paper.

"Baby, come here," she cried wildly. "Oh, my baby! I shall die of joy!"

She had read: "Jacob Steel, who died to-day at the Middlesex Hospital, made a confession in which he declared that he was the murderer of Andrew McComb, a clerk in the employ of Messrs. Stevens, Edwards and Co., and that the man John Scott, now imprisoned for that crime, is entirely innocent." Mrs. Denison.

THE LOVERS OF YVONNE

By RAFAEL SABATINI.

START THIS NEW SERIAL TO-DAY.

SUMMARY:

ANDREA DE MANCINI, a nephew of Cardinal Mazarin, is found one day by the latter in the Palais Royal, Paris, in a state of intoxication. Gaston de Luynes, the narrator of this story, and fencing-master to de Mancini, is blamed by the Cardinal for allowing his nephew to get into such a condition, and is removed from his position of fencing-master.

Eugène de Canaples insults de Mancini and a duel is arranged, but the Cardinal hears of it and tells de Luynes that it must not take place. De Luynes realises that if he does not prevent it the Cardinal has power to do him great harm, and accordingly raises a quarrel with de Canaples which ends in a fight, de Canaples being severely wounded. The onlookers are enraged with de Luynes because he indiscreetly lets fall the fact that he raised this quarrel so as to prevent a duel between de Mancini and de Canaples, and he has to flee for his life. To escape his pursuers he springs on the step of a passing carriage, and the ladies inside let him shelter there for a time, but when he says that he has wounded de Canaples they order him to alight.

De Luynes then returns home to find a note awaiting him from de Marcini, who wants de Luynes to join him at Choisy, a few miles from Paris. De Luynes joins him there and learns that the Cardinal wishes de Mancini to marry a sister of Eugène de Canaples, which was the reason the duel arranged between them was not to take place. While the two men are at the inn the two ladies who had befriended de Luynes arrive, also a certain Armand de Malpertuis with whom de Luynes quarrels, and a duel is arranged between them.

CHAPTER V. (*continued.*)

"GENTLEMEN! Gentlemen!" cried St. Auban, thrusting himself between us. "Malpertuis, have the goodness to wait until one affair is concluded before you create a second one. Now, M. de Luynes, will you tell me whether M. de Mancini is here or not?"

"What if he should be?"

"You will be wise to withdraw; we shall be three to two."

"Three to two! Surely, Marquis, your reckoning is at fault. You cannot count the Vicomte there as one; his knees are knocking together. At best he is but a woman in man's clothes. As for your other friend, unless his height misleads me, he is but a boy. Therefore, Monsieur, you see that the advantage is with us. We are two men, opposed to a man, a woman, and a child, so that——"

"In Heaven's name, sir," cried St. Auban, again interposing himself betwixt me and the bellicose Malpertuis, "will you cease this foolishness? A word with you in private, M. de Luynes."

I permitted him to take me by the sleeve and lead me aside, marvelling the while what curb it was that he was setting upon his temper, and what wily motives he might have for adopting so conciliatory a tone.

With many generations to come the name of César de St. Auban must perforce be familiar as that of one of the greatest roysterers and most courtly libertines of the early days of Louis XIV., as well as that of a rabid anti-cardinalist and *frondeur*, and one of the earliest of that new cabal of nobility known as the *petits-maîtres*, whose leader the Prince of Conde was destined to become a few years later. He was a man of about my own age, that is to say, between thirty-two and thirty-three, and of my own frame, tall, spare, and active. On his florid, good-natured countenance was stamped his character of profligate. In dress he was courtly in the extreme. His doublet and surcoat were of wine-coloured velvet, richly laced, and he still affected the hanging sleeves of a fast disappearing fashion. Valuable lace filled the tops of his black boots, a valuable jewel glistened here and there upon his person, and one must needs have pronounced him a fop but for the strength and resoluteness of his bearing, and the long rapier that hung from his gold-embroidered baldrick. Such, in brief, is a portrait of the man who now confronted me, his fine blue eyes fixed upon my face, wherein, methinks, he read but little, search though he might.

"M. de Luynes," he murmured at last, "you appear to find entertainment in making enemies, and you do it wantonly."

"Have you brought me aside to instruct me in the art of making friends?"

"Possibly, M. de Luynes; and without intending an offence, permit me to remark that you need them."

"Mayhap. But I do not seek them."

"I have it in my heart to wish that you did; for I, M. de Luynes, seek to make a friend of you. Nay, do not smile in that unbelieving fashion. I have long esteemed you for those very qualities of dauntlessness and defiance which have brought you so rich a crop of hatred. If you doubt my words, perhaps you will recall my attitude towards you in the horse-market yesterday, and let that speak. Without wishing to remind you of a service done, I may yet mention that I stood betwixt you and the mob that sought to avenge my friend Canaples. He was my friend; you stood there, as indeed you have always stood, in the attitude of a foe. You wounded Canaples, maltreated Vilmorin, defied me, and yet but for my intervention, sir, you had been torn to pieces."

"All this, I grant, is very true, Monsieur," I made

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reply, with deep suspicion in my soul. "Yet, pardon me if I confess that to me it proves no more than that you acted as a generous enemy. Pardon my bluntness also, but what profit do you look to make from gaining my friendship?"

"You are frank, Monsieur," he said, colouring slightly; "I will be none the less so. I am a *frondeur*, an anti-cardinalist. In a word, I am a gentleman and a Frenchman."

An interloping foreigner, miserly, mean-souled, and jesuitical, springs up, weans himself into the graces of a foolish, impetuous, wilful queen, and climbs the ladder which she holds for him to the highest position in France. I allude to Mazarin; this Cardinal who is not a priest, this minister of France who is not a Frenchman, this belittler of nobles who is not a gentleman."

"Have a care, Monsieur——"

"One moment, M. de Luynes. This adventurer, not content with the millions which his avaricious talons have dragged from the people for his own benefit, seeks by means of illustrious alliances to enrich a pack of beggarly nieces and nephews that he has rescued from the squalor of their Sicilian homes to bring hither. His nieces, the Mancinis and Martinozzis, he is marrying to dukes and princes. 'Tis not nice to witness, but 'tis the affair of the men who wed them. In seeking, however, to marry his nephew Andrea to one of the greatest heiresses in France he goes too far. Yvonne de Canaples is for some noble countryman of her own—there are many suitors to her hand—and for no nephew of Giulio Mazarini. Her brother Eugène himself thinks thus, and therein, M. de Luynes, you have the real motive of the quarrel which he provoked with Andrea, and which, had you not interfered, could have had but one ending."

"Why do you tell me all this, Monsieur?" I inquired coldly, betraying none of the amazement his last words gave birth to.

"So that you may know the true position of affairs, and, knowing it, see the course which the name you bear must bid you follow. Because Canaples failed am I here to-day. I had not counted upon meeting you, but since I have met you, I have set the truth before you, confident that you will now withdraw from an affair to which no real interest can bind you, leaving matters to pursue their course."

He eyed me, methought, almost anxiously from under his brows, as he awaited my reply. It was briefer than he looked for.

"You have wasted time, Monsieur."

"How? You persist?"

"Yes. I persist. Yet for the Cardinal I care nothing. Mazarin has dismissed me from his service unjustly and unpaid. He has forbidden me his nephew's company. In fact, did he know of my presence here with M. de Mancini, he would probably carry out his threat to hang me."

"Heaven!" cried St. Auban, "you are mad if that be so. France is divided into two parties, cardinalists and anti-cardinalists. You, sir, without belonging to either stand alone, an enemy to both. Your attitude is preposterous!"

"Nay, sir, not alone. There is Andrea de Mancini. The boy is my only friend in a world of enemies. I am growing fond of him, Monsieur, and I will stand by him while my arm can wield a sword, in all that may advance his fortunes and his happiness. That, Monsieur, is my last word."

"Do not forget, M. de Luynes," he said, his suaveness all departed of a sudden, and his tone full of menace and acidity, "do not forget that when a wall cannot be scaled it may be broken through."

"Aye, Monsieur; but many of those who break through stand in danger of being crushed by the falling stones," I answered, entering into the spirit of his allegory.

"There are many ways of striking," he said.

"And many ways of being struck," I retorted, with a sneer.

Our words grew sinister, our eyes waxed fiery, and more might have followed had not the door leading to the staircase opened at that moment to admit Andrea himself. He came, elegant in dress and figure, with a smile upon his handsome young face, whose noble features gave the lie to St. Auban's assertion that he had been drawn from a squalid Sicilian home. Such faces are not bred in squalor.

In utter ignorance of the cabal against him, he greeted St. Auban, who was well known to him, with a graceful bow, and also Vilmorin, who stood in the doorway with Malpertuis, and who at the sight of de Mancini grew visibly ill at ease. In coming to Choisy the Vicomte had clearly expected to do no more than second St. Auban in the duel which he thought to see forced upon Andrea. He now realised that if a fight there was, he might, by his presence, be forced into it. Malpertuis looked fierce and tugged at his moustachios, whilst his companions returned Andrea's salutation—St. Auban gravely, and Vilmorin hesitatingly.

"Ha, Gaston," said the boy, advancing towards me, "our host tells me that two ladies who have been shipwrecked here wish to do me the honour of occupying my apartments for an hour or so. Ha! there they are," he added, as the two girls came suddenly forward. Then bowing, "Mesdames, I am enchanted to set the poor room at your disposal for as long as it may please you to honour it."

As the ladies, of whose appearance St. Auban had been unaware, appeared before us, I shot a glance at the Marquis, and from the start he gave upon beholding them, I saw that things were as I had suspected.

Before they could reply to Andrea, St. Auban suddenly advanced.

"Mesdemoiselles," quoth he, "forgive me if in this miserable light I did not earlier discover your presence and offer you my services. I do so now, with the hope that you will honour me by making use of them."

"Thank you, M. de St. Auban," replied the dark-haired one, whom I guessed to be none other than Yvonne de Canaples herself, "but since this gentleman so gallantly cedes his apartments to us, all our needs are satisfied. It would be churlish to refuse that which is so graciously proffered."

Her tone was cold in the extreme, as also was the inclination of the head wherewith she favoured the Marquis. In arrant contrast were the pretty words of thanks she addressed to Andrea, who stood by, blushing like a girl; and a fearful scowl did this contrast draw from St. Aubyn, a scowl that lasted until, escorted by the landlord, the two ladies had withdrawn.

There was an awkward pause when they were gone, and methought, from the look on St. Aubyn's face, that he was about to provoke a fight, after all. Not so, however; for after staring at us like a clown whilst one might count a dozen, he turned and strode to the door, calling for his horse and those of his companions.

"*Au revoir*, M. de Luynes," he said significantly as he got into the saddle.

"*Au revoir*, M. de Luynes," said also Malpertuis, coming close up to me. "We shall meet again, believe me."

"Pray Heaven that we may not, if you would die in your bed," I answered mockingly. "Adieu!"

CHAPTER VI.

Of How Andrea Became Lovesick.

With what fictions I could call to mind did I put off Andrea's questions touching the peculiar fashion of St.

Auban's leave-taking. Tell him the truth and expose to him the situation whereof he was himself the unconscious centre I dared not, lest his high-spirited impetuosity should cause him to take into his own hands the reins of the affair, and thus drive himself into irreparable disaster.

Andrea himself showed scant concern, however, and was luckily content with my hurriedly invented explanations; his thoughts had suddenly found occupation in another and a gentler theme than the ill-humour of men, and presently his tongue betrayed it when he drew the conversation to the ladies to whom he had resigned his apartments.

"Heavens, Gaston," he burst out, "she is a lovely maid! Saw you ever a bonnier?"

"Indeed she is very beautiful," I answered, laughing to myself at the thought of how little he dreamt that it was of Yvonne St. Albaret de Canaples that he spoke, and not minded for the while to enlighten him.

"If she be as kind and gentle as she is beautiful, Gaston, well—Uncle Giulio's plans are likely to suffer shipwreck. I shall not leave Choisy until I have spoken to her; in fact, I shall not leave until she leaves."

"Nevertheless we shall still be able to set out, as we had projected, after dining; for in an hour, or two at most, they will proceed on their journey."

He was silent for some moments, then, "To the deuce with the Cardinal's plans," quoth he, banging his fist on the table. "I shall not go to Blois."

"Pooh! Why not?"

"Why not?" He halted for a moment, then in a meandering tone, "You have read, perchance, in story-books," he said, "of love being born from the first meeting of two pairs of eyes, as a spark is born of flint and steel, and you may have laughed at the conceit, as I have laughed at it. But laugh no more, Gaston; for I who stand before you am one who has experienced this thing which poets tell of, and which hitherto I have held in ridicule. I will not go to Blois, because—because—well, because I intend to go where *she* goes."

"Then, dear lad, you *will* go to Blois. You will go to Blois, if not as a dutiful nephew, resigned to obey his reverend uncle's wishes, at least because Fate forces you to follow a pair of eyes that have—hum, what was it you said you did?"

"Do you say that *she* is going to Blois? How do you know?"

"Eh? How do I know? Oh, I heard her servant speaking with the hostler."

"So much the better, then; for thus if his Eminence gets news of my whereabouts, the news will not awaken his ever-ready suspicions. Heavens! How beautiful she is! Noted you her eyes, her skin? And what hair, de Luynes! Like threads of gold!"

"Like threads of gold?" I echoed. "You are dreaming, boy. Oh, yes, yes! I understand. You are speaking of the fair-haired chit that was with her."

He eyed me in amazement.

"'Tis you whose thoughts are wandering to that lanky, nose-in-the-air madame who accompanied her."

I began a laugh that I broke off suddenly as I realised that it was not Yvonne, after all, who had imprisoned his wits. The Cardinal's plans were indeed like to miscarry if he persisted thus.

"But 'twas the nose-in-the-air madame, as you call her, with whom you spoke."

"Aye, but it was the golden-haired lady that held my gaze. Pshaw! Who would mention them in a breath?"

"Who, indeed?" said I, but with a different meaning.

Thereafter, seeing him listless, I suggested a turn in the village to stretch our limbs before dining. But he would have none of it; and when I pressed the point with sound reasoning, touching the benefits which health may cull from exercise, he grew petulant as a wayward child. She might descend whilst he was absent. Indeed, she might require some slight service that lay, perchance, in his power to render her. What an opportunity would he not lose were he abroad? She might even depart before we returned, and than that no greater calamity could just then befall him. No, he would not stir a foot from the inn. A fig for exercise. To the deuce with health. Who sought an appetite? Not he. He wished for no appetite—could contrive no base and vulgar appetite for food whilst his soul, he swore, was being consumed by the overwhelming, all-effacing appetite to behold her.

Such meandering fools are most of us at nineteen, when the heart is young—a flawless mirror, ready to hold the image of the first fair maid that looks into it through our eyes, and as ready—Heaven knows—to relinquish it when the subject is withdrawn.

But I, who was not nineteen, and the mirror of whose heart—to pursue my metaphor—was dulled, warped, and cracked with much ill-usage, grew sick of the boy's enthusiasm and the monotony of a conversation which I could divert into no other channel from that upon which it had been started by a little slip of a girl with hair of gold and sapphire eyes—I use Andrea's words. And so I rose, and bidding him take root in the tavern if so it pleased his fancy, I left him there.

Wrapped in my cloak, for the air was raw and damp, I strode aimlessly along, revolving in my mind what had befallen at the *Connêtable* that morning, and speculating upon the issue that this quaint affair might have. In matters of love, or rather, of matrimony, which is not quite the same thing, opposition is common enough. But the opposers are usually members of either of the interested families. Now the families—that is to say, the heads of the families—being agreed, and even anxious to bring about the union of Yvonne de Canaples and Andrea de Mancini, it was something new to have a cabal of persons who from motives of principle, as St. Auban had it, should oppose the alliance so relentlessly as to even resort to violence if no other means occurred to them. It seemed vastly probable that Andrea would be disposed of by a knife in the back, and more than probable that a like fate would be reserved for me, since I had constituted myself his guardian angel. For my own part, however, I had a pronounced distaste to ending my days in so unostentatious a fashion. I had also a notion that I should prove an exceedingly difficult person to assassinate, and that those who sought to slip a knife into me would find my hide peculiarly tough, and my hand peculiarly ready to return the compliment.

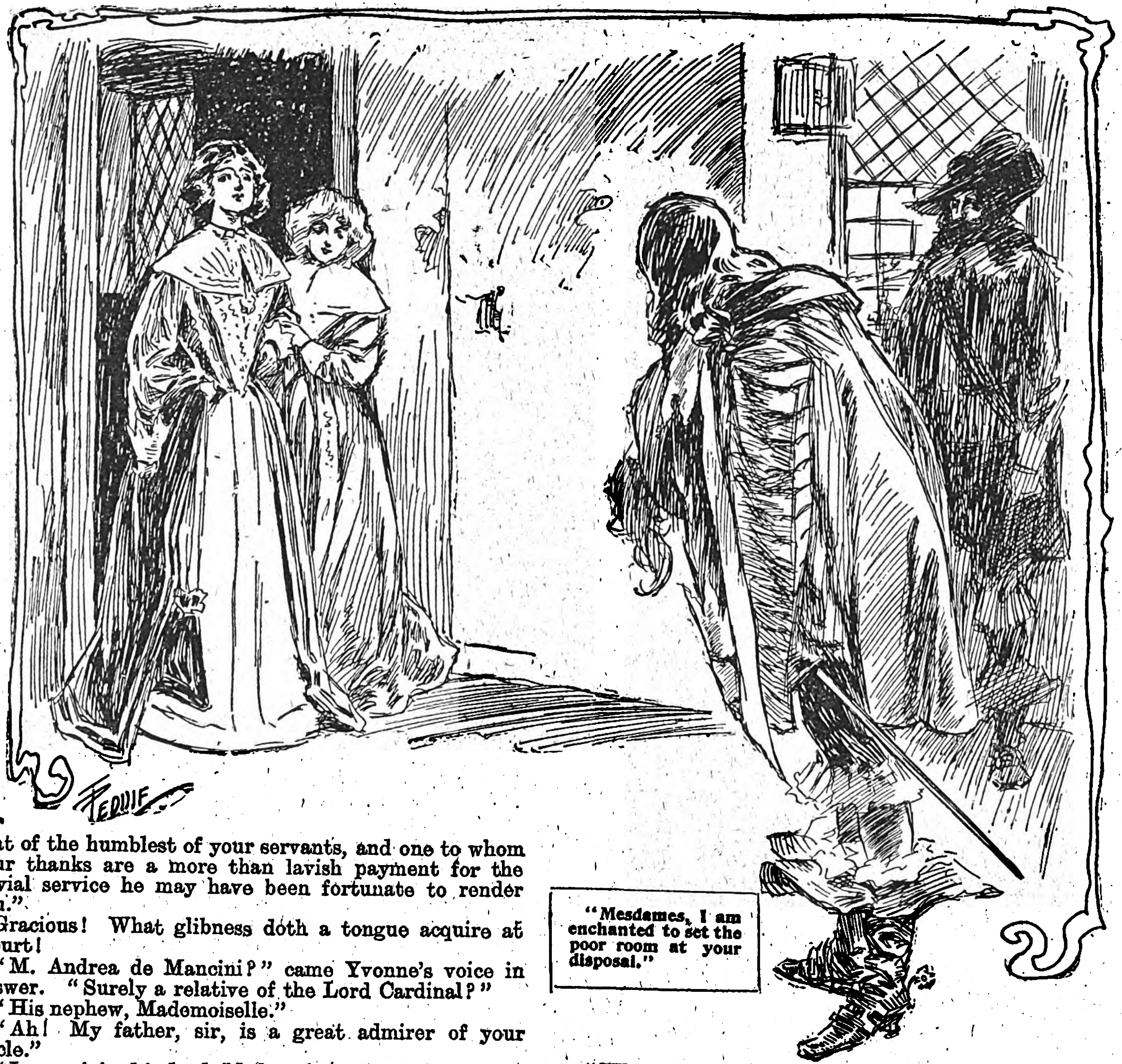
So deeply did I sink into ponderings of this character that it was not until two hours afterwards that I again found myself drawing near the *Connêtable*.

I reached the inn to find by the door a coach, and by that coach Andrea; he stood bareheaded, despite the cold, conversing, with all outward semblances of profound respect, with those within it.

So engrossed was he and so ecstatic that my approach went unheeded; and when presently I noted that the coach was Mademoiselle de Canaples', I ceased to wonder at the boy's unconsciousness of what took place around him. Clearly the farrier had been found at last, and the horse shod afresh during my absence. Loath to interrupt so pretty a scene, I waited, aloof, until these farewells should be completed, and whilst I waited there came to me from the carriage a sweet, musical voice that was not Yvonne's.

"May we not learn at least, Monsieur, the name of the gentleman to whose courtesy we are indebted for having spent the last two hours without discomfort?"

"My name, Mademoiselle, is Andrea de Mancini,



"Mesdames, I am enchanted to set the poor room at your disposal."

that of the humblest of your servants, and one to whom your thanks are a more than lavish payment for the trivial service he may have been fortunate to render you."

Gracious! What glibness doth a tongue acquire at Court!

"M. Andrea de Mancini?" came Yvonne's voice in answer. "Surely a relative of the Lord Cardinal?"

"His nephew, Mademoiselle."

"Ah! My father, sir, is a great admirer of your uncle."

"I am rejoiced indeed, Mademoiselle," replied Andrea with a bow, as though the compliment had been paid to him. "Am I indiscreet in asking the name of Monsieur your father?"

"Indiscreet! Nay, Monsieur. You have a right to learn the name of those who are under an obligation to you. My father is the Chevalier de Canaples, of whom it is possible that you have heard. I am Yvonne de Canaples, of whom it is unlikely that you should have heard, and this is my sister Geneviève, whom a like obscurity envelops."

The boy's lips moved, but no sound came from them, whilst his cheeks went white and red by turns. His courtliness of a moment ago had vanished, and he stood sheepish and awkward as a clown. At length he so far mastered himself as to bow and make a sign to the coachman, who thereupon gathered up his reins.

"You are going presumably to Blois," he stammered with a nervous laugh, as if the journey were a humorous proceeding.

"Yes, Monsieur," answered Geneviève, "we are going home."

"Why, then it is possible that we shall meet again. I, too, am travelling in that direction. *Au revoir*, Mesdemoiselles!"

The whip cracked, the coach began to move, and the creaking of its wheels drowned, so far as I was concerned, the female voices that answered his farewell.

I drew near and laid my hand on Andrea's shoulder; at the touch he started like one awakened suddenly and looked up.

"Ah, you are returned, Gaston."

"To find that you have made a discovery, and are overwhelmed by your error."

"My error?"

"Yes; that of falling in love with the wrong one. Alas! It is but one of those ironical jests wherewith Fate amuses herself at every step of our lives. Had you fallen in love with Yvonne, and it passes my understanding why you did not, everything would have gone smoothly with your wooing. Unfortunately you have a preference for fair hair——"

"Have done," he interrupted peevishly. "What does it signify? To the deuce with Mazarin's plans!"

"So you said this morning."

"Yes, when I did not even dream her name was Canaples."

"Nevertheless she is the wrong Canaples."

"For my uncle, but, good heavens, sir, 'tis I who am to wed, and I shall wed as my heart bids me."

"Hum! And Mazarin?"

"Faugh!" he answered, with an expressive shrug.

"Well, since you are resolved, let us dine."

"I have no appetite."

"Let us dine notwithstanding. Eat you must if you would live; and unless you live—think of it!— you'll never reach Blois."

"Gaston, you are laughing at me. I do not wish to eat."

I surveyed him gravely, with my arms akimbo.

"Can love so expand the heart of man that it fills even his stomach? Well, well, if you will not eat, at least have the grace to bear me company at table. Come, Andrea," and I took his arm, "let us ascend to that chamber which she has but quitted. Who can tell but that we shall find there some token of her recent presence? If nothing more, at least the air will be pervaded by the perfume she affected, and since you scorn the humble food of man, you can dine on that."

He smiled despite himself as I drew him towards the staircase.

"Scoffer!" quoth he. "Your callous soul knows naught of love."

"Whereas you have had three hours' experience. Heavens! You shall instruct me in the gentle art."

Alas for these perfumes upon which I had proposed that he should feast himself. If any the beautiful Geneviève had left behind her, they had been smothered in the vulgar yet appetising odour of the steaming *ragoût* that occupied the table.

I prevailed at length upon the love-lorn boy to take some food, but I could not lead him to talk of ought save Geneviève de Canaples. Presently he took to chiding me for the deliberateness wherewith I ate, and betrayed thereby his impatience to be in the saddle and after her. I argued that whilst she saw him not she might think of him. But the argument, though sound, availed me little, and in the end I was forced, for all that I am a man accustomed to please myself, to hurriedly end my repast and pronounce myself ready to start.

As Andrea had with him some store of baggage, since his sojourn at Blois was like to be of some duration, he travelled in a coach. Into this coach, then, we climbed, he and I. His valet Silvio occupied the seat beside the coachman, whilst my stalwart Michelot rode behind, leading my horse by the bridle. In this fashion we set out, and ere long the silence of my thoughtful companion, the monotonous rumbling of the vehicle, and, most important of factors, the good dinner that I had consumed, bred in me a torpor that soon became a sleep.

From a dream, that bound hand and foot, I was being dragged by St. Auban and Malpertuis before the Cardinal, I awakened with a start to find that we were clattering already through the streets of Etrechy; so that whilst I had slept we had covered some six leagues. Twilight had already set in, and Andrea lay idly back in the carriage, holding a book which it was growing too dark to read, and between the leaves of which he had slipped his forefinger to mark the place where he had paused. His eyes met mine as I looked round and he smiled.

"I should not have thought, Gaston," he said, "that a man with so seared a conscience could have slept thus soundly."

"I have not slept soundly," I grumbled, recalling my dream.

"You have slept long at least."

"Out of self-protection, so that I might not hear the name of Geneviève Canaples. 'Tis a sweet name, but you render it monotonous."

He laughed good-humouredly.

"Have you never loved, Gaston?"

"Often."

"Ah! But I mean did you never conceive a great passion?"

"Hundreds, boy."

"But never such a one as mine."

"Assuredly not; for the world has never seen its fellow. Be good enough to pull the cord, you Cupid incarnate. I wish to alight."

"You wish to alight? Why?"

"Because I am sick of love. I am going to ride a while with Michelot whilst you dream of her coral lips, her sapphire eyes, and what other gems constitute her wondrous personality."

Two minutes later I was in the saddle, riding with Michelot in the wake of the carriage. As I have already sought to indicate in these pages, Michelot was as much my friend as my servant. It is therefore no more than natural that I should communicate to him my fears touching what might come of the machinations of St. Auban, Vilmorin, and even, perchance, of that little firebrand Malpertuis.

Night fell while we talked, and at last the lights of Etampes, where we proposed to lie, peeped at us from a distance, and food and warmth.

It was eight o'clock when we reached the town, and a few moments later we rattled into the courtyard of the Hôtel de l'Epée.

Andrea was out of temper to learn that Mesdemoiselles de Canaples had reached the place two hours earlier, taken fresh horses, and proceeded on their journey, intending to reach Monnerville that night. He was even mad enough to propose that we should follow their example; but my sober arguments prevailed, and at Etampes we stayed till morning.

Andrea withdrew early. But I, having chanced upon a certain M. de la Vrillière, a courtier of Vilmorin's stamp, with whom I had some slight acquaintance, and his purse being heavier than his wits, I spent a passing profitable evening in his company. This pretty gentleman hailed my advent with a delight that amazed me, and suggested that we should throw a main together to kill time. The dice were found, and so clumsily did he use them that in half-an-hour, playing for beggarly crowns, he had lost twenty pistoles. Next he lost his temper, and with an oath pitched the cubes into the fire, swearing that they were toys for children, and that I must grant him his revenge with cards. The cards were furnished us, and with a fortune that varied little we played *lansquenet* until long past midnight. The fire died out in the grate, and the air grew chill, until at last, with a violent sneeze, de la Vrillière protested that he would play no more.

Cursing himself for the unluckiest being alive, the fool bade me good night, and left me seventy pistoles richer than when I had met him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHATEAU DE CANAPLES.

DESPITE the strenuous efforts which Andrea compelled us to put forth, we did not again come up with Mesdemoiselles de Canaples, who, in truth, must have travelled with greater speed than ladies are wont to.

This circumstance bred much discomfort in Andrea's bosom, for in it he read that his Geneviève thought not of him as he of her, else, knowing that he followed the same roads, she would have retarded their progress so that he might overtake them. Thus argued he, when on the following night, which was that of Friday, we lay at

Orleans. But when, towards noon on Saturday, our journey ended with our arrival at Blois, he went so far as to conclude that she had hastened on expressly to avoid him. Now, from what I had seen of Mademoiselle Yvonne, methought I might hazard a guess that she it was who commanded in these, and haply too in other matters, and that the manner of their journey had been such as was best attuned to her wishes.

With such an argument did I strive to appease Andrea's doubts, but all in vain; which is indeed no matter for astonishment, for to reason with a man in love is to reason with one who knows no reason.

After a brief halt at the *Lys de France*, at which hostelry I hired myself a room, we set out for the Château de Canaples, which is situated on the left bank of the Loire, at a distance of about half-a-league from Blois, in the direction of Tours.

We cut a brave enough figure as we rode down the Rue Vieille attended by our servants, and many a rustic Blasiois stopped to gape at us, to nudge his companion, and point us out, whispering the word "Paris."

I had donned my grey velvet doublet, deeming the occasion worthy of it, whilst Andrea wore a handsome suit of black, with gold lace, which for elegance it would have been difficult to surpass. An air of pensiveness added interest to his handsome face and courtly figure, and methought that Geneviève must be hard to please if she fell not a victim to his wooing.

We proceeded along the road bordering the Loire, a road of rare beauty at any other season of the year, but now bare of foliage, grey, bleak, and sullen as the clouds overhead, and as cold to the eye as was the sharp wind to the flesh. As we rode I fell to thinking of what my reception at the Château de Canaples was like to be, and almost to regret that I had permitted Andrea to persuade me to accompany him. Long ago I had known the Chevalier de Canaples, and for all the disparity of our ages—for he counted twice my years, we had been friends and comrades. That, however, was ten years ago, in the old days when I owned something more than the name of de Luynes. To-day I appeared before him as a ruined adventurer, a soldier of fortune, a ruffler, a duellist who had almost slain his son in a brawl whose details might be known to him, but not its origin. Seeing me in the company of Andrea de Mancini he might—who could say?—even deem me one of those parasites who cling to young men of fortune so that they may live at their expense. That the daughter would have formed such a conceit of me I was assured; it but remained to me with what countenance the father would greet me.

From such speculations I was at length aroused by our arrival at the gates of the Canaples park. Seeing them wide open, we rode between the two massive columns of granite, each surmounted by a *couchant* lion holding the escutcheon of the Canaples, and proceeded at an ambling pace up the avenue. Through the naked trees the château became discernible, a brave old castle that once had been the stronghold of a feudal race long dead. Grey it was, and attuned that day to the rest of the grey landscape. But at its base the ivy grew thick and green, and here and there long streaks of it crept up almost to the battlements, whilst in one place it had gone higher yet, and clothed one of the quaint old turrets. A moat there had once been, but this was now filled up and arranged into little mounds that became flower-beds in summer.

Resigning our horses to the keeping of our servants, we followed the grave butler who had received us. He led us across the spacious hall, which had all the appearance of an armory, and up the regal staircase of polished oak on to a landing wide and lofty. Here, turning to the left, he opened a door and desired us to give ourselves the trouble of awaiting the Chevalier. We entered a handsome room, hung in costly Dutch tapestry and richly furnished, yet with a sobriety of colour almost puritanical. It contained many long windows which overlooked a broad terrace, inclosed in a grey stone balustrade, from which some half-dozen steps led to a garden below. Beyond that ran the swift waters of the Loire, and beyond that again, in the distance, we beheld the famous Château de Chambord, built in the days of the first Francis.

I had but remarked these details when the door again opened, to admit a short, slender man, in whose black hair and beard the hand of time had scattered but little of that white dust that marks its passage. His face was pale, thin, and wrinkled, and his grey eyes had a nervous, restless look that dwelt not long on anything.

"Welcome to Canaples, M. de Mancini!" he exclaimed, as he hurried forward, with a smile so winning that his countenance appeared transfigured by it. "Welcome most cordially! We had not hoped that you would arrive so soon, but fortunately my daughters, to whom you appear to have been of service at Choisy, warned me that you were journeying hither. Your apartments, therefore, are prepared for you, and we hope you will honor Canaples by long remaining a guest."

Andrea thanked him becomingly.

"In truth," he added, "my departure from Paris was somewhat sudden, but I have a letter here from Monseigneur my uncle which explains the matter."

"No explanation is needed, my dear Andrea," replied the old nobleman, abandoning the formalities that had marked his welcoming speech. "How left you my Lord Cardinal?" he asked as he took the letter.

"In excellent health, but somewhat harassed, I fear, by the affairs of state."

"Ah, yes, yes. But stay. You are not alone." And Canaples' grey eyes shot an almost furtive glance of inquiry in my direction. A second glance followed the first, and the Chevalier's brows were knit. Then he came a step nearer, scanning my face.

"Surely, surely, Monsieur," he exclaimed before Andrea had time to answer him, "were you not at Rocroi?"

"Your memory flatters me, Monsieur," I replied with a laugh. "I was indeed at Rocroi, captain in the regiment of light horse whereof you were *Mestre de Champ*."

"His name," said Andrea, "is Gaston de Luynes, my very dear friend, counsellor, and, I might almost say, protector."

"Heavens, yes! Gaston de Luynes!" he ejaculated, seizing my hand in an affectionate grip. "But how have you fared since Rocroi was fought? For a soldier of such promise, one might have predicted great things in ten years."

"Alas, Monsieur! I was dismissed the service after Senlac."

"Dismissed the service!"

"Pah!" I laughed, not without bitterness, "'tis a long story and an ugly one, divided 'twixt the dice-box, the bottle, and the scabbard. Ten years ago I was a promising young captain, ardent and ambitious. To-day I am a broken ruffler, unrecognized by my family, a man without hope, without ambition, almost without honor."

I know not what it was that impelled me to speak thus. Haply the wish that, since soon he must learn to what depths Gaston de Luynes had sunk, he should at least learn it from my own lips at the outset.

He shuddered at my concluding words, and had not Andrea at that moment put his arm affectionately upon my shoulder, and declared me the bravest fellow and truest friend in all the world, 'tis possible that the Chevalier de Canaples would have sought an excuse to be rid of me. Such men as he seek not the acquaintance of such men as I.

(To be continued.)

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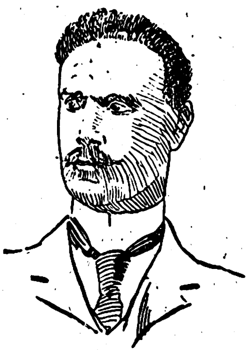

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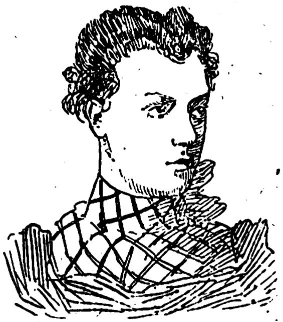

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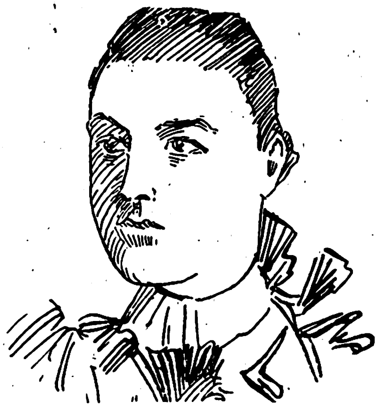

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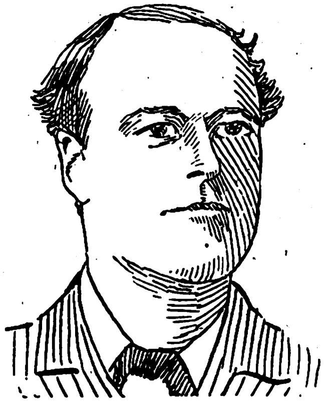

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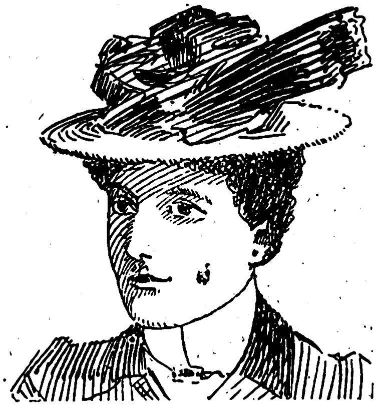


No. 70.

The Entertaining of the Chief.

It was quite obvious, when Tom came home on Monday from the City, that something was wrong. He had never before forgotten to kiss Elsie, in all their three months of married life. He looked round the tiny dining-room, with its oppressively new furniture, as if it annoyed him; he straightened a picture on the wall, and then went and looked with disparaging criticism at the Japanese umbrella in the fireplace.

"I wish we'd bought the other one—the silk thing that held photographs," he said irritably.

"But it was so very much dearer!" pleaded Elsie, with quivering lips.

Tom went and gazed up at an old-fashioned Parian figure on a plush bracket. "Can't you take that hideous thing away?" he demanded.

"Oh, Tom! It was Aunt Selina's present, and she has been so kind to us!" protested Elsie. "She comes in nearly every day, you know, and I wouldn't hurt her feelings for the world. It's not so *very* ugly. Besides, no one sees it who matters. I put it in here instead of in the drawing-room, on purpose."

Tom muttered as if he were unconvinced. He turned up his nose at the supper, which Elsie had provided with such anxious reference to his likes and dislikes; he pronounced the bread stale, and found fault with the butter, and altogether goaded his small wife to the point of distraction. When the good-humoured little servant banged the door cheerfully behind her he gave a melodramatic start and frown, and turned upon Elsie almost savagely.

"*Can't* you teach that girl to behave like other people's servants?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, Tom, she's such a good girl, and means *so* well!" quavered Elsie. "And—oh, Tom, what *is* the matter with you to-night?"

The sight of two tears trickling forlornly down her pink cheeks brought the erring husband to his senses instantaneously. He dashed round the table, consoling and apologising in a breath, and calling himself all the hard names that occurred to him; but Elsie, though well pleased at this turn of affairs, could not be happy until the mystery was solved. "Tom, you must tell me!" she implored. "Something awful has happened!"

"No, indeed, darling!" Tom hastened to reassure her. "It's only that the chief——"

Elsie sat up with a gasp, and clasped her hands. "Tom! You—you haven't got the—the *sack*?"

"Oh, no. He's kind enough to be very pleased with me just now. In fact, we went up in the same train this morning, and he was so affable that he asked if he might come and see us—said he'd no idea that I lived here, and that Mrs. Soames would like to make your acquaintance.

"Oh, Tom! They're not really coming?" protested Elsie, with a horrified face.

"Of course, I had to say that you would be delighted," said Tom remorsefully.

"But, oh, Tom! Just think of what they're used to at home—champagne, and things," said Elsie, with distracted vagueness. "I shan't know what to give them to eat; and Bertha *always* does what you don't expect. Just remember when we had the Vicarage people and the Holmses to tea!"

"She served salt with the strawberries—*I* remember!" said Tom, groaning.

"I really *can't* entertain the chief and Mrs. Soames!" cried Elsie, frantically. Oh, can't you say that I've got influenza or something?"

"But I told him you were very well; and I've asked them, you see," said Tom, staring guiltily at the ground.

"You didn't fix a day?" screamed Elsie.

"He said that they had only Tuesday free," Tom replied desperately.

Elsie wrung her hands. They *needn't* have chosen Bertha's night out!" she wailed. "She'll be offended if I ask her to change it, and then *everything* will go wrong!"

Tom was smitten with deep remorse.

"Oh, Elsie, don't cry!" he exclaimed desperately. "Of course I'll tell them not to come if you feel like that about it. I'll write to-night—it doesn't matter if the chief *is* offended. Oh, *don't*, darling! I'd rather leave the office altogether than see you so uspset."

His repentance was so alarming that Elsie had to become consoler in her turn. She would be able to manage, she assured him, drying her eyes. Bertha should be bribed into peace, and all would yet be well—and, after all, the entertainment would soon be over.

"Are they *very* critical sort of people, Tom?" she inquired fearfully.

"Oh, dear no!" cried Tom. "The chief's awfully good-natured and easy to please—everyone likes him."

"And Mrs. Soames?" Elsie asked, somewhat reassured. But of her Tom had no such encouraging report to give. He knew almost nothing about her, he protested. Further questioned, he owned that people called her stiff; and it was finally dragged from him that a fellow-clerk who had the pleasure of her acquaintance, had remarked that he would rather talk to an iceberg than to Mrs. Soames. Poor Elsie sat appalled; and Tom began to realise the full magnitude of his sins.

"Oh, Tom, you will be *sure* to come home in good time?" she implored; and Tom promised fervently, conscious that it was the least atonement he could make.

Elsie found her work cut out for her. First and most important of all, she had to soothe the injured Bertha—who could only meet her "friend" on Tuesday nights—with the hopeful assurance that the dreaded visitors would leave too early to be any hindrance. She ransacked the suburb for delicacies, bought flowers with reckless extravagance, and scorched her pretty face over the kitchen fire in the concoction of scones and other mysteries. By three o'clock her path had cleared before her. All was well in train, Bertha's good-humour was restored, and she had been drilled in the minutest points of etiquette. Elsie donned her best frock, and sat expectant in the drawing-room, looking complacently round on her flowers, and wishing that her face were not so hot. She hoped fervently that Tom would be in time; it was not often that he could leave the office early. Elsie had forgotten, in her agitation, to ask what time the formidable guests might be expected, but it would surely be beneath their dignity to come before four o'clock. Her preparations were so far complete that she could allow herself a little rest. With a thankful thought that in two hours' time all would be over, and she and Tom left once more in peace, she installed herself on the drawing-room sofa—carefully, with due regard to her best frock—and prepared to be found elegantly at ease over a book. She had not found time to sit down all day, and a rest was very welcome—so much so, in fact, that five minutes later the book dropped from her hand, and she fell asleep.

An indefinite interval passed before the door opened and Bertha's injured face presented itself.

"If you please, m'm, what time might you be expecting of 'em?"

Elsie sprang up, only half-awake.

"I don't know exactly, Bertha," she said apologetically. "I don't *think* they will come before four——"

"Seeing as how it's half-past five now——" said Bertha, with a grim pause.

"Half-past five!" Elsie exclaimed. "Impossible!" But she looked at the clock, and found that it was true. Mistress and maid faced each other with dawning smiles of relief.

"They can't be coming," said Elsie.

"What about my hevening, please, m'm?" said Bertha.

"Help me to put the things away, and you can go this minute!" cried Elsie blissfully. Even the sight of her wasted extravagance could not dim her joy. The best tea-service was merrily stowed away, the silver cream-jug locked up, and the store of cakes relegated to the larder. In an amazingly short time Bertha was banging the garden gate behind her, while Elsie tripped upstairs to change into her oldest and least exacting summer muslin. When she heard the little gate clang, she ran out to welcome her erring husband with free forgiveness.

"Well—have they come?" were Tom's first words.

"Come? No!" said Elsie, with a long sigh of relief. "Oh, I'm *so* glad, Tom! But I do wish you could have let me know that they weren't coming, for I was expecting them for hours."

"Not coming? But they *are* coming!" cried Tom. "You didn't expect them yet, did you?"

"Why, what time did you ask them?" cried Elsie.

"I said half-past seven, of course. We always have supper at half-past seven, don't we?"

Elsie sat down on the stairs, and began to laugh hysterically. "I never dreamt of your asking them to supper!" she cried. "*Of course*, I thought you said tea."

"But we always have our friends to supper," said Tom, blankly. "How could I get home in time for tea? You never objected to my asking Jack Bowles, or Sidney, or the Mastersons."

At this climax of masculine obtuseness, Elsie's sorely-tried temper gave way.

"Oh, can't you *see* that it isn't the same thing at all?" she cried, wringing her hands. "Can't you understand that I wanted to have everything specially nice for Mr. and Mrs. Soames? And I'd taken such trouble, and I had a really lovely tea!"

"I'm sure we always have everything very nice," protested Tom. "Oh, don't worry, little woman! It will be all right."

Elsie stood up with an angry sob.

"How can it be all right," she said, "when I've got my very oldest frock on, and there's no time to change, and Bertha's out, and there's nothing in the world for supper but liver and bacon?"

"Oh, I say!" cried Tom, dismayed at last.

"I ordered the very vulgarest supper I possibly could," sobbed Elsie, "because I thought it would be such a relief after entertaining them."

The gate clanged.

"There they are!" exclaimed Tom, frantically. "Good heavens! Elsie, don't cry! What in the world are we to do?"

"You must open the door," said Elsie, drying her eyes in a dark corner.

The door was open, the dreaded guests had entered; and Elsie's heart sank to the lowest depths at sight of Mrs. Soames, who was a tall lady of majestic presence, with an aquiline nose and a deep voice. Tom was feverishly murmuring something about "My wife," and Elsie came forward, trembling, to be introduced, and to invite Mrs. Soames into the drawing-room, while Tom helped his chief to take off his coat. An awful silence reigned in both drawing-room and hall, while host and hostess cast desperately about for apologies.

"There is nothing wrong, I hope? No mistake?" said Mrs. Soames, stiffly. "We certainly understood your husband to say Tuesday."

Elsie looked at the imposing figure sitting opposite, resplendent in rustling silks, and fully appreciated a certain comparison respecting icebergs.

"Oh, I don't know what to say, Mrs. Soames!" she began desperately. "You see, I understood my husband to say that he had asked you to tea, not to supper—it was not in the least *his* fault!"—with frantic loyalty. "And I'm so dreadfully sorry and ashamed. I don't know *what* you will think of us! You see, I gave up all expectation of your coming after six o'clock, and I let our maid go out. And—and I had such a *nice* tea for you," sobbed poor Elsie incoherently; "and—and there's nothing whatever for supper but—but liver and bacon!"

"How very unexpected, and how very nice!" said Mrs. Soames. Her voice certainly shook a good deal, as if with suppressed laughter, but it was so kind that Elsie looked up in amazement. "I'll tell you a secret, my dear," continued the majestic lady. "You needn't apologise in the least for your supper, for my husband and I like nothing better, only—you won't tell anyone, will you?—only I am so dreadfully afraid of my cook, that I never dare to ask for it!"

Elsie gasped, and was speechless.

"You'll let me help you to get supper ready, won't you?" pleaded Mrs. Soames, quite eagerly. "Ah, you don't know what a lucky girl you are, my dear! You can't think how dull it is to be afraid to do anything for yourself because your servants will think it undignified. You *will* let me take off my bonnet and help, won't you?"

"Of course, if you really would like to——" began Elsie confusedly.

"I would like it of all things!" cried Mrs. Soames. She ran out into the hall, looking ten years younger. "Come, Philip!" she cried to her astonished husband. "Mrs. Sargent is very kindly going to let me help her with the supper, and I've no doubt Mr. Sargent can find something for you to do. We can imagine ourselves back in Larkspur Terrace, can't we?"

"Heaven knows, I often wish we were!" said the chief fervently, his lined face brightening, as he entered into the spirit of the thing with amazing promptness. When Elsie came down again, bringing one formidable visitor, bonnetless, and enveloped in a large apron, she found the other briskly uncorking bottled beer under Tom's directions, as one to the manner born.

E. M. Bredin.

The Adventures of an Actress.

XXI.—A FAREWELL APPEARANCE.

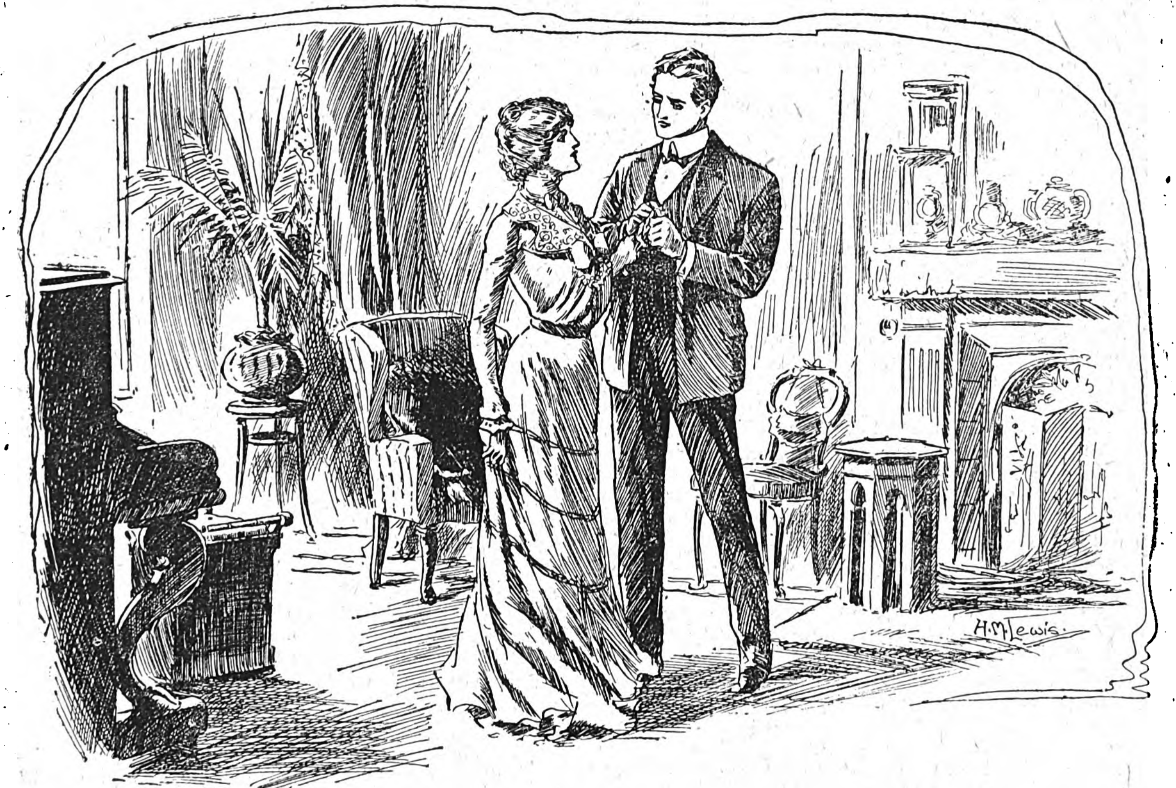
By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

It was Christmas week. In a miserable London eating house, in an obscure quarter of the great metropolis, a man was seated, alone, upon his face a scowl that rendered it so sinister as to single him out as a being who had but little reason for being on good terms with his surroundings.

His clothes were shabby, upon his chin was a thick stubble, the moustache that disguised his mouth drooped untidily over his upper lip, his cheeks were pale. Yet he had no one to blame but himself for his present position. Only a few months before he had held a high position among his fellows, with the means and qualifications of gentle birth, and a fine old family name to aid him in enjoying his wealth.

"So this is where my endeavours have landed me ?" he said bitterly. "This is the end of my plans—a wretched Soho restaurant, deprived of my wealth, with detectives at my heels, and all for the sake of a woman ! This is how you've won Hazel Harlow, Horace Caldecott !" The frown upon his face deepened. "Curse it all !" he muttered ; "what is there left for me ? I've sworn I'll have my desires, and now if ever a man was in a hopeless plight I am he. And yet I love her—love her with all my heart and soul, although she has been responsible for bringing me to my present miserable state. What is there left for me to do ? Shall I make one last attempt to retrieve the past or shall I cut myself adrift from everything before it is too late ?" He took a deep draught at a glass of absinthe at his elbow.



"There's one thing that makes me a bit nervous," she said in a low voice.

The pungent liquor seemed to fire his brain anew. Wild thoughts began to crowd into his mind, thoughts that brought with them a hundred fanciful pictures. And always he saw before him a woman's face, gazing at him with big blue eyes, the vision of the girl, for love of whom he had sacrificed everything; aye, even his honour and his sense of right.

"To think that at this moment Hazel Harlow is in London; that she may, for all I know, be within a short distance of this very place. And yet she was never farther from me than now. Again, what is there left for me to do? Shall I own myself beaten, or shall I make one final effort to retrieve the mistakes of the past? The *Good Samaritan* Company is at the Coronet Theatre this week. If only I could get hold of some money. I wonder if old Moss would help me"—then his face changed—"why I don't believe the old Jew knows that I've come a cropper. Perhaps I could bounce him for a hundred or two. If I could, well—I'd have a last fling. And who knows? The fact of it being such a desperate venture might spell success; might be the means of putting Hazel in my power for ever. I'll go and see Moss at once," and draining the last drops of his drink, he left the restaurant, with seething brain, already occupied with the nucleus of a diabolical plan.

He pulled the soft felt slouch hat he was wearing well over his eyes as he issued into the publicity of the open streets, taking care, moreover, to avoid as much as possible the main thoroughfares, alive with Christmas shoppers.

At last, after much devious threading of side streets, he crossed Holborn and turned down a narrow court that debouched from the main thoroughfare.

A little way down the alley was a door that opened into a small mean dwelling, and upon which was a brass plate, that bore the simple legend: "Samuel Moss," without further clue to the identity or business of the occupier.

A peculiar knock upon the door with the brass knocker that depended therefrom, brought, in a few moments, an answer to Caldecott's summons in the person of an old, white-bearded man, of unmistakable Semitic appearance, and with a greasy skull-cap upon his bald head.

The Jew peered warily into the face of his visitor, who said in a low voice:

"Good-day, Emmanuel, I don't suppose you expected to see me to-day!"

The old Hebrew made no verbal answer to this greeting, but merely made a sign to Caldecott to enter. This the latter did with alacrity.

Moss led the way into a dingy little office, the only furniture of which was a plain pedestal writing-desk, a safe in one corner of the room, and a couple of rather dilapidated chairs, on one of which he motioned his visitor to be seated.

"And now," he said, in a husky voice, "to what am I indebted to Mr. Horace Caldecott for a visit?"

"The same old game, Emmanuel," answered the other with forced gaiety. "I am once more masquerading. You know me of old, my friend, so that you surely need not be surprised at seeing me in my present seedy get-up?

"Many a time in the old days I used to come to you, Emmanuel, when I wanted a frolic, and I've come to you again. I want a disguise and I want a small loan. There's a big thing on, and I want to be in it. And you know perfectly well that there's no fence in London who is a better hand at getting rid of contraband booty than Emmanuel Moss. I shan't tell you any more, but you know me. Isn't that so?"

Little did the old Jew know the true state of Caldecott's mind as he spoke, or that a mighty flood of apprehension was beating against the light-toned barrier of his inner consciousness. For despite the easy voice in which he uttered his wishes, he was all the time a prey to the fear that Moss knew the real state of his affairs, was perfectly conscious that this man was indeed in desperate straits. Caldecott was trading on a past intimacy, on the days when he had had intimate and nefarious dealings with the rascally old Hebrew.

Judge of his heart-felt relief then, when Moss replied:

"So this is the true explanation of why you have been keeping so much in the background, Mr. Caldecott. I was wondering what had become of you. What sort of disguise do you want, and how much money?"

The battle had been won without a blow! Caldecott rubbed his hands together metaphorically as he realised that the old rascal had no idea of how matters really stood. The crimes of his past double life, when he had presented the side of a gentleman at large to the world in general as a cloak to his association with all the by-ways of crime, stood him in good stead now. For had it not been due to this that he had been able to hoodwink the astute old Israelite.

And as the result of his visit to Moss, in a comparatively short time he was enabled to issue out into the glare of publicity a new man, his real personality disguised by the cunning transformation due to Moss. He was a a portly whiskered city merchant. Aye, and more, he had money in his pocket.

CHAPTER II.

"CAN I have a word with you?"

The man addressed turned round sharply, to be confronted by a tall, well-dressed individual, with whose face and figure he was totally unfamiliar.

"Believe me, I don't wish you any harm," went on the stranger, "but I know that you have a small part in the piece now being played at the Coronet, the *Good Samaritan*, and it is in connection with that that I want a few moments' quiet conversation. I assure you that if you will accede to my request and hear what I have to say, it will be to your benefit."

The theatre had just been closed for the night, and the following meeting had taken place in the High Street, Notting Hill. The 'super's' curiosity was aroused. He was on his homeward way, but that did not matter. It could make no difference if he postponed his return for awhile. And besides his curiosity was aroused to hear what this unknown man could possibly have to say to him, that would be to his advantage.

"All right," he answered carelessly, "where shall we go?"

The other led the way to a small restaurant that was close at hand, and there the pair found a private room and some supper ordered by the stranger.

As soon as they had refreshed themselves, the latter pulled out his cigar case, and offered it to the other.

"We can talk so much better over a cigar," he said, "Mr. —" "Hall" finished the actor.

"Hall, thank you. My own name is, well, let us say Jones, for it doesn't matter one way or the other. Well, now, Mr. Hall, are you game to earn twenty pounds as the price of helping me to indulge in a little harmless frolic?"

Now, as all the world knows, the earnings of a supernumary character in a travelling theatrical company can never be called excessive, and £20 represented to Mark Hall the equivalent of a good many weeks salary.

There was a gleam in his eye as he replied: "I don't mind earning twenty quid so long as I don't burn my fingers in doing so."

"And you need not be afraid of that," returned the other, "for your part will only be a tacit one. I am a journalist, and desirous of playing a part for one night in your piece. Now, if you will let me assume your personality, for one night only, mind you, I'll pay you the twenty pounds to-night."

"Yes, that's right enough. "cried the actor, "but, in the first place, how are you going to pass yourself off as me? And how are you going to do my business? A man doesn't make himself an actor in five minutes," this last with an assumption of almost ludicrous dignity, considering that his own part in the *Good Samaritan* was nothing more than a 'walk on.'

The other smiled. "Oh, that is all right," he said airily," a little coaching from you, and I shall do perfectly well. Then don't you see we could change places just before the play begins. You could be seen at the theatre as usual, and then could slip out and let me take up your part. The make-up will help me to pass muster, and I've seen the piece a good many times, so that I know more or less what to do. We're both about the same height, you and I. The thing is really as easy as A B C so long as you don't go back on me."

Hall was silent for a few minutes. It certainly did seem a very easy way of earning twenty pounds, and he could see nothing very extraordinary about the request. Journalists were always doing curious things. And even if his part in the proceeding were to be discovered, he was doing nothing criminal. And twenty pounds was a sum of money worth running some risk for. It was Christmas-time, and there was a certain girl in a rival company, also a super, who would be very glad of a present. The more Hall pondered over the affair, the more he resolved to accede to the stranger's request.

"All right," he said, at last, "I'll consent. Suppose we say Friday night. I shall have time to coach you in what you are to do by then. And I promise you it won't be my fault if we're found out."

"That's the way to look at things," retorted the other with a smile. "We shan't be found out. Don't you be afraid of that. You give me your [address and I'll come round and see you to-morrow morning. Then we can fix up details." He put his hand to his pocket, and drew forth a fat pocket-book.

"Here's your fee," he said, with a smile, handing the other two ten pound notes. "You can't say I'm not a man of my word. I reckon that will come in handy at Christmas-time, eh?"

The other stammered out his thanks. Such promptitude in paying an account was a thing utterly new to all his instincts, probably because, like the majority of his kind, he so rarely had any chance of paying, or, indeed, incurring easily such a sum.

But if Mark Hall could have seen what was passing in "Jones'" mind, while he conversed so glibly, he would have had genuine cause to regret the part that he had offered to take in the affair in question.

And as "Jones" strolled along the quiet streets of Bayswater, he murmured to himself: "So far so good, Horace Caldecott, though there's still a good deal to be done. If I can only fix up the other matter as easily,

TRIUMPHANT SUCCESS OF THE "RUSSELL" TREATMENT FOR THE CURE OF CORPULENCY.

Read what the "Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News," in its issue of November 16th, says:—

NOTHING succeeds like success, says the ancient dictum; and, since the first success of the "Russell" treatment some twenty odd years ago, the triumphs of this marvellous system for the *permanent* reduction of corpulency have increased by leaps and bounds. For two reasons. In the first place, it is a scientific and rational treatment, necessitating no inconvenience, no discomfort, no distressing restrictions. In the second place, everyone who has tried it has been eager to recommend it to his or her stout acquaintances, because, not only is it pleasant, harmless, and easy, but it goes to the root of the evil, and brings about *lasting* beneficial results. By this is meant that when, after a course of the treatment, normal symmetrical proportions are regained, there is very little fear of the adipose tissue re-forming, and the treatment may therefore be definitely abandoned. How different is this from the many other so-called systems for the eradication of obesity! As a general rule, such systems not only involve extreme measures as to dietary restrictions, excessive exercise, abnormal purging and sweating, but as soon as they are dropped the fat formation re-commences, and the whole process of elimination of the adipose has to be gone through again. If our stout readers desire to inform themselves thoroughly as to the various treatments for the suppression of obesity, and as to the causes and the threatened dangers of corpulency, we cannot do better than recommend to their notice a very remarkable treatise by Mr. F. Cecil Russell, the originator of the aforementioned "Russell" treatment. This admirable book of 256 pages, which is entitled "Corpulency and the Cure," contains everything one could possibly wish to know on the subject. It treats of scientific matters without the hard scientific terminology usual in such books; it is so eminently lucid and clear that anyone may understand it without trouble. Mr. Russell, after dealing exhaustively with the causes and the cure of obesity, and the various methods of treatment hitherto employed, gives us the *recipe* of the compound that forms the basis of his own treatment. From this it will be seen that none but harmless vegetable ingredients are employed. *Ensuite*, Mr. Russell presents about a thousand extracts from grateful letters received from patients who have permanently benefited by the "Russell" *régime*. We find that the average reduction is about 2lbs. per diem, commencing within twenty-four hours of starting the treatment; but Mr. Russell's more modest claim is a decrease of fat averaging from ½lb. to 2lbs. per day until normal weight and size are reached. We cordially recommend "Corpulency and the Cure" to our stout friends. For a gratis copy they have simply to send two penny stamps (for postage) to Mr. F. Cecil Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., and they will receive a copy per return, under plain, sealed envelope.

I ought to stand a very fair chance of success. And I shall at least have had a fling for my money, or I suppose I ought to say Emmanuel Moss'."

CHAPTER III.

"And to think that to-morrow night I make my farewell appearance on any public stage," said Hazel Harlow, looking tenderly into her lover's face, "I can hardly believe it, and to think of all that has happened since I ran away from Honeycote only a few short months ago—I can hardly believe I am the same girl."

"But you don't regret it, Hazel, dearest," cried Eric Monteith, "I mean that you don't regret saying good-bye to the stage. Is the prospect for the future so dark that —" but Hazel put her hand over the young man's mouth.

"Don't fish for compliments, Eric," she said gaily.

Then her voice changed. "There's one thing that makes me a bit nervous," she said in a low voice, "and that is that we have heard nothing of Horace Caldecott for so long. I can't help thinking that we shall hear of him again."

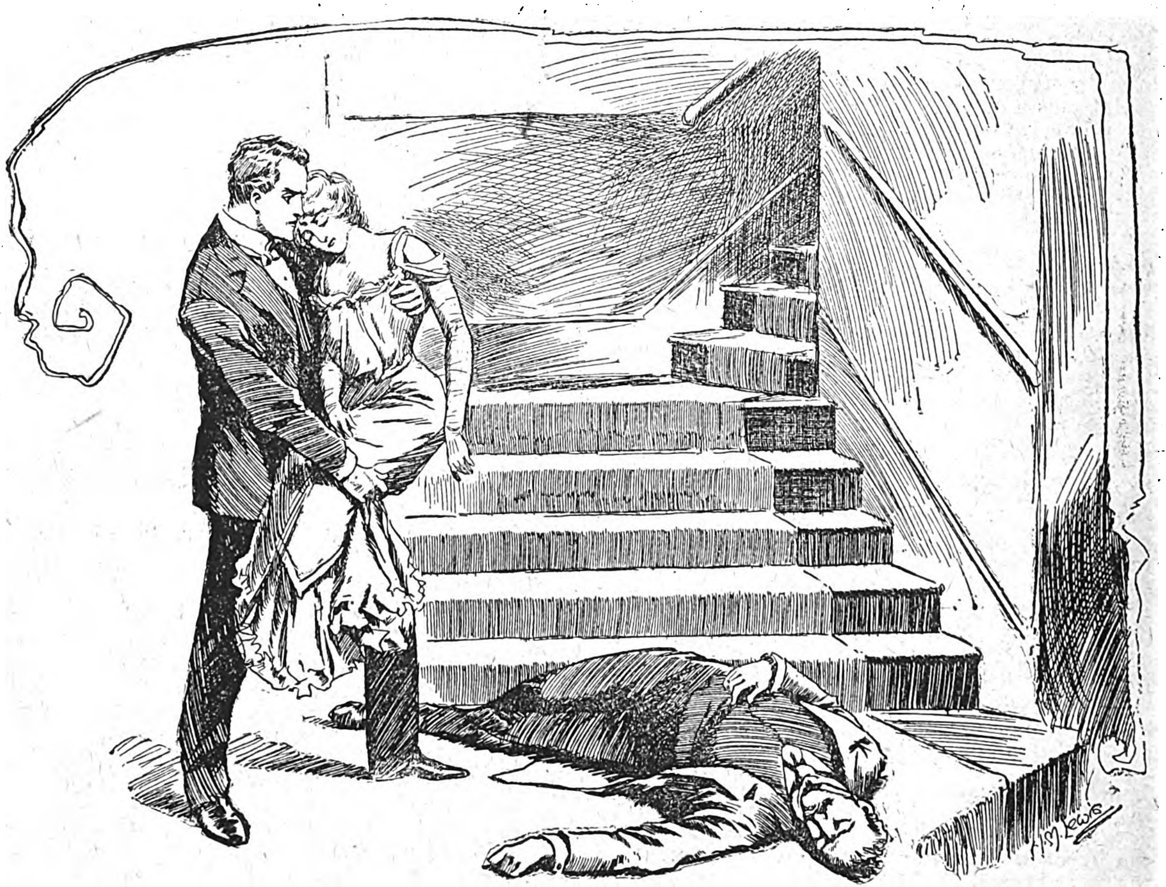
Eric's face darkened as he folded his sweetheart in his arms, with a fond embrace.

"Next week, Hazel," he said softly, "and we shall be man and wife. Not all the Horace Caldecotts in the world can hurt us then. So keep a brave heart, sweetest, and rest content in the prospect of the happy life that awaits us. Now that Alice, my dear sister, is on the high road to convalescence, I feel that there need be little fear or ground for foreboding. And think, we shall be off on our honeymoon in a few days, away to the sunny south and forgetfulness of all the sorrows we have experienced."

Such cheery optimism was infectious, and Hazel's forebodings vanished before the glow of Eric's whole-hearted devotion.

It really seemed as if the end of her troubles was in sight.

The end of the week was indeed to see a change in the organisation of the *Good Samaritan* Company. To begin with, both Hazel and Eric were to bid good-bye for ever to the profession that they had both graced for so short a time, while Raymond Venables, the manager of the Company, was to be wedded to Hazel's bosom friend, Jenny Lovelace, and Venables had promised his future wife that he would give up touring, and settle down in London.



"At last," he muttered to himself, "at last, oh my enemy! And this time there shall be no mistake."

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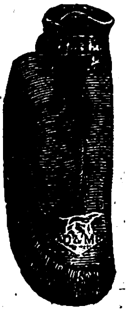

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It is filled with the best curled hair, and covered with wine coloured nappa kid.

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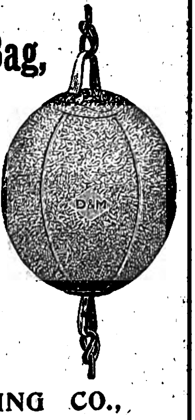

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Financially, the tour had been exceptionally successful, a fact due in no small measure to the undoubted charms and histrionic talents of Hazel Harlow.

And so in due sequence Friday night came and there remained but one more night upon which the Company would all meet together upon the boards.

And there was one member of the Company who viewed the farewell performance, but one, with no slight feelings of apprehension, Mark Hall the "super."

True to his compact with the mysterious Jones, he had coached the would-be actor with the utmost care, and had gone thoroughly into the details that were to change the two men's personalities for one night.

The train was ready for firing. The explosion was to be far greater than Hall ever dreamt of for one single instant.

As for Caldecott, he had left no stone unturned that might militate towards the success of the desperate scheme he had evolved for the attainment of his sinister purpose.

Hall had appeared as usual at the theatre that night. He had always been a man who had held somewhat aloof from the rest of his fellow-actors. Hence he was considered of small account, and it is exceedingly unlikely that either Hazel or Eric would have known what he looked like off the stage. And as he had merely to walk on with the rest of the crowd such a nonentity as he could not hope for much recognition from spectators or players.

He did not appear at all upon the stage until the second act, and then only for a few moments, so that it was perfectly easy for him to slip away and notify to the expectant Caldecott that the coast was clear for his enterprise. And the latter had been at great pains to make himself up to resemble as closely as possible the man whose identity he was assuming.

More than that, it had been necessary for Caldecott, in accordance with the plan that he had worked out, to make himself thoroughly conversant with the interior of the theatre, so far as was concerned with the stage portion of the building.

He knew the play well, for he had often seen it from the auditorium, and now with the aid he had received from Hall, he felt himself perfectly competent to carry out the deception he had in view. It was not that part of the plot that was troubling him, but whether another side of it would turn out to be equally as easy of accomplishment as he hoped.

All went well at first. He slipped in in the place of Hall, and took up his position in the wings, taking good care to remain as much as possible in shadow. And here the taciturn reputation of Hall stood him in good stead. He remained unnoticed and unmolested.

At last the second act drew to a close, and with it the time for the perpetration of his scheme drew near.

He had chosen a time when Hazel was standing alone by the wings on the right of the stage, with the rest of the principal performers on the other side, waiting for the cue that was to send them trooping on in a body. He himself was standing in a recess only a few yards away from the unsuspecting actress.

There were but two people on the stage itself, one of these Jenny Lovelace, the other the villain of the piece. The cue for the general onrush was a cry from Jenny as the villain sprang towards her saying: "You shall answer for that with your life!"

The cry was given, the words spoken. Then an amazing thing happened. With startling rapidity a great darkness fell over the whole theatre, as though the electric light had suddenly been cut off all over the building, as was indeed the case.

Caldecott leapt forward. Before Hazel could utter a cry she felt strong arms around her. A handkerchief steeped in chloroform was laid over her face. A burning kiss was imprinted upon her lips, and swinging her off her feet the desperate villain dashed for the head of the stairs, close at hand, leading down to the street below.

As can be well imagined, the sudden darkness was responsible for something approaching a panic among the audience. On every hand startled cries rang out.

Eric's first feeling had been for Hazel. He had of course no suspicions that the catastrophe was traceable to anything more than one of those untoward accidents that will happen under the best regulated conditions. The instinct was merely the natural one that everybody has, to be near the person you care most for in the world, in any moment of danger.

He dashed across the stage. "Hazel," he cried, "are you there?"

There was no answer. He groped his way to the wings where she had been standing. Still he heard nothing. A sudden fear clutched at his heart. He dashed towards the head of the stairway down which Caldecott had a moment or so before disappeared. A feeble gas-jet flared on the staircase.

Suddenly he saw something that sent the blood to his cheeks. It was a lace handkerchief, lying upon a step. He recognised it in an instant as having been one that he had himself purchased for his lover.

He tore down the stairs, at lightning speed, to almost fall headlong upon the figure of a man with a girl in his arms, Hazel, and apparently lifeless.

With a cry of rage he sprang at the unknown abductor who let his living burden slip from his grasp, to turn round with a snarl like that of a wild beast, to receive Eric's fist delivered with crashing force in his face. He dropped like a log, beside the body of the girl, stunned by the force of the blow.

One glance at the man's face and the truth came home to Monteith.

"At last," he muttered to himself, "at last, O my enemy! And this time there shall be no mistake."

* * * * *

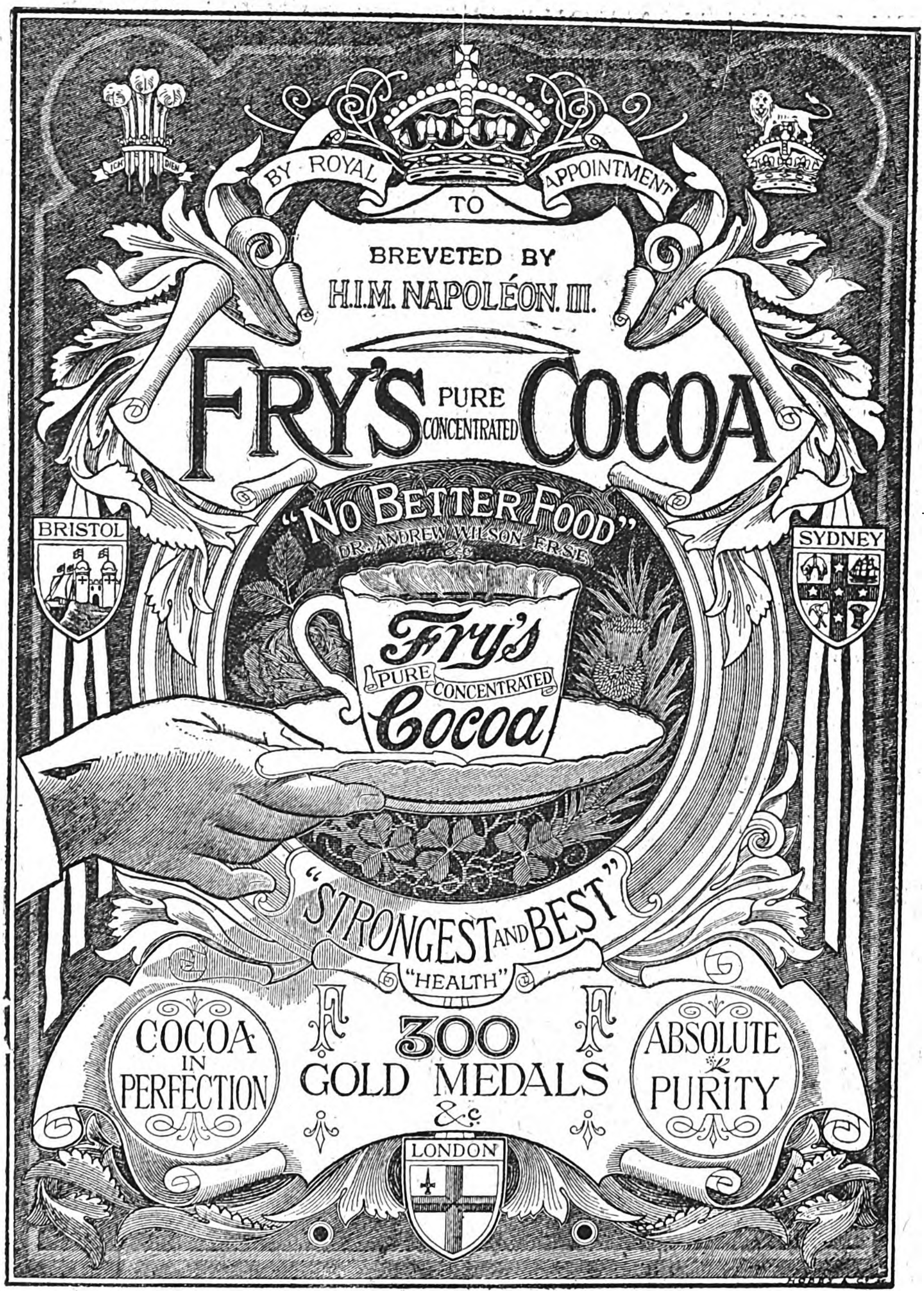
So died the last attempt of Horace Caldecott to abduct the girl whom he had already harassed with such relentless persecution.

The whole black business was revealed at the trial of the scoundrel. He had, so it turned out, bribed the man in charge of the electric lighting installation in the theatre to sever the wires that fed the globes in the building with the needful current, and just at the one period in the play when his desperate scheme might have a chance of success. It was only by a mere hair's-breadth that his foul plot had been rendered useless. For outside the theatre was a carriage, the driver of which was in his pay, into which he could have bundled the hapless victim of his base passions, and driven off to goodness knows what lair.

Hazel Harlow is Hazel Monteith now, and has said good-bye to the stage for ever. All her troubles are at an end.

Horace Caldecott, who was identified with other crimes almost blacker than those he had perpetrated to gain Hazel Harlow as his wife, received a long term of penal servitude as his rich reward.

And so with this knowledge let us say farewell to Hazel Harlow.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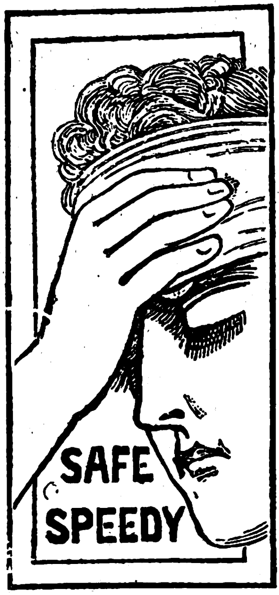

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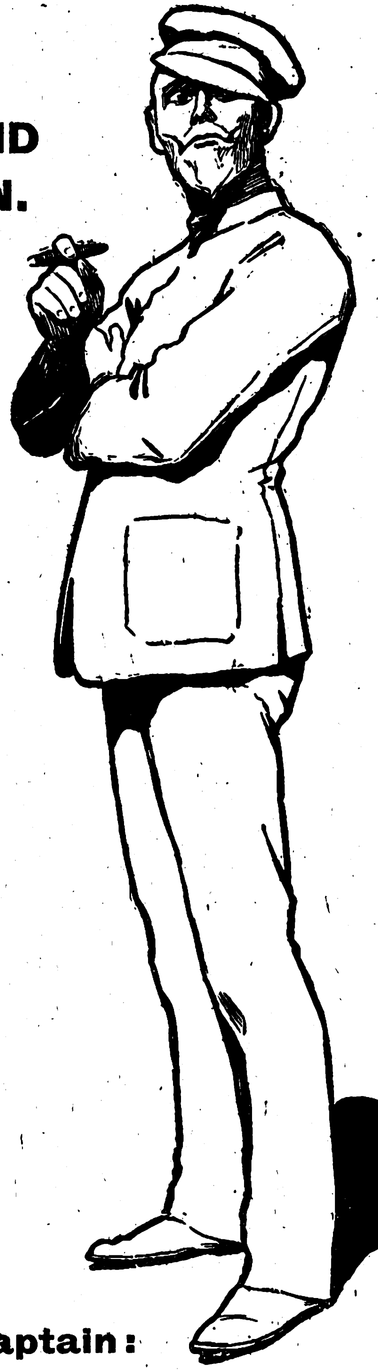

The Captain:

"Yes, Sir. I'm Captain Kettle, and I'd have you remember I'm a long way off being DEAD yet.

"By James! You get 'Pearson's' and see."

(The famous Captain Kettle Stories recommence in "Pearson's Magazine" for January.

Short Stories That . . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. To those readers who submit storyettes which are used, a six shilling novel will be awarded. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, December 30th. Post-cards only, please.

Solving the Problem.

George: "Women are still pushing their way into all the industries." Jack: "That's so. I have just been discharged to make way for a woman." "You have? Well! well! What are you going to do now?" "I am trying to marry the woman."

Still the Boards.

"I don't believe in opposing the preferences of a son in the matter of choosing a profession," said an indulgent father. "Nor I," said another father. "Has your son chosen his profession?" "Well, in a way." "What is it?" "Why, he was stage-struck, and insisted that he was 'born for the boards,' as he expressed it; and so I apprenticed him to a carpenter!"

Couldn't Want More.

Jones (to house agent): "I thought you said there was a charming view from the front windows? Why, there are only houses to be seen." House agent: "So there is a charming view, sir. In the house opposite lives the most beautiful widow you ever clapped eyes on, and she's always at the window."

A Good Cure.

"My husband is so poetic!" said one lady to another in a tram car the other day. "Have you ever tried rubbin' his jints with hartshorn liniment, mum?" interrupted a woman with a market basket at her feet, who was sitting at her elbow and overheard the remark. "That will straighten him out as quick as anything I know of, if he ain't got it too bad."

Wasted Energy.

First Reporter (big daily paper): "What's the matter?" Second Reporter: "I worked for two mortal hours over that lost child, and spent about five shillings for sweets and toys, trying to coax him to tell what his name was, so I could take him to his parents and write it up. Thought I'd get about a column of affecting scenes out of it." "Didn't you succeed?" "Yes; he told finally." "Then what are you grumbling about?" "He's my own son."

The Dutchman's Dodge.

"What is the meaning of that red line above the fourth storey of your house?" asked a stranger of a farmer in Holland. "That is a water mark. That mark shows how high the water was during a great overflow about a year ago." "Impossible. If the water had been that high the whole town would have been swept away." "The water was never that high. It only came up to the first storey window, but the boys rubbed the mark out three or four times, so I put it up there, where they can't get at it. It takes a smart man to circumvent these boys."

Something Missing.

"Are you disappointed in your Christmas gifts, Willie?" asked his mother. "N-no," he answered, dubiously, "I'm not exactly disappointed, but I don't see anything here that I can make a noise with."

Hard to Please.

Papa: "My daughter tells me, sir, that you kissed her forcibly last night. What have you to say for yourself?" Harry: "I'm sure nobody regrets the occurrence more than I do." Papa and Daughter together: "Sir!"

A Financial Genius.

Father: "I hope you are doing well in the financial world, my boy?" Son: "Yes, father; I made three thousand last year, but if I have good luck this year I shall make a cool fifty thousand." "You have great business ability, Jack. It is a legitimate speculation, I suppose?" "Oh, yes; Miss Hendrick is going to answer me to-night."

The Wisdom of Experience.

Experienced Traveller (at railway restaurant): "When did that man at the other table give his order?" Waiter: "'Bout ten minutes ago, sir." "What did he order?" "Beefsteak and onions, sir." "How much did he pay you?" "Sixpence, sir." "Well, here's a shilling. Cook another steak and bring me his." "Yes, sir."

No Excuse.

A member of a volunteer fire-brigade did not appear at the scene of the conflagration until after the fire was under control. The chief of the fire department reproached him bitterly for his neglect of duty. "It's not my fault," replied the fireman, "I live a long distance from the fire." "That's no excuse, you must move nearer to the next fire."

He'd Seen Them Before.

Mrs. De Flatte: "Boy, did you see a stray pug dog anywhere?" Smart Boy: "Yes'm. I just saw one bein' chewed up by a big bull-dog, an' I saw another bein' tied to a tin can, and I saw another bein' chopped up fer sausages an'——" Mrs. De Flatte (clutching at a railing for support): "Oo! Horrors! I'd give a guinea to get my little Fido safely back." Smart Boy: "All right, mum. You wait here half-a-minute."

PHOTO COMPETITION.

Four correct claims have been received in connection with the photo competition this week, and £5 notes have been sent to the following:

Miss Julia McAndrew (No. 51),
Beechgrove House,
Castlebar,
Co Mayo, Ireland.

Mrs. E. Fidler (No. 53),
3 North Street,
Swindon.

Mr. W. Sumner (No. 54),
48 Manchester Road West,
Little Hulton,
Nr. Bolton.

Miss Winstanley Frewer (No. 55),
5 Merton Road,
South Hampstead,
London, N.W.

The Brain Gymnasium.

In these competitions a prize of £1 1s. will be awarded each week to the competitor whose attempt we receive giving the correct solution of all the puzzles. If more than one is absolutely correct the prize of £1 1s. will be given to the first correct attempt dealt with.

If no lists of absolutely correct solutions are sent in, the first prize will be awarded to the competitor whose attempt is first dealt with showing the fewest mistakes.

Each week we shall award, in addition to the above, either ten of our gold-plated pencil-cases or ten popular novels, to be distributed amongst the competitors whose attempts are absolutely correct and have failed to win the first prize, or, if no complete lists of correct solutions are received, to those whose attempts show the fewest mistakes.

Write all your solutions on one side only of the paper, putting the number against each. Post the batch in an envelope marked "Brain Gymnasium," to reach the Editor, *Short Stories*, 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., by first post on Monday, January 6th, 1902.

Readers are invited to submit puzzles, acrostics, conundrums, word-squares, etc., for publication on this page. A gold-plated pencil-case will be given to each reader whose attempts are used. All attempts must be vouched for as original, and, of course, it is distinctly understood that the sender of a puzzle must neither compete in the competition nor divulge to anyone the solution. Any reader found infringing this rule will be severely dealt with.

No. 7.

ACROSTIC.

My first is a renowned female character in one of Dickens' works.

My second is found in one of Dickens' Christmas tales.

My third was once the mistress of the world.

My fourth was a fellow who asked for more.

My fifth is noted in English history.

My sixth is a fascinating story by Swift.

My seventh is the heroine of one of Longfellow's poems.

My initials read downwards compose the name of a personage made famous by Dickens.

J. D.

No. 8.

ENIGMA.

In album, not in book.
In chalice, not in cup.
In lady, not in girl.
In yarrow not in fern.
In love, not in hate.
In fury, not in peace.
In castle and in hut.
In household, not in inn.
In belt, not in clasp.
In ill, not in harm.
In market, not in street.
In cuckoo, not in wren.
In merry, not sad.
The whole is the title of a beautiful poem.

No. 9.

CHARADE.

My FIRST is a fairy, but under a ban.
Let her work out her penance as swift as she can.
In clear crystal waters my NEXT you behold,
Dressed in olive, or yellow, or glitter of gold.
My WHOLE may be found fragrant, juicy, and sweet.
Or again, dry and tasteless, and unfit to eat.

No. 10.

TRANSPOSITIONS.

The letters of each of these words or phrases when arranged properly will form a word in ordinary use:

1. I even lost. 2. Strides pain me. 3. I cannot go. 4. It stole me. 5. Catalogue. 6. Specie trade. 7. I prove great. 8. Eminent as stilts. 9. Gain a life debt. 10. No charm. 11. Sir, not dice.

No. 11.

UNITED WORD SQUARE.

From equivalents of the following form a united square:

Upper left-hand corner.—1. A foolish person. 2. Employments. 3. Homes for animals. 4. To be (Latin verb).

Upper right-hand corner.—1. An opening into a house. 2. A name borne by a monarch of Greece. 3. One of the United States. 4. An apartment.

Centre.—1. Always. 2. Low ground between hills. 3. A girl's name. 4. To peruse.

Lower left-hand corner.—1. A luminous body in the heavens. 2. A fable. 3. Liquors. 4. To cease from action.

Lower right-hand corner.—1. To provoke. 2. Sour. 3. An outer coating. 4. A ripple.

Below we give the way in which the words are arranged—each star denotes a letter.

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No. 12.

GEOGRAPHICAL PUZZLE.

There was once a young lady named (*town in Australia*), who expected a friend named (*city in Italy*). The day arrived when (*city in Italy*) was to come. She wore a dark (*mountains in the United States*) dress, and a (*sea off the eastern coast of Africa*) (*an island south of England*). She carried a (*country of Africa*) purse, and wore a long (*county in United States*). She brought (*town in Australia*) a ring, with a (*river in U.S.A.*) in, and a (*mountain in U.S.A.*) stone. (*Town in Australia*) thought she would give a party for (*city in Italy*). As she invited a number of her friends, (*city in Italy*) could play the (*mountains in South America*) very nicely, so she was asked to play, after which refreshments were served, which consisted of (*country in Europe*), (*islands in Oceanica*), (*city in Austria*), bread, tinned (*river in America*), (*first half of a city in Italy*) of mutton, and (*first half of an island north-west of Europe*) cream. After this she was presented with some vases made of the finest (*city in Germany*) (*town near London*). When they were going, the (*mountains in Africa*) was shining, and the (*other mountains in Africa*) was so deep they could scarcely wade through. She at last said (*cape off Greenland*) and returned home.

Printed by Horace Cox, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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Investigation by a "BIRMINGHAM TELEGRAPH" reporter.

The marvellous curative properties of Bile Beans for Biliousness are once again demonstrated by a double cure recently effected in a pretty suburb of Leicester. Mrs. E. Haxton, of 45 Overton Road, and her daughter, Miss Haxton, are the fortunate couple; and they have told their story to a *Birmingham Telegraph* reporter. "For about two years," said Miss Haxton, "I endured excruciating pains in the head. First of all a violent pain would shoot to the top of my head, just as if I had received a severe blow. Then it seemed to extend over the whole of my body, so as to put me into fearful agony. I used to have a nice fresh colour, but the pain took it all away, until my face became ghastly and almost bloodless.

"Every time these attacks came on it was just as though I were going to have a fit. My lips turned blue, and my mother got quite frightened, for she was unable to relieve me. On a night, before I had been long asleep, the pains would awaken me, and I should have to sit up in bed. I dare not lie down again. Sometimes I have been afraid to go to bed at all, and would sit up in a chair all night rather than do so. I tried all sorts of means to secure relief, but in vain. A leading Leicester doctor said it was nervous exhaustion, and gave me medicine, but it did me no good, and I had to take brandy to keep me on my feet.

"The pain also affected my eyes, and I was afraid I should have to give up my situation. Things were at a crisis when my mother had a few Bile Beans given her. I took a dose, and when I perceived they did me good I went in for a proper course. The pains in the head soon troubled me less, and I began to get a good night's rest as a regular thing. Now they have disappeared completely, my eyesight is all right again, and, thanks solely to Bile Beans, I am better in health and spirits than I have been for a long time past."

Mrs. Haxton added her testimony to the following effect. She said: "I was a great sufferer from constipation, sickness, and indigestion. My meals were followed by a most disagreeable nausea and feeling of fulness, which was hard to bear. The Beans had a most beneficial result, putting my bowels into thoroughly good order. The attacks of indigestion grew fewer and fewer, until now I have become a stranger to that complaint, and I eat heartily, and have none of the disagreeable after-effects I used to have.

"My daughter, too, is completely cured. So delighted are we with the Beans that we are recommending them everywhere. They are a wonderful medicine, and everybody should know of them."

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Short Stories.
Dec. 28th, 1901.

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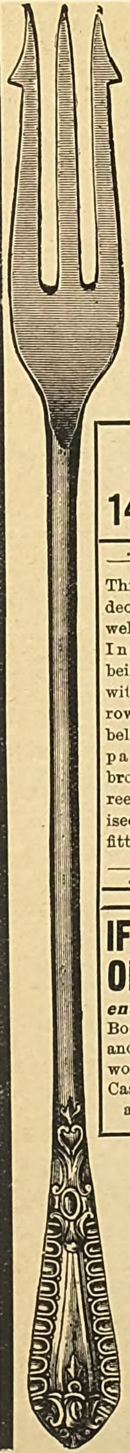

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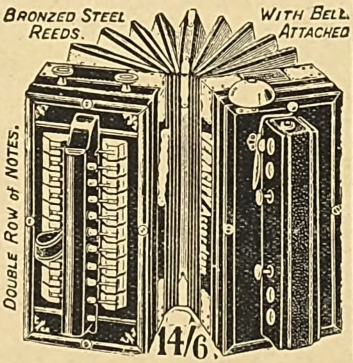
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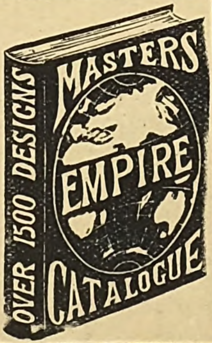

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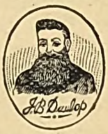

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